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**VIA EMAIL**

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Dear Julie Castonguay:

**Forest Practices Board's feedback on the draft Forest Landscape Plan and Forest Operations Plan for Tree Farm Licence 37**

The Forest Practices Board (the Board) has a unique role in evaluating forest management planning, bringing a public interest perspective based on experience and knowledge and the Board's audit and investigative work since 1995.

The Board is encouraged by the collaboration between 'N̓amgis First Nation, Western Forest Products, and Atli Resources Limited Partnership, and commends the team for the innovations sparked in developing these important plans. This draft Forest Landscape Plan (FLP) is an important tactical link between *Forest and Range Practices Act* (FRPA) objectives and tangible operational planning.

As the watchdog for forest and range practices, the Board wishes to provide constructive feedback to improve the FLP framework and strengthen stewardship of public forest lands. The Board does not intend to review and comment on all FLPs but will provide input during this formative stage of FLP implementation in BC. The Board's comments in this document do not reflect an exhaustive review of the draft FLP and Forest Operations Plan (FOP) but instead, focus on four themes (in bold headings below), discuss their importance, and show how they relate to the draft FLP and FOP.

**The FLP and FOP must be linked with FRPA objectives**

When recent amendments to the FRPA are brought into force, FRPA will require the chief forester to consider objectives for timber production, environmental conservation, Indigenous

and community values, and forest health (section 2.22) in preparing an FLP. These broad objectives are meant to be expanded upon in the FLP to address regional priorities by establishing future outcomes (section 2.28). Once the outcomes are defined through collaborative planning, FOPs must align forest practices, silviculture systems, and stocking standards with the outcomes of the FLP.

Without a strong link between the FRPA objectives, FLP outcomes, and the content of an FOP, there is a risk that on-the-ground practices will not achieve the objectives.<sup>1</sup>

- The draft TFL 37 FLP could better expand upon the section 2.22 objectives to specify regional values or priorities for management. For example, section 2.22(d) is an objective for *managing the values placed on the forest ecosystems by local communities*. The FLP does little to describe those values and does not have clear outcomes to address the objective (*see appendix ref.1 for another example*).
- The draft TFL 37 FLP could clarify how objectives were considered. For example, the “How the FRPA Section 2.22 Objectives Were Considered in Establishing the Outcome” section for each outcome in the FLP tends to describe an outcome rather than a description of how the applicable objectives were considered as required by section 2.28 (*see appendix ref. 2 & 3*).
- The FLP does not include any planning guidelines. Planning guidelines are meant to document management practices to achieve the outcomes of the FLP by including detailed operational specifications and thresholds that are easily understood by practitioners working with the FLP. Planning guidelines would strengthen the links between the FOP, FLP and FRPA’s objectives.

### **FOP content should be measurable and verifiable**

Where the FLP states the desired outcomes for the plan area, the FOP should detail practical strategies to achieve them. The FOP should guide site-level plans, detailing how strategies are implemented in the field and the outcomes are achieved. After the amendments to FRPA are enacted, FRPA will continue to be a results-based model supported by three pillars: objectives, plans and practice requirements, and compliance and enforcement. Measurable and verifiable commitments in a plan are essential to supporting a results-based model. To test if FOP content is measurable and verifiable, the strategies should explain what will occur, who is doing it, and where and when it will occur.<sup>2</sup>

FLP outcomes and FOP content should set out strategies for managing public forests in lieu of or alongside government regulations. This highlights the importance of having measurable or

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<sup>1</sup> See *Tactical Forest Planning: The Missing Link Between Strategic Planning and Operational Planning in BC*. (2019) BC Forest Practices Board Special Report 58.

<sup>2</sup> See *Forest Stewardship Plans: Are They Meeting Expectations?* (2015) BC Forest Practices Board Special Investigation 44.

verifiable criteria. “After all, a commitment that is not measurable or verifiable cannot be enforced, and a commitment that cannot be enforced is but an empty promise.”<sup>3</sup>

- The draft FOP’s stewardship strategies should be more specific. For example, there are references to retention levels without specifying the unit of measure or what is being retained (*see appendix ref. 4*).
- While targets aren’t a legal requirement, setting targets for indicators provides a way to measure if an outcome has been achieved. The draft FLP and FOP lack targets for many important outcomes (*see appendix ref. 5*).
- The draft FOP omits certain details on managing values without clear support for achieving the outcome. For example, while forest harvesting is allowed in the ‘Namgis Conservation Network, no stewardship strategies detail how streams, lakes and wetlands will be managed, and therefore, it is unclear how harvesting adjacent to these water features will support an outcome such as FF3 for maintaining riparian function.

### **Plans should be transparent**

An FOP represents an important agreement between a licensee and the provincial government (or other decision-making body), demonstrating how values identified in the FLP are being managed in the public interest. Transparency may, for example, involve using clear language with precise definitions, providing reasonable details to support strategies or assumptions, and including complete references to relevant standards.

As the Board has noted in the past<sup>45</sup>, transparent plans and well-documented decision-making at both the site and landscape levels garner public trust, help avoid conflict between resource users, and facilitate accountability and continuous improvement.

- The draft FOP includes stewardship strategies that lack information about decision-making processes, making it difficult to determine whether a clearly defined process has been implemented (*see appendix ref. 6*).
- Some stewardship strategies in the FOP delegate important details to third-party agreements outside the public domain. This includes specifics on managing a value or provisions for alternate but undefined strategies or targets for conservation (*see appendix ref. 7*).

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<sup>3</sup> Roberta Reader, *The Expectations that Affect the Management of Public Forest and Range Lands in British Columbia: Looking Outside the Legislation*. February 2006. Page 69.

<sup>4</sup> *Forest Practices Board Bulletin, Volume 16 Balancing Risk Across Resource Values in Forest Operations (2014)*

<sup>5</sup> See principle 5 of the *Forest Practices Board Bulletin, Volume 17- Stewardship- A Forest Practices Board Perspective (2016)*

**Adaptive management should be done with purpose**

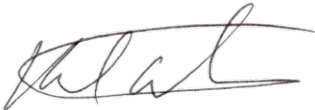
Monitoring is crucial for managing the complexities of forest stewardship and meeting public expectations. The FRPA amendments anticipate the role of monitoring, where the chief forester must report, at the end of a 5-year plan period, the extent to which the outcomes identified in the plan have been achieved. Monitoring relies on clear indicators, defined thresholds, or targets and monitoring data to help determine if current strategies are adequate or need changes. The adaptive management cycle includes monitoring (either passive or active monitoring to achieve implementation and effectiveness monitoring goals), evaluating the results, and adjusting the plan.

Without clear targets, well-defined indicators, or a built-in process for adjusting the plan, the process lacks the essential feedback needed to adapt and improve outcomes.

- While the draft FLP has 40 Adaptive Management Indicators (AMIs), many can be strengthened by defining thresholds and targets for the condition to be achieved. The plan can then clarify how the monitoring results will inform plan adjustments and changes in practices (*see appendix ref. 8*).
- Some AMIs suggest focusing on effectiveness monitoring, but the data collected may not enhance the understanding needed to improve stewardship practices (*see appendix ref. 9*).
- Some AMIs need to improve their definitions to ensure the stated goals are measurable. For example, AMI 9 refers to “functioning and resilient riparian forests,” and AMI 19 refers to “ecological integrity,” while definitions support neither.

Finally, the Board acknowledges the tremendous work of the plan holders in creating the first draft of FLP and FOP within this new legal framework. We recognize the challenge of drafting an FLP and FOP ahead of major policy changes, such as ongoing modernized land use planning and any upcoming changes to the regulations made under FRPA, which may affect the final product. Although several key elements are currently missing in the FLP, such as the Vancouver Island Use Plan Higher Level Plan Order requirements, we trust these will be addressed in future iterations. Thank you for the opportunity to provide input, and please contact us for any clarifications or questions.

Sincerely,



Keith Atkinson, RPF  
Chair, Forest Practices Board

Appendices (1): *Appendix 1, Examples of Opportunities for Improvement by Theme*

## Appendix - Examples of opportunities for improvement by theme

### The FLP and FOP must be linked with FRPA objectives

Ref	Description	Issue
1 <i>FLP</i> <i>p.49</i>	FF 9: CULTURAL, TRADITIONAL AND RECREATIONAL USE  A diversity of age classes is maintained across all biogeoclimatic ecosystem variants into the future."	This outcome is meant to address 4 of the FRPA objectives, clearly emphasizing FRPA s.2.22 (c) and (d). However, there is no clear description of those values or how the outcome supports each objective.
2 <i>FLP-</i> <i>p.37</i>	FF 4: DIVERSITY AND PATTERN OF FOREST STANDS IN THE GWA'NI SPECIAL MANAGEMENT ZONE  "A diverse mix of forest ages with greater than 50% of the forest older than 120 years by 2140 growing across a range of patch sizes, contributing to an un-even <sup>6</sup> aged forest mosaic."	This outcome is meant to address all 5 of the FRPA objectives but without a clear link or justification. For example, in section 2.22 (e), the FRPA objective is <i>'preventing, mitigating and adapting to impacts caused by significant disturbances to forests and forest health, including wildfire, insects, disease and drought.'</i>  There is no explanation of how the outcome specifically supports the objective other than saying variable retention maintains "a diversity of forest structures, tree ages and patch sizes that contribute to healthy, diverse and resilient forests."
3 <i>FLP</i> <i>p.29</i>	FF 1: WESTERN REDCEDAR AND YELLOW CEDAR  "The abundance of western red cedar and yellow cedar increases across the range of sizes, including the k'wa'xtlu and trees for bark harvest."	While the outcome mentions an increase across various sizes, the forecast contradicts it, showing a clear decrease in bark harvest availability inside the conservation network.

<sup>6</sup> The term 'uneven aged' refers to a well-recognized silviculture system where trees of various ages and sizes are managed within a single stand. This approach involves selective harvesting and natural regeneration, maintaining continuous forest cover and promoting biodiversity. While the draft FLP/FOP adopts variable retention and single entry dispersed retention stocking standards, the silviculture system most forecasted resembles clearcutting with reserves. In the context of FF4, the term 'uneven aged' is used to describe the distribution of age classes, which does not align with the principles of true uneven aged stand management systems. This merging of terms may misalign public expectations.

## FOP content should be measurable and verifiable

Ref	Description	Issue
<p><b>4</b> <i>FOP</i> <i>p.79</i></p>	<p>SS 5: RETENTION OF RIPARIAN FOREST- STREAMS</p> <p>The management strategy for S4, S5 and S6 streams states that x% of the first y metres will be retained, informed by site-level geomorphic and aquatic factors.</p>	<p>It is unclear what unit of measure the % retention refers to (ex: stems, basal area, or area). It is also unclear what is being retained (ex, co-dominant trees, understory, all vegetation)</p> <p>The default retention targets should be clearer. For example, the default target for S4 is to retain only half the RMZ (15m of a 30m RMZ). While a minimum of 65% of the first 15 metres of the RMZ is retained, is it intended that the outer 15 metres can be fully harvested?</p>
<p><b>5</b> <i>FLP</i> <i>p.40</i> <i>&amp;</i> <i>54</i></p>	<p>FF 5: ECOSYSTEM INTEGRITY</p> <p>"Ecosystem integrity improves across the Nimpkish Valley with a noticeable shift from class IV and III to classes II and I in the Gwa'ni Special Management Zone, particularly along the Nimpkish River and its primary tributaries."</p> <p>FF 11: RARE ECOSYSTEMS</p> <p>"The integrity of rare ecosystems improves into the future."</p>	<p>It is unclear if the forecasted scenarios that apply to the outcomes are used as targets, as no other threshold or target is identified to measure success.</p> <p>The current description of the classification system for "integrity classes" is vague and not verifiable.</p>

## Plans should be transparent

Ref	Description	Issue
<p><b>6</b> <i>FOP</i> <i>p.75</i></p>	<p>SS 4: LANDSLIDE RISK TOLERANCE FOR ROADS AND HARVESTING</p> <p>Design cutblocks and roads to the risk tolerance for landslides</p>	<p>The FOP does not define 'risk tolerance to landslides,' with a footnote pointing to the ABCFP/EGBC guideline for criteria to consider rather than a clear description of the risk tolerance process.</p>
<p><b>7</b> <i>FOP</i> <i>p.72</i> &amp; <i>86</i></p>	<p>SS 1: 'NAMGIS CONSERVATION NETWORK INCLUDING RESERVES FOR WILDLIFE, BIODIVERSITY AND CARBON</p> <p>Forest harvesting within the 'Namgis Conservation Network can be completed for certain reasons if it is consistent with the cooperative decision-making agreement and any legally established reserves and carbon reserve requirements.</p> <p>SS 11: K'WA'XTLU RETENTION CRITERIA</p> <p>Retain k'wa'xtlu as identified in the SS 11.</p>	<p>The strategies authorize incursions into the conservation area based on criteria unavailable to the public.</p> <p>The percent cedar retention amounts are determined by 'site level flexibility for operational considerations' consistent with the cooperative decision-making agreement- which is not available to the public.</p>

## Adaptive management should be done with purpose

Ref	Description	Issue
<p><b>8</b> <i>FLP</i> <i>p.33</i></p>	<p>FF 2: STREAM CHANNEL CONDITION</p> <p>FF 2 refers to AMI 7, which uses channel condition as an indicator to monitor trends for the level of disturbance from high to stable or consistent with the natural condition.</p>	<p>It is unclear how a) channel condition is being measured or how the disturbance categories are defined, b) what threshold is used to measure success, and c) how the findings inform plan adjustments.</p>
<p><b>9</b> <i>FOP</i> <i>p.77</i></p>	<p>AMI 8 is the five-year rolling average of the number of landslides per 100ha of logged steep terrain in the 15-year period after harvesting.</p> <p>AMI 5 will measure the total number of bear dens and raptor nests protected.</p>	<p>AMI 8 implies an effectiveness monitoring question like "Were activities effective at minimizing landslides?" However, the indicator excludes areas of important harvest-origin landslide causes. For example, a logged area in gentle-over-steep terrain that initiates a landslide in steep, unlogged terrain will not be monitored.</p> <p>AMI 5 is written as an implementation monitoring question, such as, "Did we protect dens and nests?" However, SS 20's management prescription could better include adaptive management principles by employing effectiveness monitoring (measuring habitat quality) and answering the question, "Were prescriptions effective at protecting dens and nests?"</p>