

Board Bulletin, Volume 4 – Summary of Findings from the 2003 Audit Season

This bulletin is the fourth in a series of Forest Practices Board bulletins describing new aspects of forest legislation, practices and trends, and their implications for forest stewardship. These bulletins are intended to foster discussion and to improve understanding of forest practices. This bulletin summarizes key findings from the 2003 Board audit season. It identifies some of the major issues the Board will be examining in the 2004 audit season, which will be the first audits conducted under the new Forest and Range Practices Act.

As the 2004 audit season begins, the Forest Practices Board is releasing a bulletin summarizing some of the key findings from the 2003 Board audits, which relate to issues that have recurred over a number of years. The goal of the bulletin is to make licensees and government ministries aware of problems uncovered in previous audits, so that they can take corrective action as needed in those areas. This bulletin does not include findings from the Board's work in other areas, such as investigations, reviews and appeals, special reports and special investigation reports.

Bridge Safety

Both the new *Forest and Range Practices Act* (FRPA), which took effect on January 31, 2004, and the previous Forest Practices Code (the Code) include requirements to ensure that bridges along logging roads are built, maintained and removed safely and do not cause harm to the environment or to the people using them. However, the inspection, maintenance and condition of bridges and major structures continues to be an area where non-compliance is noted in audits.

There are several sections of FRPA that describe key bridge maintenance requirements. If a bridge has structural deficiencies, the legislation requires that either the deficiencies be corrected; or that the bridge be closed, removed or replaced; or that traffic loads be restricted to a safe level for that bridge. If the bridge is unable to carry its original design load, signs stating the actual capacity must be posted at each bridge approach.

Past Board audits have found several cases where the responsible authorities have not fully met those obligations. For example, in a 2003 audit, the Board found significant non-compliance with respect to a bridge on a forest service road. In this case, district staff took 18 months to

block physical access to the bridge after deciding to “close down the crossing and remove the bridge as soon as practicable”.

Licensees should be aware that, in the Board’s opinion, partial remediation measures such as posting a ‘Bridge Closed’ sign in the middle of a bridge do not meet the requirements of the legislation. The Board will be releasing a special investigation report on bridge inspection and maintenance on forest service roads in summer 2004.

Fire Tools

Provincial legislation requires firefighting tools and equipment to be on-site during the fire season (April 1 to October 30) and the fire preparedness plan and the cache are required to be operational during this period. One of the 2003 compliance audits identified a situation of significant non-compliance related to firefighting equipment, training and preparedness.

At four out of five industrial work sites inspected, firefighting tools and equipment were not sufficient to meet Code requirements. When considered individually, the missing fire tools would not be considered as significant; however, from a program level, the deficiencies accumulated to a pervasive condition.

Other Board audits have found situations where the fire preparedness plan was missing key requirements and the central fire tool cache was missing tools necessary to meet Code standards. In another case, seven fire preparedness plans examined were missing content requirements, including identification of persons with training qualifications; availability of tools in central caches; location of weather stations; proposed timing and location of industrial activities and specific fire detection and initial fire suppression actions to be taken in the event of a fire.

The Board believes that the legislated fire tool obligations are not onerous. Given that fire danger rating can change rapidly during the fire season, it is critical to maintain adequate tools on-site. It is important to ensure that the company and contractors review firefighting equipment on a regular basis to ensure an adequate supply of equipment is available if required.

Free-growing Obligations

Following the harvesting of public land, forest companies are required to reforest the site with appropriate tree species, establishing a new crop of trees. Each year, more than 200 million seedlings are planted in BC. Forest companies are then required to tend those trees for a number of years, to ensure they survive and grow into a healthy new forest. Once they reach this stage, called ‘free growing’, the companies are relieved of their responsibility to look after the trees and they once again become the responsibility of the Crown.

One of the 2003 audits found a situation of significant non-compliance related to the failure to establish free-growing stands within specified timeframes. The non-compliance was considered significant because it demonstrated a breakdown in the silviculture management system designed to achieve a free-growing stand of trees in harvested areas.

The attainment of a free-growing stand is the ultimate goal of basic silviculture. The right to harvest the Crown resource is given on condition that the area is returned to a free-growing state. Licensees and timber sales managers are urged to be vigilant and proactive with respect to their FRPA free-growing obligations and to take early action to identify and correct any problems that arise with respect to meeting those obligations.