

Wilderness Tourism Association



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Editor, BC Forest Professional
Association of BC Forest Professionals
602-1281 W. Georgia St.
Vancouver, BC V6E 3J7

Dear Editor,

I am writing in response to the forestry and tourism articles in the May-June 2014 issue of BC Forest Professional. Highlighting these two intertwined industries, their significance to the BC economy and how they work together (or don't) is timely. There is no doubt that both the forestry and tourism sectors are important to BC economically and culturally. Equally important is the need for these two sectors to work together so that both can prosper, and continue to contribute to the provinces GDP and jobs. Tourism is one of the leading contributors to the provinces GDP. Nature-based tourism (or adventure tourism) alone generates \$1.5 billion and the majority of visitors are from out of country.

I would like to respond specifically to Ms. Leine's article (Timber and Tourism: Success in Synergy). Readers may get the impression from the article that forest practices are highly regulated and controlled, and that the forestry and tourism sectors have good working relationships where communication and coordination of activities is the norm. Sadly, as articulated in Mr. Kellar's article (Wilderness Tourism: The other Forest Industry), these ideas do not bear out in reality and the experience of many tourism operators regarding forestry interactions is negative.

There are several issues and concerns raised by the tourism industry regarding the impact of forestry development on their operations including (but not limited to): quality of viewscapes, environmental practices, fisheries values, recreation features and trails, seasonal operations, changes in access, safety hazards, and the rate of planned development, harvest and reforestation.

The view of many in the tourism industry is that the problems between the two sectors are rooted in the provincial regulatory framework. Since the inception of the Forest Practices Code there has been poor performance by government agencies towards developing legally binding objectives for non-timber values such as recreation features or visual quality. Furthermore, landscape level planning has become largely out of date. The objectives that are incorporated into FRPA are too weak, or tend to be vague. In addition, most non-timber values are subject to the policy reference "*without unduly restricting the supply of timber.*"

The FRPA framework removes much of the government oversight of forestry plans and practices, but at the same time makes enforcement more difficult. The lack of information in forest stewardship plans makes it more difficult for Ministry staff to diligently approve these plans, and for the public and stakeholders to meaningfully comment on them. Yet this is the only approved plan under the FRPA regime. There is no incentive for a forest company to propose results and strategies, which can be effectively enforced. Rather there is a risk of results and strategies being written in a manner

"Ensuring a sustainable future for BC's wilderness tourism industry through leadership, advocacy, and stewardship."

where they are extremely difficult to enforce in practice. This creates great difficulty for C&E to build a case when the intent of the objective is not met. We are experiencing this with many objectives including VQOs.

Requirements for forest licensees regarding notification and consultation with tourism tenure holders are rarely adhered to, and if licensees do consult with tourism tenure holders, they seem to be under no obligation to take their considerations and concerns into account in harvesting plans and activities. All too often tourism operators are not finding out about proposed harvesting until flagging tape is put up, or more disturbingly, until the harvesting activities are underway and the damage to their features (i.e. trails) is in progress, in many cases resulting in devastating impact to their business and operations. These findings have been supported in many FPB reports. In fact the Board has criticized the FRPA's required level of consultation because it fails to live up to the principles of "effective public consultation" and has further stated that in most cases, effective consultation will not be achieved if only the minimum requirements of the FRPA are followed (Forest Practices Board, 2014).

It isn't all doom and gloom. There are many examples of good working relationships between forest licensees and tourism operators, and where practices are well managed and "sustainable". Unfortunately these examples are despite the regulatory framework, not because of it and are far from becoming the norm across the province. The cross-sector association collaboration that Ms. Leine mentions in her article is no longer occurring.

Ms. Leine does make some great comments regarding the idea of our sectors promoting our forestry resource industry and its heritage as a tourism attribute. We would agree and our sector can do a much better job at this. However the reverse is equally true, the forestry industry can and should be taking a proactive, collaborative position with tourism operators – the coordination of forestry activities can, in many cases, result mutual benefit and gain for all. When forestry operations are negatively impacting significant portions of adventure tourism tenures primarily due to a lack of consultation and coordination, something needs to change.

Founded in 1999, the Wilderness Tourism Association of BC (WTABC) is a non-profit society, which exists to ensure a sustainable future for BC's wilderness tourism or nature based tourism industry through leadership, advocacy, and stewardship. We are the voice of the roughly 2,000 nature tourism businesses, and 10 sector associations in British Columbia, which are dependent on the natural resource base for their tourism product. We work to protect our SuperNatural Brand.

Yours truly,

Evan Loveless
Executive Director
Wilderness Tourism Association of BC