



Snowden Forest Guiding Principles

How forest operations will maintain recreational values

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About BCTS

BC Timber Sales (BCTS) is the operational division of the Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development (FLNRORD) with the mandate to develop and competitively auction approximately 20% of the annual allowable cut (AAC) in BC. The data gathered from development and auction is used to set stumpage rates for the rest of the forest industry. This is referred to as a Market Pricing System and is used to defend the Province from accusations from international trade partners of subsidies given to the domestic forest industry in BC. BCTS is organized into business areas and Campbell River is located within the Strait of Georgia business area.

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to **communicate the principles and management techniques BC Timber Sales uses to maintain recreational values and user experience** in the Snowden Forest. These principles go beyond legal requirements and capture the intent to manage values that are not easily measured or defined. Recreational user values and forest conditions vary across the landscape and must be considered on a case-by-case basis. Appropriate consideration of the recreational user experience will help **ensure the area continues to be an asset to the community both for local recreational use and as a tourism resource**.

Other values, including but not limited to the John Hart Community Watershed, wildlife, biodiversity, soils, and timber, will be managed with an elevated level of care and consideration and in accordance with multiple legal and non-legal requirements and best practices. Advice from Qualified Registered Professionals (QRP's) will be sought as required.

About the Snowden Forest

Located approximately 8 kilometers north of Campbell River, the Snowden Forest is a 2500-hectare area within the Sayward Landscape Unit that has been used by the Ministry of Forests since the 1980's to promote public awareness of integrated resource management. It is an area with high timber and recreational values, and features an extensive network of legally established trails and non-established routes enjoyed by a variety of user groups⁽¹⁾.

The Snowden Forest is located within a management unit called the North Island Timber Supply Area. Under the Forest Act, the Chief Forester determines the amount of volume that can be harvested annually within each management unit every ten years. This volume is referred to as the Allowable Annual Cut or the AAC. The Minister is responsible for apportioning the volume between operators on the land base. The volume BCTS harvests annually is set at the management unit scale and is not specific to areas as small as the Snowden Forest. It is up to BCTS to manage the volume apportioned to it within the management unit. Under the Forest Act if BCTS does not harvest its volume, the volume can be auctioned to other operators.

Legal Framework for Snowden Management

The Sayward Landscape Unit Plan (LUP) ⁽²⁾ was established in 2003. This LUP provides management objectives and direction for managing the Sayward Forest for biodiversity, drinking water, recreation, wildlife, timber and other values.

The LUP identifies most of the Snowden area as a “modified” Recreation Resource Unit (RRU). There are small areas of “natural” around Lost and Elmer Lakes, and a “natural roaded” designation around Frog Lake. The modified RRU is described as:

- “low to moderate level of developed or directed access to the recreation features;
- basic to standard level of public recreation site development and
- low to moderate level of commercial recreation tenures;
- Recommended visual quality classes (RVQC) to manage for range from Retention to Partial Retention.”

The Sayward LUP together with the *Forest and Range Practices Act* (FRPA), and the BCTS Campbell River Forest Stewardship Plan ⁽³⁾ provide context and opportunity for timber harvesting in the Snowden as well as protection for legally established recreation resource features.

Further information on the Sayward LUP and Snowden trails can be found in the List of References and on the Campbell River District webpage.

BCTS Objectives and Commitments

An organization founded on principles of safety and sound forest management, BCTS plans harvesting operations with diligent regard for all resources including recreation. BCTS works closely with the Recreation Sites and Trails Branch (RSTBC) on all proposed activities. RSTBC is the lead agency managing recreational facilities on Provincial public lands. BCTS must obtain approval from the Delegated Decision Maker within RSTBC prior to harvesting and/or road building within 10m of a legally established trail.

The long-term forest management objective of BCTS in the Snowden is to ***maintain an appropriate balance of resource values through planning and conscientious practices.***

To successfully integrate harvesting operations with other uses of the Snowden, BCTS recognizes harvesting must occur at a scale and frequency which is consistent with the Sayward LUP and public expectations. Forest operations will be undertaken only after the impacts of road construction and timber harvesting on the recreational values have been assessed. The intent is to minimize any negative effects on the recreation setting and user experience, and to work with RSTBC to enhance recreation opportunities when possible.

BCTS is committed to managing the Snowden Forest as a sustainable management unit. Formal Timber Supply Analysis by the Forest and Inventory Branch is completed at the much larger timber supply area level. Generally harvest level analysis is not conducted for an area as small as the Snowden. An evaluation of sustainable harvest level has indicated the Snowden could support an annual harvest of over 10,000m³/ha, or an approximate area of 16ha/year. In recognition of the significant recreational values, BCTS intends to manage for an annual harvest level of 5,000 - 6,000m³/year, which would likely be planned in five 5 year increments of roughly 50ha (10ha/year). Harvests planned for STEMS (Silviculture Treatments for Ecosystem Management in the Sayward) research area will contribute to this volume; timing and volume of harvest in STEMS is dictated by an approved research plan which is not in the direct control of BCTS; however, STEMS harvest entries are very small and should have a negligible impact on the recreational experience.

Consultation and Education

BCTS will communicate harvest and road construction proposals to First Nations and identified stakeholders. Opportunity will be given to review and comment. Any input received will be considered in the development of operational plans.

Communication with the public and identified stakeholder groups will also be maintained throughout active operations to ensure users are aware of the timing of operations and trail closures.

BCTS will coordinate with RSTBC to improve public awareness of forestry activities through various methods including signage that explains the forestry practices that are occurring.

In fall 2018, in response to concern from the public and City of Campbell River, BCTS initiated the Snowden Advisory Group, which consists of representatives from various stakeholder groups that utilize the Snowden. First Nations were invited to the group but declined to participate. The group was created to provide viewpoints and advice to BCTS in order to ensure planning in the Snowden achieves the best balance of values and conditions taking into consideration timber, recreation, community watershed, and other values. The advisory group met regularly from fall 2018 to winter 2020 to develop a terms of reference and provide input on short and long term planning. This included identifying and mapping areas of increased recreational sensitivity (see appendix). The intent is for the group to continue to meet periodically (minimum once/year) to inform and provide feedback as forest operations occur and to incorporate learnings from each harvest into future harvest planning.

Access Management

Road access is a critical component of forest management. Industrial forest roads provide access and represent long term, high cost investments. BCTS harvesting has historically relied on the industrial forest roads surrounding the Snowden for safe and efficient access.

Forest roads suitable for log transportation do not exist in the interior portion of the Snowden. Therefore, a program of new road construction and old road and rail grade reconstruction is required to facilitate harvesting. Since these forest roads may have the potential to impact the recreation setting, BCTS will be guided by the following principles during the planning, construction and use of forest roads. Careful planning is required to ensure constructed roads are located to optimize current and future access needs.

Planning

Evaluation of road location options includes due consideration for:

- Efficiently minimizing the overall amount of road required to develop the area.
- Management of the visual impacts of roads on established trails.
- Management of the physical impact of road crossings on established trails by striving to minimize the number of crossings.
- Selecting sites for rock quarries outside of higher use areas.
- Old rail grades and roads that allow for logical timber development may be reconstructed and utilized for timber harvesting operations.

Design and Construction

Factors considered in the design and construction of forest roads includes:

- Where possible and safe to do so, “S shaped” corners will be engineered at trail and road intersections to avoid creation of long visual corridors.

- At trail and road intersections, trail continuity or connectivity will be maintained.
- Constructing primary roads to an all-season standard in recognition that winter, spring and fall season operations may be desirable.
- Right of way widths will be the minimum required for safe operations.
- Road construction and ditching will be designed to the minimum width required for stability, safety and adequate drainage.
- Active operations will have timing restrictions designed to avoid events such as the BC Bike Race, Island Cup, Snowden Challenge or other permitted events. Additional timing restrictions may be applied on a project by project basis based on stakeholder feedback and evaluation of the harvest area's recreational sensitivities.
- Where a trail is impacted by road construction, relocation of the trail will be considered in consultation with RSTBC.
- Within the John Hart Lake watershed, overland type construction will be utilized where applicable to maintain natural drainage patterns.

Use and Deactivation

- Gated access with appropriate signage may be maintained during active road construction operations for safety reasons.
- During periods of extended industrial inactivity, vehicle/motorized access will be prohibited.
- Deactivation planning and activities for branch roads will be compatible with recreational interests in the area. These activities will be coordinated in consultation with RSTBC and stakeholder input. Permanent deactivation may be prescribed to preclude access (potentially short sections).
- During active operations, vehicle access to active roads will be restricted.
- Signage will be posted at trail crossings (both on the trail and roads) for safety purposes.

Harvesting

In order to reduce impact to the recreational user experience, BCTS aims to distribute harvest across space and time. Over the long term, as young stands develop, further assessment will determine if additional harvesting may be conducted; BCTS harvesting in the Snowden has historically relied on existing industrial access, resulting in a pattern of peripheral cutblocks. As the interior of the Snowden Forest lacks useable forestry roads, no recent harvesting has taken place there. Since forest harvesting has the potential to impact the recreation users' experience, BCTS planning and harvesting will be guided by the following principles:

Planning Phase

- Harvesting and road construction planning for the Snowden Forest will occur on a low to moderate scale consistent with the recreation resource unit classification set out in the Sayward Landscape Unit Plan.
- Subject to safety and forest health considerations, cutblocks in recreationally sensitive areas will consist of variable sized small openings (typically 1-15ha) and/or utilize effective screening. Where this principle applies, a multiple pass harvest strategy will be implemented utilizing silviculture systems appropriate for the given site and stand conditions. Areas of increased recreational sensitivity are noted on the "Snowden Recreation Sensitivity Map" (see appendix).
- Windthrow (blow down) will be managed to a low risk tolerance for all harvest boundaries near recreation features in order to manage safety and recreational user experience.

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- Areas that require de-stumping for root rot will consider visual impacts of stumps left near trails.
- Viewscapes from identified viewpoints will be considered.
- Relocation of trails/routes will be considered in discussion / partnership with Recreation Sites and Trails BC; when possible, trails should be re-routed to inoperable/constrained areas.
- Any relocation works will take place ahead of harvest activities where possible.
- Cutblock size and design will be determined site specifically, dictated by limits of acceptable alteration to recreation user setting and experience. Factors to be considered in evaluating alteration of recreation user setting and experience include:
 - Time taken by an average user to traverse through a harvested area
 - Focus of recreation user (relaxed on flat grade or intense on steep downhill)
 - Orientation of trail (direction of user focus)
 - Opening design or shape (corners and straight lines versus curving boundaries)
 - Topography adjacent the trail and in the cutblock
 - Distance to forested edge from the trail
 - Adjacent forest cover attributes (age, density, species composition, understory, crown closure)
 - Amount and nature of previous and/or planned harvest disturbance
 - Amount and nature of road intersections
 - The relative amount of existing and planned alteration to the recreation setting on a specific section of trail

Harvesting Phase

- BCTS will provide advance notice of any trail closures as a result of harvesting operations. Trail closure notices will be posted at all entrances to the affected trail.
- Harvest operations will have timing restrictions designed to avoid events such as the BC Bike Race, Island Cup and Snowden Trail Challenge. Additional timing restrictions (i.e. weekends, holidays) will be applied on a project by project basis based on stakeholder feedback and the harvest area's recreational sensitivity.

Post-Harvest

- BCTS will make reasonable efforts to prevent motorized access to cutblocks, including installation of gates and other structures to block vehicle access.
- Effectiveness of access restrictions will be monitored, and additional measures will be considered if required.
- Trails impacted by harvesting will be cleared post-harvest, and trail structures will be rebuilt if required. This work will be undertaken in cooperation with Recreation Sites & Trails BC.
- Trails impacted by harvest may be relocated if unforeseen degradation occurs beyond reasonable repair.
- Effectiveness of harvest design to reduce recreation user impact will be assessed to inform future plans.

Appendices

1. Snowden Demonstration Forest Advisory Group terms of reference
2. Snowden Recreation Sensitivity Map
3. Snowden Advisory Group Values Map
4. Snowden BCTS Long Term Plan Map

Literature cited

1. **Stewardship.** Snowden Forest Trails Map. Campbell River Natural Resource District. [Online] https://icw.for.gov.bc.ca/ftp/TSG/external!/publish/Web/Snowden/Snowden_Trail_Map_Mar2010%20-%20POSTED%20on%20public%20site.pdf
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