

Terms of Reference for a Special Investigation

Woodlot Management and Practices in the Kootenay Lakes TSA

BACKGROUND

A **woodlot licence** is a form of area-based tenure awarded by the Province of BC. There are approximately 865 active woodlots in British Columbia with an allowable annual cut of over 1.5 million cubic metres.¹

As part of its annual audit program, the Board regularly looks at forestry activities on woodlots. Since 2011, the Board has audited 24 woodlots, including 4 woodlots in the Kootenay Lake Timber Supply Area (TSA) in 2015. Of the 24 woodlots audited in the last 5 years, 10 of them, including all 4 in the Kootenay Lake TSA, had reported non-compliances with legislation. The problems included not meeting reforestation obligations, fire protection requirements, annual reporting deficiencies, as well as unsafe bridges.

This level of non-compliance is concerning to the Board, particularly for the 4 woodlots audited in the Kootenay Lake TSA. The Board has decided to take a broader look at how woodlots are being managed in this TSA to see if there are similar issues in the remaining 12 woodlots, or if it was just a coincidence that the 4 audited all had issues. Depending on the findings of this investigation, the Board may choose to take a broader look at the provincial woodlot program in the future.

OBJECTIVE

The investigation will determine if the roles and responsibilities of woodlot licensees, government and forest professionals in the Kootenay Lake TSA are clearly defined and understood, and are being carried out in a manner that ensures woodlot licensees are complying with forest practices legislation.

SCOPE

This investigation will include district woodlot program staff, the West Kootenay Woodlot Association and local woodlot licensees, as well as district compliance and enforcement staff. The investigation will look at the woodlot program framework, policies, roles and responsibilities, relationships, and government enforcement within the district.

In addition, investigators will assess the 12 woodlots within the Kootenay Lake TSA that were not audited in 2015, to determine if these woodlot licensees are compliant with the *Forest and Range Practices Act* and the *Wildfire Act*.

¹ Federation of British Columbia Woodlot Associations – <http://woodlot.bc.ca/about-woodlots/>

APPROACH

The investigation will include office and field components. Investigators will interview district woodlot and C&E staff, as well as representatives from the local woodlot association to determine their level of involvement / interaction, if any, with the woodlot tenure holders. Individual woodlot licence holders may also be interviewed.

Board staff will review the planning and annual reporting performance for the 12 unaudited woodlots. Board staff will then select a sample of these woodlot licences (approximately 6 woodlots) to assess practices on the ground. The timing of this work will be split into phases with initial interviews and the reporting analysis being conducted in the summer, followed by the field work later in the summer/early fall.

REPORTING

The results of this special investigation will be reported to the public.

Although the field work will follow relevant audit methods, this is not an audit. Results of the field assessments will be summarized and will not be attributed to any individual woodlot licence holder. The report may make recommendations on improving the effectiveness of the current regulations, policy and planning processes for managing woodlots in this TSA and more broadly if appropriate.