



**Cowichan Lake & River
Stewardship Society**

PO Box 907, Lake Cowichan, BC V0R 2G0

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Re: Professional Reliance Model in BC

Thank-you for providing the opportunity to comment on implementation of the Professional Reliance Model in BC. The Cowichan Lake and River Stewardship Society (CLRSS) is dedicated to the protection and health of the Cowichan watershed. It is important to us that regulatory tools and qualified environmental professionals operating under provincial legislation strive to provide the best riparian protection possible.

The CLRSS was established in 2011 in response to concerns in the community about the declining health of the lake and river system. We are a diverse group knowledgeable about and actively engaged in projects that improve riparian function. Three major CLRSS projects are:

- i) Public Education Program;
- ii) Cowichan River clean-up; and
- iii) Cowichan Shoreline Stewardship Project.

As part of the Public Education Program, for four years now, volunteers have been conducting a door-to-door campaign speaking with over 300 of the roughly 600 lake and river front property owners about riparian values and how they can be protected. We have conducted nine annual river clean-ups, each involving over 100 community members removing several tons of garbage from the river. The Cowichan Shoreline Stewardship Project has completed restoration projects on 34 public and private properties along more than 1100 linear meters and over 10,000 square meters.

How the Professional Reliance Model Affects Our Work

As mandated by our membership, our goal is to encourage riparian protection and foster good riparian values. The Professional Reliance Model affects the work we do in two important areas:

Forest and Range Practices Act

One year ago, CLRSS reviewed and provided comments on a proposed Forest Stewardship Plan (FSP) for several forest tenure holders in the Cowichan

Valley. Our comments described concerns with respect to possible harvesting in a development unit adjacent to Cowichan Lake. We were concerned that inadequate riparian protection may have an adverse impact on a sensitive ecosystem. We received a response consisting only of a form letter identical to response letters received by several other local organizations. There was no content that indicated any of our input would be used to adjust harvesting plans.

Subsequently, CLRSS became aware that harvesting was planned in or near the riparian area of concern and was interested in obtaining harvesting plans in order to provide input; however, there is no mechanism in place to acquire the information. Requests for meetings with the tenure holder and copies of the prescription were not addressed and harvesting occurred without CLRSS having an opportunity to be aware of plans ahead of time and unable to provide meaningful input. As an organization that works hard and is dedicated to riparian protection, it was frustrating to not be able to apply our knowledge where it could make a difference.

With respect to the FSP review process, for non-forestry workers, the content of an FSP is challenging to understand. For example, maps and other content include only high-level strategic planning information (e.g., old growth management) versus operational information (i.e., cutblocks and new roads). This makes it extremely difficult for the general public to understand what may occur in the future, effectively excluding them from a meaningful review process.

Riparian Areas Regulation

The Shoreline Restoration Projects we work on have provided the opportunity to observe application of the Riparian Areas Regulation. Most often, we see good on-the-ground results from high quality assessments; however, in some cases we are disappointed to observe the results from poor implementation of this regulation:

- When we have reported blatant destruction of riparian habitat to authorities, we have found that compliance and enforcement staffing levels are inadequate and the consequences to the landowner for the violation are negligible or absent; and
- We have also observed damage to fish spawning habitat resulting from a well-intended riparian assessment that was deficient in its restoration prescription. We believe that government review and approval of the plan could have resulted in a more positive outcome, as it is often better to have the input of other experienced professionals.

Although the Professional Reliance Model was to be supported by effective government monitoring and enforcement programs, we feel that it suffers

from the lack of staffing needed to provide the appropriate and necessary review, supervision and enforcement.

Recommendations for Changes to the Professional Reliance Model

As the BC government looks forward to making positive changes to how our natural resources are managed, the CLRSS believes changes to the professional reliance model are required. Managing natural environments is complex, especially with climate change impacts. Therefore, ensuring regulatory tools are in place that permit meaningful opportunities for community participation in decision-making and that enable the government to effectively monitor and enforce regulations are required in order to benefit our natural environment.

We offer the following recommendations:

- i) Provide meaningful opportunities for public consultation (versus review and comment) with respect to forest development planning. This would provide the opportunity for dialogue between tenure holders and stakeholders.
- ii) Ensure documents released for public consultation provide meaningful information easily understood by non-forestry people and at a minimum, include on maps past, proposed and approved cutblocks and roads. Information needs to be made available on a regular (e.g., annual) basis versus once every 5 to 10 years.
- iii) Increase monitoring and enforcement capacity in government.
- iv) Provide a process that improves quality of riparian area assessments. For example, replace the qualified professional's ability to "self assess" and require local government approval of an individual's qualifications. And/or require government review and approval of riparian area assessments.

The CLRSS appreciates this opportunity to provide input into the review of the professional reliance model. We look forward to hearing about the necessary changes that will support CLRSS in our efforts to ensure protection and restoration of the riparian areas around the Cowichan Lake and River.

Sincerely,



Heather Pritchard
Vice President
Cowichan Lake and River Stewardship Society

Cc: Sonia Furstenau, MLA for Cowichan Valley