



**Forest
Practices
Board**

**BC'S INDEPENDENT WATCHDOG FOR
SOUND FOREST & RANGE PRACTICES**



**ANNUAL
REPORT**
2023-2024



Territorial Acknowledgement

We acknowledge, with gratitude and respect, the territories of the Indigenous peoples across British Columbia.

We are committed to incorporating Indigenous views and values in our work and encouraging practices and stewardship of forests and rangelands that support reconciliation.

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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

As the independent watchdog for sound forest and range practices in British Columbia, we are proud to present this overview of our work during the 2023-2024 fiscal year. This year marks our 28th year of operations, work that is dedicated to the continuous improvement in forest practices. In addition to the continuous improvement we promote, we are committed to unbiased professional assessments that demonstrate value and impact, all of which are intended to build credibility and confidence in the public regarding how our government, industry, and professionals manage BC's public forests.

Forest practices and their associated policy frameworks are currently under significant transformation as the province navigates ongoing adjustments in the forest sector. Of note is the introduction of tactical level planning to the forest management regime through the implementation of forest landscape plans (FLP), and the development of a biodiversity and ecosystem health framework. In interesting ways, these emerging adjustments to forest management are highlighting the need and benefit of adaptive management and the recognition and need for stronger consideration towards impacts and best practices regarding non-timber values or ecosystem components.

The province is in a transformative period for societal recognition of Indigenous peoples and their rights. This restructuring of land governance and stewardship

through reconciliation actions and the enabling legislation of the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* brings Indigenous perspectives to current forest management decisions and practices. How First Nations view the forest sector and forest practices is a corner stone to the changes that are unfolding. We are discussing with First Nations the interests and needs of managing for cultural heritage values and exploring how our work in auditing and investigating compliance can be respectful of First Nations' interests, including their emerging guardian programs.

This past year, the Forest Practices Board published a special report and a bulletin on the state of our forests and their resilience to wildfire, addressing the urgent need for change in forest management for the long-term health of our forests. These reports, supported by many leading professionals from BC and beyond, emphasize the necessity of a strategic vision for forest management that promotes better-adapted forest conditions.

Our goal is to achieve resilient forests conditions that remain healthy amid changing climate conditions, and meet the needs and interests of our communities. The varied impacts on our forests highlight the importance of policy reforms that support these new influences and improve the values we seek to uphold.

This work requires collaboration, and we are pleased to be part of the team that reviews and contributes to these essential improvements. The Forest Practices Board remains committed to advancing forest and range practices that benefit all of our society.

As we look forward, our focus will continue to be on fostering resilient and sustainable forest practices, ensuring that our forests can thrive for generations to come.

Keith Atkinson
Chair, Forest Practices Board

STRATEGIC PLAN 2023-26

In May 2023, the Board approved a three-year strategic plan. The plan outlines new priorities aimed at promoting the public interest in forest and range practices throughout British Columbia.

The strategic plan not only reaffirms the Board's mission and purpose statements, but also introduces new values and priorities to adapt to the evolving landscape of the province.

Our 2023-26 Strategic Plan identified four priorities for the Board:

1. Encourage forest and range practices that are adapted to climate change effects and support ecological resilience, including conservation of biodiversity and wildlife habitat.
2. Support inclusion and engagement of Indigenous Peoples in forest and range stewardship.
3. Increase the awareness and impact of our work among government, practitioners and license holders in the forest and range sector, Indigenous Peoples, and the public.
4. Grow and maintain a professional team with training, support, and a positive work environment.

The 16 reports produced in 2023-24 exhibited a wide range of content. Our special report, *Forest and Fire Management in BC: Toward Landscape Resilience*, and accompanying technical bulletin focused on key strategic priority 1.

The Board called for the BC provincial government to put in place a vision and action plan for restoring landscape resilience and co-existing with fire so that all parts of government work together toward a set of common goals. Integrating landscape fire management as part of BC's land management framework would recognize the critical role of managed wildfires and prescribed burning (including cultural burning) in reducing the risk of damage from catastrophic wildfires in BC's ecosystems. Landscape fire management is an important step in managing ecosystem health and landscape resilience.

The Technical Bulletin—Practicing Landscape Fire Management—describes principles of landscape fire management that can be integrated into practice for land managers across all land uses, including conservation initiatives or forest management planning. These principles provide a cohesive link that can bridge vision to on-the-ground activities that have a direct bearing on the health of BC's ecosystems.



THE BOARD



Board Members (from left)
 Gerry Grant
 Gail Wallin
 Cindy Stern
 Keith Atkinson
 Bruce Larson, and
 Rick Monchak.

The Board consists of a full-time Chair and five part-time members who live in communities across the province. Board members Gail Wallin, Cindy Stern, and Rick Monchak terms were renewed. In December, Gerry Grant was appointed Vice Chair. This appointment was made in anticipation of Bruce Larson's retirement from the Board in April 2024.

The board members met monthly, except in December and August to stay informed about public interests, perceptions, and emerging issues affecting forest and range stewardship, and to engage with governments, organizations, stakeholders and interest groups. In June the Board met in Kamloops and spent a field day with members and representatives of the BC Cattlemen's

Association and First Nations from the area to hear and learn about what's affecting forest and range stewardship. The Board travelled to Logan Lake and met with Ministry staff, local operators and licensees where they visited fuel treatment sites. The purpose of the field trip was to see emerging practices in fuel management, ecosystem restoration, and post-fire reforestation.

In September the Board met in Cowichan Lake to review and confirm strategic priorities for the coming year. Board members met with Mosaic Forest Management and had an opportunity to visit forest operation sites in the area and looked at hazard abatement practices, road building, and recreational values.

BUDGET & FINANCIALS

FINANCIAL REPORT	Board Members and Executive	Investigations	Audits	Legal	Communications	Administration and Overhead	TOTAL
Salaries and Benefits	426,067	646,344	531,469	226,429	155,259	235,042	2,220,610
Other Operating Costs	172,364	167,582	128,726	2,439	52,973	1,126,582	1,650,666
Total Operating Expenditures	598,431	813,926	660,195	228,868	208,232	1,361,624	3,871,276
Total Capital Expenditures	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total Expenditures	605,431	813,926	660,195	228,868	208,232	1,361,624	3,871,276
Budget							3,986,000

NOTES:

1. "Board Members and Executive" expenditures cover those of the Chair of the Board, the part-time Board members, the office of the Executive Director, and staff providing direct support to the Board members.
2. "Legal" expenditures covers legal advice on all files of the Board, including review and appeals.
3. "Administration and Overhead" includes building occupancy charges, software licensing, centralized support charges, and salaries associated with support for corporate services and information systems.



AUDITS

The Board conducts audits of forest and range practices on public lands to assess compliance with the Forest and Range Practices Act (FRPA) and the Wildfire Act and the appropriateness of government enforcement. Through these audits, the Board can make recommendations for improvement to practices and legislation.

Auditors conduct thorough and objective evaluations to determine the alignment of forestry and range

practices with FRPA, the Wildfire Act, and operational plans. This ensures that practices are consistent with government objectives for the sustainable management of forest resources.

In this fiscal year, 1 BCTS and 4 licensees (4 forest licenses, 2 community forest agreements on BCTS area) were audited, and 11 reports were published; we continued with developing a process for our enforcement audits; and we hired two new audit staff.

COMPLETED AUDITS

AUDITEE
<i>Started in Fiscal 2022-23</i>
1. Interfor Corporation TFL 18
2. BCTS Stuart-Nechako Business Area – Fort St. James Field Unit
3. Woodlot Licence W0085
4. Woodlot Licence W2001
5. Woodlot Licence W2044
6. Woodlot Licence W2046
7. Woodlot Licence W2004
<i>Started in Fiscal 2023-24</i>
1. Lake Babine Nation Forestry Ltd. First Nations Woodland Licence
2. Yucwmenlúcwu (“Caretakers of the Land”) 2007 LLP
3. BCTS Cariboo-Chiclotin Business Area
4. Tolko Industries Ltd. – Timber Licence T0816

AUDIT RESULTS

11 Audit Reports Published			
2 Without Issues			
1. Lake Babine Nation Forestry Ltd. First Nations Woodland Licence 2. Tolko Industries Ltd. – Timber Licence T0816			
9 With Issues	2 Unsound Practices	9 Significant Non-Compliances	9 Areas Requiring Improvement
1. Interfor Corporation TFL 18		Road Construction Culvert Maintenance Bridge Guardrail Maintenance	
2. BCTS Stuart-Nechako Business Area – Fort St. James Field Unit	Site Planning – Terrain Stability Assessment Soil Disturbance	Bridge Construction	Fire Hazard Assessment
3. Woodlot Licence W0085 – Campbell River Natural Resource District			Silviculture Activities and Obligations
4. Woodlot Licence W2001 – Campbell River Natural Resource District		Bridge Construction Bridge Maintenance Fire Hazard Abatement	
5. Woodlot Licence W2004 – Campbell River Natural Resource District			Silviculture Activities and Obligations Fire Protection Activities
6. Woodlot Licence W2044 – Campbell River Natural Resource District		Timber Harvesting	Fire Hazard Assessment
7. Woodlot Licence W2046 – Campbell River Natural Resource District		Free Growing	Fire Hazard Assessment
8. Yucwmenlúcwu (“Caretakers of the Land”) 2007 LLP			Fire Hazard Abatement Fire Hazard Assessment
9. BCTS Cariboo-Chiclotin Business Area			Fire Hazard Assessment

COMPLIANCE AUDITS IN PROGRESS (as of March 31, 2024)

AUDITEES	
1.	BC Timber Sales and 7 Timber Sale Licence Holders in the Selkirk Natural Resource District
2.	1175401 BC Ltd.'s Forest Licences A77899 and A77900 in the Sunshine Coast Natural Resource District
3.	Valemount Community Forest Company Ltd.'s Community Forest Agreements K5Q and K2T and Forest Licence A93987 in the Prince George Natural Resource District
4.	Nak'al Koh Timber Ltd.'s Forest Licence A89836 in the Mackenzie Natural Resource District

AUDIT SEASON STATISTICS

	POPULATION	SAMPLED
HARVESTING (# of cutblocks)	121	70
ROADS (km)		
▪ Construction	127	66
▪ Deactivation	8	3
▪ Maintenance	1552	438
SILVICULTURE (# of cutblocks*)	139	53
MAJOR STRUCTURES		
▪ Construction	10	10
▪ Maintenance	92	51
FIRE PROTECTION (# of cutblocks**)	102	81

*The number represents blocks that were planted. Block with regeneration and free-growing obligations are not included in this total.

**Blocks with fire assessment and abatement obligations.

COMPLAINTS

The Board investigates public complaints about compliance with FRPA and the Wildfire Act and the appropriateness of government enforcement. Complaints that the Board can investigate involve activities taking place on public land, such as forest stewardship plans, site plans, and woodlot licence plans, forest practices, range plans and practices, protection of resources, and government enforcement.

In this fiscal year, we noticed two complaint trends. The first trend involves three complaints related to range planning and practices, with two complaints originating from the southern interior and one from the northeast. The complainants include a First Nation, range agreement holders, and a conservation organization. These complaints centre around issues such as compliance with range use plans, overgrazing of upland and riparian areas, protection of cultural values like mineral licks, and the appropriateness of government enforcement.

COMPLAINTS AND CONCERNS	COMPLAINTS	CONCERNS
CARRIED OVER (FROM PREVIOUS FISCAL YEARS)	2	9
NEW COMPLAINTS RECEIVED	10	41
TOTAL	12	50
PUBLISHED	2*	n/a
RESOLVED	0	n/a
ON GOING AT MARCH 31, 2024	10	9

*Three were carried over and published, but it was in two reports.

The second trend involves two complaints regarding the government's use of fire in the suppression of the Bush Creek East and Downton Lake wildfires. These complaints are in line with a previous investigation published in March 2023, which focused on fire control near Manning Creek.

As the fire season starts earlier, ends later, is more intense, and disrupts the lives of more and more people, the public is increasingly concerned about how the government manages wildfires. Many of these concerns, including the type and prioritization of resources, and evacuation orders and alerts, are not within the jurisdiction of the Board to investigate. However, the Board can investigate whether or not a decision to use fire as part of wildfire suppression was reasonable. In the case of the Bush Creek East and Downton Lake wildfires, government intentionally ignited fires as part of wildfire suppression, and the investigations are examining whether or not that was reasonable.

NEW COMPLAINTS RECEIVED

We received and began investigation of 10 complaints

COMPLAINT	DESCRIPTION
Harvesting around Whitebark Pine near Granby Park	A Grand Forks resident is concerned that Interfor is planning to harvest around whitebark pine, and they are concerned about windthrow and accidental harvesting.
Logging Old Forest on Quadra Island	The failure to complete land use planning and establish old growth management areas on Quadra Island means that licensees continue to log old-growth, which the complainant is concerned is inconsistent with the land use plan.
Coutlee Plateau Range Practices	Ranchers are concerned about changes made to a range use plan without their knowledge, overgrazing, and fence maintenance.
Grazing Impacts near Grand Forks	The complainant is concerned about livestock grazing out of rotation, fence maintenance, overgrazing, and inappropriate government enforcement.
Halfway River Range Practices	A First Nation is concerned about the impact of livestock and grazing on mineral licks and riparian and upland areas, as well as government enforcement.
Keremeos Creek Wildfire Rehabilitation	Private property owners are concerned that fire guards and roads built to suppress the Keremeos Creek wildfire in July 2022 have not been rehabilitated.
Access Restrictions Within Tree Farm Licence 46	A citizen scientist birder believes that 1) road closures in TFL 46 are unlawful, and 2) the licensee has arbitrarily and unfairly prevented them from accessing TFL 46.
Harvesting near Gardner Creek	A rancher has several concerns about the impact of harvesting by different licensees in the past five years above Gardner Creek.
Government Use of Fire - Bush Creek East	A Shuswap resident believes that a BC Wildfire Service planned ignition was inappropriate considering the circumstances, and it led to the firestorm that devastated the communities of the North Shuswap.
Downton Lake Wildfire Control	Gun Lake residents believe that a BC Wildfire Service planned ignition was inappropriate considering the circumstances and led to the destruction of more than 40 homes.

PUBLISHED REPORTS

- Livestock Grazing in the South Okanagan and White Lake Grasslands Protected Area*
- Access Restrictions within Tree Farm Licence 46

*Two complaints were addressed in this report.

SPECIAL PROJECTS

The Board undertakes special projects to examine trends identified in audits or investigations and issues of public interest.

SPECIAL INVESTIGATIONS

Special investigations are conducted to ensure compliance with legislation and the appropriateness of enforcement actions. Additionally, these investigations may uncover policy implications that need to be addressed.

SPECIAL REPORTS

Special reports summarize trends or findings from Board audits or investigations, identify and discuss forest or range policies and legislation, and raise stewardship issues within the forest or range to promote public understanding and discussion. These reports are crucial in informing stakeholders and the general public about important issues affecting our natural resources.

In this fiscal year, the Board published four reports, started two new projects, and prepared new projects for 2024/25. Significant changes in forestry legislation, based on past Board recommendations, included new processes for public review of planned roads and cutblocks¹ and increased decision-maker discretion for authorizations. Previously, decision-makers had to issue cutting permits if certain requirements were met. In 2015, the Board recommended that district managers be allowed to refuse permits if there were risks to public safety, forest resources, or values. In November 2023, the *Forest Statutes Amendment Act* directed the Minister of Forests and delegates to consider the impact of timber harvest and road construction on forest resources, cultural heritage, public safety, and other matters. These provisions enable decision-makers to intervene in planned developments to protect the public interest.

¹Reference to Forest Operations Map (FRPA sec. 151.1) and recommendations from the 2015 Special Report *Forest Stewardship Plans- Are they meeting expectations.*

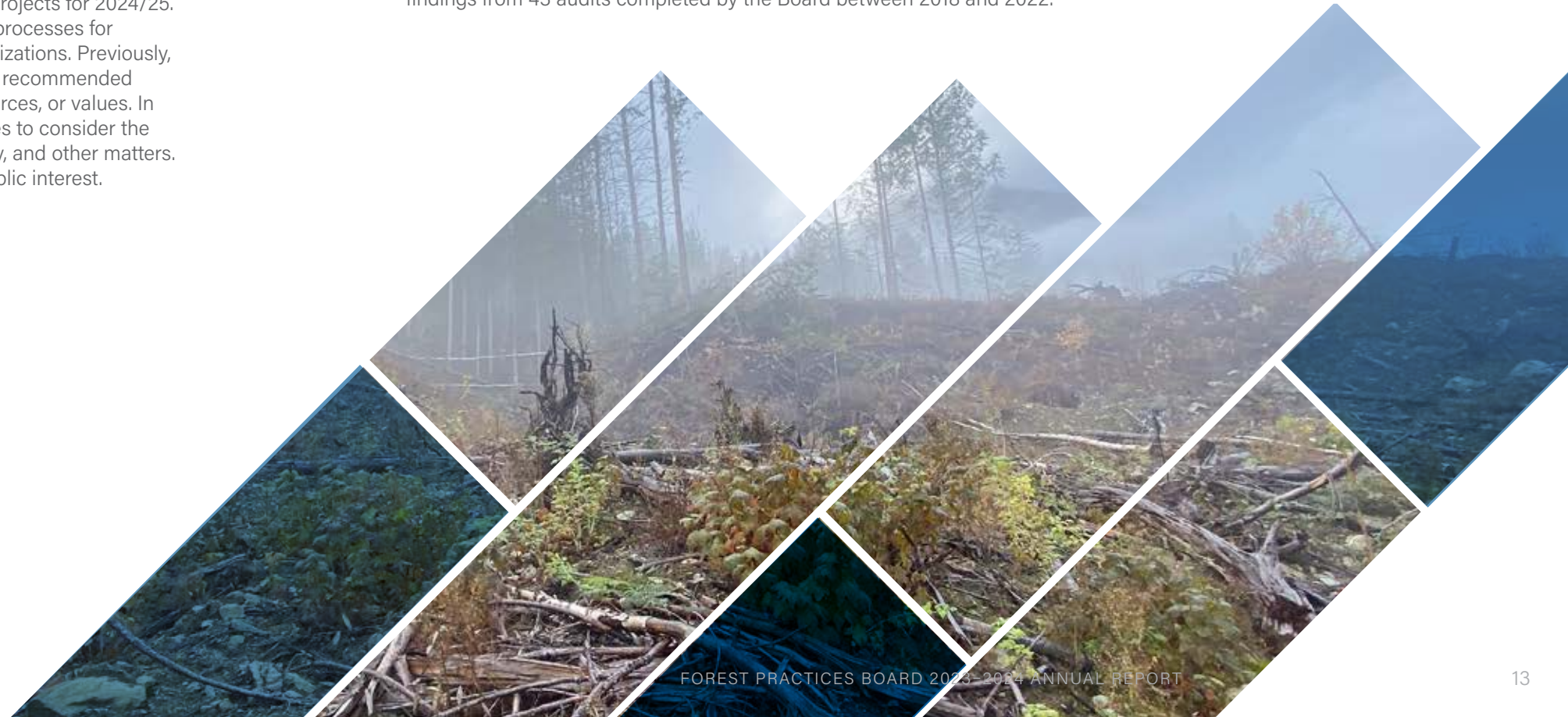
SPECIAL PROJECTS IN PROGRESS (as of March 31, 2024)

Special Investigation: Are regulated activities helping or hindering Wildfire Risk Reduction?

This project will evaluate how activities authorized under FRPA and the *Wildfire Act* help or hinder wildfire risk reduction efforts within the wildland urban interface and how those activities align with wildfire risk reduction plans. Board staff completed field assessments throughout the Sea to Sky, Cariboo-Chilcotin, and Peace Natural Resource Districts, evaluating post-harvest hazard abatement and post-treatment wildfire risk reduction activities.

Special Report: A Summary of Audit Findings From 2018-2022

This report will summarize trends in compliance with the *Forest and Range Practices Act* and *Wildfire Act* and other findings from 43 audits completed by the Board between 2018 and 2022.





SPECIAL PROJECTS PUBLISHED

Forest and Fire Management in BC: Toward Landscape Resilience

This special report emphasizes the need to integrate principles of landscape fire management (LFM) throughout the forest management regime. LFM is a way of managing forest fuel build-up and enhancing landscape resilience. It acknowledges the importance of fire in BC ecosystems, aligning with historical and future fire regimes and varying fire frequencies, sizes, and severities. LFM aims to reduce wildfire risk to safeguard key values and gradually restore landscape resilience across all public lands.

The report is a call to action for government to adopt a whole-of-society approach, proactively mitigating the risk of catastrophic wildfires and enhancing landscape resilience.

Practicing Landscape Fire Management - Technical Bulletin

This technical bulletin outlines some LFM principles—defining the landscape, understanding current and projected conditions, assessing risk to values, setting complementary wildland fire objectives across land use zones, coordinating intervention, and learning from experience. Integrating the principles of LFM into BC's land management framework means land and fire managers working together to increase the pace and scale of strategies designed to restore landscape resilience.

Management of Habitat for Species at Risk under FRPA

This special investigation evaluates the BC government's use of FRPA tools to protect species-at-risk habitats and forest licensees' compliance with legal requirements. The Board found that forest planning and practices met habitat protection measures. Still, it noted that legal tools are not always used, and there is a lack of transparency in decision-making regarding timber supply and habitat protection. Additionally, the process for listing species in order to use FRPA tools is slow and outdated, failing to reflect the current status of species at risk in BC.

The Board recommended that the government update its species-at-risk habitat policies and increase transparency in decisions balancing timber supply and habitat protection.

Measuring and Allocating Forage on Rangelands in BC

This special report examines the BC government's methods for measuring and allocating forage on rangelands. The Board assessed 10 districts with the highest forage allocations, finding that while government has credible procedures, their implementation is inconsistent. Forage measurement often relies on ocular assessments instead of systematic ground sampling. Allocations are based on historical data and rarely adjusted despite changes in forage availability, leading to potential overgrazing or missed opportunities.

The Board recommended that government develop a strategic range inventory, ensuring credible forage measurement, implementing a risk-ranking system, creating wildlife management guidelines, and integrating range and forest planning to achieve government objectives for sustainable forage management.



APPEALS

The Board can initiate appeals to the Forest Appeals Commission of certain determinations made under the FRPA and the Wildfire Act and participate in appeals initiated by others. The Board initiates or joins appeals where there are important public interest issues regarding statutory interpretation or concerns related to administrative justice, such as the fairness of penalties or the application of statutory defences.

This fiscal year, the Board achieved its goal to conduct an analysis of each determination and notice of appeal received and to bring a public interest perspective and encourage fair and equitable application of FRPA and the *Wildfire Act* while participating in appeals to the Forest Appeals Commission (FAC). The Board:

- reviewed 30 FRPA and *Wildfire Act* determinations
- received 3 requests from the public to appeal forest stewardship plan approvals, conducted an analysis of each request and decided not to initiate any appeals
- joined 2 appeals and did not initiate any appeals

APPEAL CASES

Suspension and Cancellation of *Range Act* Grazing Licence

The Board joined an appeal in which the appellant challenges the suspension and cancellation of its *Range Act* grazing licence. The Board intends to focus its participation in the appeal on the interpretation of the grounds for suspending and cancelling a grazing licence in the *Range Act*, which includes conduct that is causing or may imminently cause serious damage to the environment.

Category 2 Open Burning

The Board joined an appeal involving a lessee and contractor being found in contravention of the *Wildfire Act* for failing to comply with the requirements for category 2 open burning. The Board is likely to focus its participation in the appeal on the diligence required, to establish a defence of due diligence, when a person hires another person to burn for them. The Board may also participate on the issue of apportioning the government's costs of fire control and damages to government property among multiple persons.

Compliance with Forest Stewardship Plan

The Board participated in a 10-day hearing involving the appeal of a FRPA determination. The appeal was largely about the interpretation and application of the appellant's commitments in its forest stewardship plan relating to timber harvesting in draft old growth management areas. The Board limited its participation in the appeal to the mandatory penalty considerations of the gravity and magnitude of a contravention and whether a contravention was repeated or continuous. The parties are waiting for a decision from the FAC.

Debris Pile Burning and The Defence of Due Diligence

The Board participated in an 11-day hearing involving the appeal of a *Wildfire Act* determination. The FAC published a decision in March 2024. The FAC accepted the Board's submissions relating to the standard of diligence that applies to preventing the escape of a fire after a person takes action to extinguish a holdover fire. The FAC's decision is currently under appeal to the Supreme Court of British Columbia.

COMMUNICATIONS

The Board communicates the results of its activities through a range of channels. This includes issuing news releases, presenting audit findings and investigations, and sharing highlights of the Board's work on social media.

THIS YEAR'S PUBLICATIONS

This fiscal year we published 16 reports, 1 technical bulletin, 1 annual report, and 14 news releases.

Our top 5 most viewed reports were:

1. **Forest and Fire Management in BC: Toward Landscape Resilience**
2. **Measuring and Allocating Forage on Rangelands in BC**
3. **2022-23 Annual Report**
4. **Practicing Landscape Fire Management – Technical Bulletin**
5. **Access Restrictions within Tree Farm Licence 46**

CONTACT US

We would be pleased to answer your questions and provide additional information, whether by phone, meetings, webinars, or by giving presentations on our reports and our work.

EMAIL US

Do you have a concern about forest and range practices in BC?
Email us at FPBoard@bcfpb.ca

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We encourage individuals interested in staying up-to-date on the latest news from the Board to subscribe to our email updates and follow us on social media platforms.

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