

Initial Impressions: Cross-Case Study Comparison

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CLUSTER RESEARCH REPORT: Forestry



Introduction

The *Future of Forestry* project, part of the overarching [Regional Workforce Development in Rural BC](#) program, is focused on better understanding the fundamental issues facing the forestry sector today. One of the project's objectives is to provide a comparison between the two study areas: the Columbia Basin-Boundary region of British Columbia and Scotland.

Between August and December 2017, 30 targeted interviews were completed with participants from the forestry sector in the Columbia-Basin Boundary region of British Columbia (BC), Canada (18) and Scotland, United Kingdom (12). Participants included representation from academic, government, industry, and other civil organizations (e.g., professional bodies). Participants were asked a range of questions related to their personal experience, the general state of the forest sector, training and education, and technology and innovation.

This document has two objectives:

- 1) To summarize the initial impressions of the data specifically related to the cross-case study comparison; and
- 2) To provide these initial impressions to participants for their review and comment.

This initial impressions document includes preliminary feedback from research participants.

Findings: Common Themes

Overarching themes were identified from initial analysis of interviewee responses. These themes appeared in the majority of interviews in both case study regions and were often found to be reflected in responses to multiple questions, an indication of the high level of importance these themes have to the forestry sector. Participant responses reflect similarities and differences between the two jurisdictions. The six common themes are discussed in further detail below.

Culture & Context

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the interview data reflect substantial differences in culture and context between the two study areas. These differences extend beyond the obvious difference in the size and scale of the forestry sector and the resource itself. In BC the interviews reflect a long history of forestry, one that is culturally ingrained and where the economic importance is largely recognized, but with the acknowledgement that the economic landscape has shifted and diversified. Conversely, in Scotland the interviews reflect the emergence and growth of the Scottish forestry sector, where while public understanding and economic importance has grown, forestry is not an ingrained cultural element, unlike other sectors (e.g., agriculture).

Participant responses between the two study areas reflected differences in the public and political perception and support of the industry - including socio-cultural and economic factors, in the motivations of the interviewees (e.g., presence versus lack of role models), in management structure and approach, and in interactions with other sectors. For example, BC responses demonstrated the historic dominance of forestry in terms of land use, and the ongoing shifts toward incorporating and balancing other uses and values. Responses from Scotland were indicative of the dominance of agricultural land uses, with comments demonstrating not only relationships between the two, but that forestry is viewed through an agricultural lens (e.g., use of 'crop rotation' in reference to tree stands).

Comments related to conservation and environmental concerns also reflect cultural and contextual differences. A number of participants in Scotland noted efforts groups that are resistant to, or completely against, efforts to increase forest cover in Scotland, where pastoral landscapes are viewed as 'natural'. Whereas BC participants noted groups with anti-logging sentiments related to concerns such as watershed or habitat protection. While recognizing the legitimacy of concerns, in both study areas many participants felt that NIMBYism (Not In My Back Yard) was often at the root of these efforts, with people opposed to the location (and their interaction with that location) as opposed to the activity itself.

Governance & Policy

Multiple elements of each interview related to governance and policy, including the structure of the governing bodies and approaches to management. In both study areas multiple participants drew attention to the legacy and implications of past government decisions. Prominent examples included: 1) the impacts of Margaret Thatcher's Conservative Party's neoliberal approach, particularly as it related to a gap in tree planting (and subsequently to a communing supply gap), and 2) impacts of the shift to the professional reliance model and the removal of appurtenance provisions by the British Columbia Liberal¹ Government. Both examples reflect the long-term nature of the sector and, as noted by several participants, the

¹ It is important to note for those unfamiliar with BC Politics that the BC Liberals are the right-wing party of BC, more analogous to Conservatives than Liberals in the traditional political sense.

uncertainty of how planning and decision making will play out in the future. The wide ranging impact of policy changes was noted by the majority of participants, including impacts to industry, education and academia, and related stakeholder and professional agencies.

The structure of government, management, legislation, and other elements differs greatly between the two jurisdictions, as does land ownership (i.e., amount of public versus private land), the structure of the forestry supply chain, and the interaction between the public and private sectors. However, a common thread was comments related to differences in expectations and realities regarding who is responsible for what, particularly when it comes to public perception (see Engagement & Communication below).

Two specific policy examples were discussed at length by participants in both study areas: timber supply and trade.

Timber Supply

While the two study areas differ substantially in terms of the scale of forest resource, timber supply was noted as a key challenge nearly universally by participants in both places. The coming gap in timber supply in Scotland, as mentioned above, is a result of insufficient planting – with participants noting how this expected gap is necessitating changes in rotation lengths and harvesting, as well as influencing current and future planting. In BC, the conversation is different as a result of the volume of forested land. While an abundance of trees exists, when protected areas and various regulations (e.g., setbacks, environmental constraints) are combined with loss of timber from forest fires and other natural hazards (see Climate Change below), the majority of BC participants felt the current approach to determining annual allowable cut is in need of revision. In both jurisdictions, many interviewees highlighted the challenge of managing a resource in anticipation of what the future will bring (see Uncertainty & Complexity below).

Trade

The influence and impact of trade on the forest sector was a key discussion topic among participants in both case study regions. Nearly all BC participants noted the current renegotiations of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) as having important impacts on the structure of the industry, commodity prices (e.g., export duties), and competition. Similarly, nearly all participants in Scotland pointed to Brexit and its potential impacts on the labour pool, policy, granting and subsidy programs, cost of imports, and more. In both cases there were both potential positive and negative outcomes – but with uncertainty in any case being a key factor (see Uncertainty & Complexity).

Climate Change

The final overarching theme is climate change, including how it relates to the sector itself (e.g., adaptation to changes caused by climate change) and how use of forest products relates to climate change (e.g., mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions through use of green building materials). While climate change was discussed in both study areas, the emphasis of the comments differed greatly between the jurisdictions. First, the expected impacts of climate change and the anticipated challenges differed substantially. Wildfire, and growing concern over growing fire risks, were ubiquitously noted as a serious concern in BC – hardly surprising given interviews took place during the worst wildfire season on record. Fire was not seen as a concern for the Scottish forest sector, with participants noting expected changes to include increased precipitation. Participants in both places discussed the link between climate change

and pests and diseases. Participants in Scotland typically expressed low levels of concern, while participants in BC identified climate change as one of the critical challenges facing the forest sector today, impacting the resource as noted above in the Timber Supply section and its management (see Uncertainty & Complexity below).

While risk related conversations were fewer in Scotland, multiple interviewees drew attention to the potential for forest products to help with overarching societal adaptation efforts. These comments emphasized the potential for wood-based building products (and their lower carbon footprint), as well as the carbon capture and storage potential of forests.

Findings: Transferable Knowledge

Initial data analysis also identified five areas with a high potential for knowledge transfer between the two case study areas. Each of these five areas are discussed below.

Governance & Policy

Both case study regions are currently experiencing changes to governance of the forestry sector. Participants in Scotland noted devolution from the UK government and the shift in governance from the arm's length Commission to a more ministerial 'Forests and Lands Scotland'. Participants in BC pointed to the recent shift in provincial control from the BC Liberals to the New Democrat Party (NDP) and the subsequent potential for change as a result. The BC experience with the establishment and operation of the Ministry of Forests Lands Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development offers an example and lessons learned for Scotland in establishing their new governance structure. Additionally, both the past and future structure of forestry governance in Scotland offers differing examples for BC. In both jurisdictions the majority of participants noted the ongoing need for better integration when it comes to policy (see Integration below), although a minority of participants noted the potential for a diminishment or loss of importance of forestry as a result of shifts to integrated governing bodies and policies.

Engagement & Communication

The growing importance of engagement and communication was highlighted across interviews in both case study regions. The majority of interviewees spoke to recognition of the growing number of stakeholder uses and values (see Uncertainty & Complexity), as well as conflicts related to differing perceptions and values, and the legacy of past mistakes. Several interviewees expressed concern over a growing polarization of opinions.

Many interviewees in both study areas commented on the gap between the public perception of the sector and the reality, particularly in terms of structure and responsibility. Several interviewees felt that addressing this gap should not be seen as a public relations exercise (i.e., one-way public education), but rather a two-way exercise in building relationships and sharing information.

Data suggest engagement and communication are critical, and that innovation and change in approach is needed. Both positive and negative examples provided suggest that actors in both study areas will continue to address this issue, and the variety of approaches indicates potential for recording and sharing lessons learned within and across jurisdictions.

Uncertainty & Complexity

Throughout many participant responses there was the element of uncertainty and complexity. This was highlighted through examples of a growing need to balance multiple uses and values on the landscape. In both case study regions this included a balance of economic, environmental, and socio-cultural uses and values. Examples included a growing importance of First Nations rights and title (BC), wildlife habitat (both), and recreational uses (both). Many interviewees felt there is an increased understanding of the complexity of ecosystems, including long term impacts and cumulative effects. However, several interviewees stressed that despite increases in this knowledge, there is also a growing number of unknowns as noted in the Climate Change section above. The challenge of management and decision making under conditions of uncertainty and complexity were universally acknowledged, and multiple interviewees in both case study regions pointed to active adaptive management (or similar strategies) as an appropriate approach under such conditions.

Integration

Relating to uncertainty and complexity is the identified need for integration. Because of the interactions and cumulative effects, multiple interviewees indicated that maintaining the existing fragmented or 'siloed' approach of the forest sector is increasingly problematic. Interviewees provided examples of explicit links between forestry and agriculture, tourism, academia, education, economic development, conservation, and more. These links were representative of existing or potential conflicts and collaborations. Multiple successful collaborations were noted in both study areas – highlighting the availability of transferable knowledge related to wildlife management, interface management, community engagement, public/private collaborations, and others.

Workforce

Lastly, several common challenges related to the forestry workforce were noted, as well as potential solutions. For example, many participants from both regions noted a growing demographic issue around an aging workforce. A small number of comments pointed to a lack of diversity in forestry, particularly around gender. Recruitment of new workers also came across as a common issue. Comments from several BC participants indicated they feel there is a disconnect between what people perceive forestry jobs to be (think lumberjack with axe) versus the reality, particularly when it comes to the high tech aspect of the workforce. Many participants in Scotland felt that forestry simply is not presented as a career option given an overarching lack of understanding related to the sector. When discussing workforce challenges, participants often highlighted the need for, and potential of collaborative approaches to recruitment, including between employers, industry, the public sector, and academia.

The majority of participants also commented on the changing workforce landscape, particularly relating to the changing skills needed as a result of new technology and innovation, and the challenges this fast changing landscape poses for training and education. Relating to complexity as discussed above, several participants discussed the trade offs between breadth and depth relating to training and education. Questions were raised generally about who is responsible for what level and type of training. Universally, participants pointed to experiential learning as a critical need.

Lastly relating to workforce, interviews in both study areas noted resourcing gaps. These included a shrinking public sector, where shortages create challenges relating to compliance and enforcement, as well as poaching of staff between employers.