



Ref: 268834

December 14, 2021

To: Major licensees and BCTS business areas operating in the Mackenzie and Prince George Timber Supply Area (TSA)

**Subject: 2021 Omineca Joint Spruce Beetle Action Plan Response**

A spruce beetle outbreak in the Omineca Natural Resource Region was declared in October 2015. Since that time there has been a concerted effort from forest licensees and ministry staff to monitor, analyze and respond to this significant threat to British Columbia's timber supply. I would like to thank the participating licensees; Canfor, Carrier Lumber, Conifex, Sinclair Group and British Columbia Timber Sales (BCTS) for their 2021 Joint Action Plan submission and their continued dedication to this issue. This is the sixth iteration of the joint licensee action plan and as your focus is primarily salvage harvesting in several management units, a collaborative landscape-level plan is needed to ensure operations are reflecting both timber and non-timber values over the long term. I am encouraged by the collaborative and spatial nature of the latest action plan.

I am aware that competing interests cause uncertainty in planning; an especially important consideration given rapid climate change and evolving provincial priorities. New initiatives such as old growth deferrals and the *Modernizing Forest Policy* intentions paper as well as continuing concerns for caribou recovery, reconciliation with First Nations, and the Environmental Stewardship Initiative, create complexity in resource planning. As we develop clarity around new initiatives, I expect that licensees will use the best available science, and incorporate ministry guidance, to ensure that non-timber values are protected. Ministry staff will continue to work with the Director of Bark Beetle Response to ensure that the Spruce Beetle Action Plan, and its implementation, adequately reflect the provincial objectives for timber as well as important non-timber values.

There is the potential for economic loss associated with this spruce beetle infestation that must be balanced with non-timber values. Some areas impacted by spruce beetle will be left as landscape-level retention. For the remaining impacted stands where timber management objectives exist, there is a large volume of dead and dying spruce. I will continue to review stand shelf-life estimates, non-recoverable loss studies, and monitoring reports to keep track of progress with salvage harvesting. Innovative practices that safeguard future forest health and resilience should be employed wherever possible.

Within this plan, I have seen significant improvement for harvesting in isolated and difficult-to-access stands. I am still concerned with the limited capacity for steep slope harvesting. Steep slopes represent a significant area of spruce beetle infestation within the Omineca Natural Resource Region. I encourage licensees to continue to develop steep slope harvesting capacity where practicable.

I understand that areas are retained or deferred for many reasons including inoperability, isolation, low-economic value forest types, First Nations interests, midterm timber supply opportunity and access issues. To meet the Chief Foresters Expectations for Prioritization in Response to Spruce Beetle Outbreaks it is important to consider both what is removed from the land base as well as what is left. These considerations are made through the retention and deferral of stands as well as planning for block level retention and connectivity. I will continue to monitor retained and deferred areas as new information becomes available.

I would finally like to acknowledge the report recommendations for Government. The Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development (FLNRORD) will continue to monitor performance measures as outlined in the Chief Foresters Expectations for Prioritization in Response to Spruce Beetle Outbreaks and will provide a monitoring report update in the coming weeks. A joint action plan remains a key planning tool for spruce beetle response as it enables both FLNRORD and licensees to evaluate and reflect on the intended outcomes for a major forest health issue in this region. The newly appointed Director of Bark Beetle Response will organize a licensee forum to discuss licensee concerns and recommendations for the next Spruce Beetle Action Plan early in 2022. Thank you for your continued engagement to improve forest health planning within the Omineca Natural Resource Region.

Maintaining the social licence required to conduct forestry operations on public land is a priority for both the FLNRORD and the licensees operating within the Omineca Natural Resource Region. I expect that licensees will continue to use the best-available information and incorporate ministry guidance to ensure values are protected. Ministry staff will continue to work with the Office of the Chief Forester to ensure the Spruce Beetle Action Plan and its implementation adequately reflect priority provincial objectives and values. The Spruce Beetle Action Plan continues to support this joint priority. I am confident that ministry staff and licensee forest professionals in the Omineca Natural Resource Region will continue to strive for the best possible outcomes.

Thank you for your continued support on this file. If you have any questions, please contact Jeanne Robert, Director, Provincial Bark Beetle Response, by email at [Jeanne.Robert@gov.bc.ca](mailto:Jeanne.Robert@gov.bc.ca) or at 778 693-3078.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lori Borth".

Lori Borth  
Regional Executive Director  
Omineca Natural Resource Region