

*The History of Free Growing  
Policy & Legislation*

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## *Outline:*

- Why were the changes made?
- Situation before
- Goals for Governments
- What is the right standard?
- Ecosystems & Time
- How far could we go?
- Aim of legislation
- Reaction to Act
- Other issues: Security, Terminology, a False Dichotomy & some consequences
- Conclusion

# *Free Growing*

- Clearly the wrong standard
- Why was it adopted?
- We'll get to that later

# *Why was everything changed?*

- Countervail challenge
- US demanded value
- Part stumpage
- Part Silviculture
- When? Issue hot in 1987
- October seconded
- 6 week time frame
- No discussions
- Unusual - retroactive

## *What was the situation before?*

- Crown responsible to fund
- Area based licensees carry out practices but forestry costs
- Volume based – suppression – short term
- No soil disturbance limits
- Result:
- No connection between logging & new forest
- No timing connection
- No soil husbandry incentives

## *Government's goals*

- United States:
  - Add costs
  - “Equalize” the situation
  - Remove “subsidy”
- British Columbia:
  - Stewardship
  - Reduce government work; transfer cost
  - Recall silviculture budget ~ \$1/2B
  - Public displeasure with lack of stewardship

## *So what should the standards be?*

- Anyone trained in forestry:
- Depends on silvicultural system
- Even-aged > rotation
- Selection/All aged > long enough to cover response to the cut
- Contrast to extant obligations:
- Months or couple years to rotation of 40 – 120 years!
- Politically infeasible – so search for compromise

# *What is our foundation?*

- The ecosystem
- We are applied ecologists
- Ecosystem + tree species aut-ecology give range of options
- But how can you set standards for 95 M ha?
- What are the essential differences between ecosystems?
- Species : desired and undesired
- Time
- Space: holes are not compensated by density elsewhere



# *Importance of timing in ecosystems*

- Inexorable response of ecosystems to perturbations
- Typically this is the cut – either full or partial
- Clock is ticking
- Opportunities to treat are limited
- Previously the harvest & treatments were separated
- Getting the timing right = good silviculture

## *How far can the obligation be extended? Options:*

- Harvest
- Suppression
- Site preparation
- Initial regeneration
- Protect regeneration [Brushing and weeding]
- Stand management and improvement
- Full rotation

## *Industry expectations*

- Accustomed to short term obligation
- Different between coast and interior
- Coast 5-7 years
- Interior up to 20 years
- Most prepared to do regeneration
- Many opposed to protecting that regen
- Natural regen sites issues different: excessive density which needs to be managed

## *Aim of legislation*

- Protect resources: ecological prescriptions and protect soils
- Ensure timing correct
- But full rotation too long
- *At what point is future forest reasonably secure w/o further treatment?*
- Thus somewhat arbitrary Free Growing standard
- By ecosystem – time and growth rates

## *Review of Legislation: unusual*

- No review in BC
- Viewed in Washington before the BC legislature
- US pressure helped move silviculture forward in BC
- Stinks as far as sovereignty
- NB: extra language in Bill as distinct from the Act.

# *What was the reaction?*

## *Huge mental shift*

- Regen – either natural or plant: fine on Coast; some Interior objection
- B&W: Coast mainly understood; Interior serious objection
- Soil disturbance
- Interior anger. Some previous practices poor. E.g. > 60%
- Goal to initiate expectations
- Gradually improve
- This has happened

## *Issues: security for liability*

- Estimate of steady state outstanding obligation: \$1.75 B
- What secured this obligation?
- Extant: TFL bonds were tiny.
- Like bank taking your cutlery as collateral for house mortgage
- False expectation: companies permanent and committed to BC. Think of MB.
- Proposal rejected: tax payers bear brunt
- Parallel report by G Mason Feb 9 in Globe & Mail

## *Issues: terminology*

- Free growing vs Free to Grow
- Active vs passive
- In reality very different: advance understory regeneration may be taller than competition, but stunted growth and on many sites never releases
- Growth needs to be illustrated



## *Issue: false dichotomy*

- Results vs process
- Claim that results all that matter
- If so then consider: Stanley cup; Your coffin; Going to jail
- Need for feasible process to achieve; one without the other meaningless
- Unnecessary requests for details
- Some ridiculous prescriptions e.g. Ft Nelson
- Remember timing? If miss time, little chance for recovery
- Consider oil spills discussion

## *Issue: consequence of FG standards*

- Licensee desire to eliminate obligation asap
- Look for fastest solution
- Species conversion
- Thus need to emphasize ecologically appropriate species

## *What are the interests of the parties?*

- Short term: politicians and corporate pecuniary interests
- Long term: public and future generations
- Forest professionals are the ones responsible to make this happen

## *Conclusion*

- External pressures forced the change, but we needed to reconnect ecosystems to the silvicultural system and conditions were ripe for change
- An opportunity for silviculture to advance

## *Conclusions – cont'd*

- Free Growing standards are a compromise as cannot expect licensees to be held responsible for full rotation
- Standards for results on the site should be set
- Protect ecosystems, including the soil, without which we have no forests
- Ensure that we have healthy forests for future generations; their very existence will be the greatest value by the end of this century

*Questions:*