

Forestry Careers: Building Our Future A Workshop

Minutes of Meeting

Place: McGregor Model Forest Boardroom, 2nd Floor, 333 Becott Place (Exploration Place)

Date & Time: Tuesday March 6th, 2007. 12:00 – 4:30 (Lunch Provided)

This workshop is developed in conjunction with a number of partners and interested individuals.

Objectives:

1. Address issues, initiatives, opportunities, solutions in relation to capacity, and recruitment and retention of human resources in Forestry careers;
2. Ensure participants have most up to date knowledge of current initiatives;
3. Create focus and clarity around issues and opportunities and potential solutions;
4. Establish commitments and steps to ensure continued work and networking to support solutions, and;
5. Provide a northern perspective into the provincial work being undertaken.

1. INTRODUCTIONS AND WORKSHOP OBJECTIVES

Al Gorley, president of the McGregor Model Forest Association (MMFA) welcomed all participants to the meeting, noting the diverse cross section of representatives including industry, government, consultants, students and academia.

Al reviewed the objectives of the workshop as noted above and noted the apparent growing interest in the topic of demographics, recruitment and retention within forestry careers. Recent examples include the Canadian Council of Forest Ministers (CCFM) study, presentations at the Association of British Columbia Forest Professionals (ABC FP) annual general meeting, white paper discussions between the Ministry of Forest & Range (MOFR) and the ABCFP, national meetings on trends in technologies, and studies by post secondary institutions specializing in forestry.

Ed Morrice provided some background as to the reason for developing the workshop. He noted the trend to declining enrollment at the College of New Caledonia (CNC), closing of programs at other institutions (Northwest Community College, BCIT) and the need for an action plan for positive change and growth. Ed distributed a paper titled: “*A View of British Columbia Post-Secondary Forestry Student Data: Sustainability of a Profession?*”

2. **SETTING THE STAGE:**

a. Update on Provincial White Paper (Steve Baumber)

Steve Baumber has been hired by the ABCFP to provide information and produce a report by the end of March that can be used to leverage funding. The report will identify methods and describe solutions to improve recruitment of forestry practitioners in BC.

Within the Government of Canada, there is a Sector Council Program. The program works “to enable partnerships that address skills and human resources issues by establishing, developing and supporting national partnerships.” The initiative, managed by the Human Resources Partnerships Directorate announced in February available funding of \$5 million for the forest sector.

b. Quick “round table” on how the “forestry careers” issues are affecting your organization (government, academic & teaching, research, industry, consulting firms, etc.)

Each participant was encouraged to identify “forestry career issues” affecting their organization. The following is a summary of the discussion points:

- Competition between sectors and across sectors
- Perception that forestry is a sunset industry with an uncertain future, especially in areas impacted by the Mountain Pine Beetle(MPB)
- Lack of understanding and negative image- Forestry is more than a timber industry.
- Lack of Champions: mentoring programs for employees, defined career paths, forestry is not fun anymore, lack of top down advocates
- Opportunities are not obvious or “dumbed down”
- Not using network power of existing practitioners
- Large corporate culture is not attractive
- Youth think in terms of immediacy & permanence and have disconnect with nature
- Obstacles & limited incentives for investing in student employment
- Employees choose “safe haven” work (i.e., government vs. consultants, regular weekday work vs. camp living)

3. **CLARIFYING THE OPPORTUNITIES**

Al posed the following question to the group:

What do you see as the 3 top priorities to improve recruitment and retention of forestry practitioners to central & northern BC & why?

Based on the input from the group, the following list of opportunities is identified:

- Promote a Personal & Organizational commitment to recruit
- Involve missing target groups such as Reforestation contractors and First Nations in information exchange
- Utilize bridging of seasonal work to the profession; coordinate within the labour force to identify gaps.
- Use the MPB epidemic as a catalyst for change
- Link forestry to current global issues & trends; e.g. Green agenda, Climate change
- Apply resource technology to knowledge technology
- Encourage partnerships & sponsorships with youth through education links for employers; e.g. Rotary Program, COFI natural resource management program, woodlots, school work experience,
- Break through the media to relate good news stories (attract popular culture target audiences such as mountain bikers, back country skiers, extreme sports enthusiasts)
- Use visible opportunities to “rebrand” forestry e.g. MPB, fire outbreaks, resource tourism
- Establish a bigger picture through Resource Sector cooperation
- Market to audience that includes career change recruits and career advisors to take step from “interest only” to acquiring skills and qualifications
- Promote the diversity within forestry
- Link opportunities to motivations
- Student representatives presented a fairly optimistic attitude about forestry careers and opportunities perhaps counter to perceptions of those working in the sector for a long time

4. ESTABLISHING A FOCUS

The next part of the discussion addressed developing a cohesive focus and priority for “*made in the north*” solutions.

Al posed the following question:

What potential actions would you be prepared to support (time/\$/influence) over the next year?

The following is a list of current or proposed initiatives that the participants support:

- Increased promotion of program at targeted audiences (school youth, career change adults, outdoor enthusiasts). One example at the school level is the Junior Initial Attack film to promote the program to youth at the Grade 10 level.
- Develop an advocacy group to get the issue on the priority list of policy makers and CEOs.
- Find the means to fund key positions for information extension & educational outreach programs.
- Access Forest Sector Council and other sources such as NDI, OBAC, etc to secure funding of initiatives.
- Start leveraging the people aspect and high tech nature of the MPB situation

- Establish a northern network for forestry recruiting with a coordinated approach to identify expectations for employers and employees
- Expand the “Adopt a school” program
- Conduct a needs/gap analysis

4. **NEXT STEPS**

Possible outcomes from this meeting include:

- Information exchange amongst participants through an email/list serve distribution process modeled on the climate change information exchange hosted by McGregor
- Development of report by Steve Baumber by March 31, 2007
- Participate in a 2nd meeting after the report is finalized to develop an action plan pending recommendations from Steve’s report.

Prior to the adjournment of the workshop, Al issued a challenge to all participants:

Make a personal contribution to improve the recruitment and retention of forestry practitioners by identifying and completing one action item that you otherwise would not have done before attending the workshop.

Summary:

Although not directly stated, it was implied that Forestry practitioners can and should do a better job of addressing the four key cornerstones of marketing:

- Promotion
- Product
- People
- Place

The workshop was adjourned at 4:30 p.m.