

Forest Certification and the FRPA Resource Evaluation Program

The FRPA Evaluator

Extension Note #5
January 2005

Introduction

In the spring of 2004, Dr. John Innes was commissioned by the FRPA Resource Evaluation Working Group to examine the extent of the relationship between evaluations and monitoring conducted under the FRPA Resource Evaluation Program (FREP), and the monitoring and assessment of sustainable forest management practices associated with forest certification. The following is a summary of the results and recommendations that came out of that investigation.

Study Results

There are a number of forest certification systems in use in British Columbia, including the Canadian Standards Association (CSA), the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), and the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI). The ISO 14001 Environmental Management System (EMS) is also used by many forest companies in B.C.

Both forest certification and FREP use indicators to conduct their monitoring and evaluation activities. Forest certification systems use a wide variety of indicators to monitor the processes and practices used to achieve sustainable forest management and to assess the performance of forest management regimes. Rarely does forest certification actually measure the extent to which particular resources are being maintained, whereas FREP focuses on assessing the effectiveness of forest practices in managing specific resource values.

Under FREP, effectiveness evaluations use selected indicators to provide reliable information on the effects of forest management on the status or state of the resource values identified in the *Forest and Range Practices Act* (FRPA). The study suggests that the way British Columbia has defined the resource values under FRPA may result in some difficulties when trying to fit B.C.'s system into some of the more internationally recognized systems used by most forest certification schemes. An example of this is how British Columbia has three separate resource values for fish, wildlife and biodiversity, while forest certification uses the term 'biodiversity' to include all three values of fish, wildlife and biodiversity.

The FRPA Evaluator is a regular publication of the FRPA Resource Evaluation Program designed to inform stakeholders on program development and implementation, and report on the results of evaluation projects.

The objective of the FRPA Resource Evaluation Program is to determine if forest and range policies and practices in British Columbia are achieving government's objectives for the resource values identified in FRPA, with a priority on environmental outcomes and consideration for social and economic parameters, where appropriate.

The study also notes that some inconsistencies currently exist in the FRPA resource value definitions. Clarification of some of these terms would allow for a smoother integration of B.C.'s system into the sustainable forest management system used by forest certification. Dr. Innes points out that FRPA resource values as they currently exist likely only represent a subset of those values required to ensure that sustainable forest management is being practiced. As a result, the maintenance of FRPA resource values may not be recognized globally as evidence that B.C.'s forests are being managed in a sustainable manner.

Forest certification systems currently include many socio-economic indicators, most of which have little applicability or relevance to FRPA resource values. FREP is, however, addressing social and economic values during some of its evaluation and monitoring projects (e.g., forest recreation), and there may be an opportunity to use some of the existing socio-economic certification indicators where appropriate.

Certification schemes appear to be moving more towards effectiveness evaluations, and consequently may be converging somewhat with FREP. For effectiveness evaluations, one of the key issues is the accurate interpretation of data to determine whether resource values are being maintained. Perhaps the greatest potential for collaboration between FREP and forest certification lies in establishing baseline information and ecosystem-specific threshold interpretations for the maintenance of individual resource values. Through the development of value-specific indicators and monitoring protocols, as well as the reporting of results and lessons learned, FREP may provide valuable contributions to future forest certification methodologies.

It is difficult to determine which indicators used in forest certification might be applicable to the types of evaluations conducted under FREP – routine,¹ extensive² and intensive.³ Nevertheless, if certain indicators and measures used in certification systems were found to be applicable to FREP as the program evolves, and if the certification audit process contains appropriate quality assurance measures, it may be possible for FREP to reduce overall evaluation costs by utilizing indicators already being monitored as part of the certification process. Before this could occur, however, significant additional work and analysis would be required to determine which certification measures could be included in FREP.

1 Routine evaluation – A relatively low intensity evaluation calling for typically inexpensive and rapid data collection.

2 Extensive evaluation – A more detailed evaluation involving the collection of categorical data using visual estimates or relatively simple measurements.

3 Intensive evaluation – An in-depth evaluation involving detailed quantitative data collection and analysis.

Study Recommendations

A number of recommendations came out of the study:

1. There is a need to clarify the definitions of the resource values identified in FRPA in order to develop an effective evaluation program, and to fall more in line with international terminology. Perhaps the best way to go about this would be to develop an equivalence table to enable FRPA resource values to be matched with existing forest certification values.
2. Decision makers should recognize that the existing suite of resource values in FRPA only represents a subset of the values that have been recognized internationally as comprising sustainable forest management. Consequently, there is a risk that the maintenance of FRPA resource values may not be recognized by many jurisdictions as evidence that British Columbia's forests are being managed in a sustainable manner.
3. Considerable effort has gone into the design of indicators used in certification systems. While very few certification indicators relate to the extent to which specific resource values are being maintained, there are signs of the need to include effectiveness monitoring within the certification framework. This potential for collaboration between FREP and forest certification should be investigated. The coordination of FREP with other monitoring activities, such as those advocated by the Forest Practices Board, could also be beneficial and result in significant savings in costs and time.
4. A number of indicators related to forest certification concern the establishment of reliable baseline inventories. This is also a critical component of effectiveness evaluations and monitoring, and represents an area of significant potential cooperation between forest certification and FREP. This avenue should be fully explored to avoid duplication of efforts and maximize the expenditure of resources. While many certification systems have already developed their indicator sets, an opportunity for cooperation in developing baseline data may exist with new CSA certifications, where indicators will be developed by local public advisory groups.
5. Forest certification systems, in their current form, cannot duplicate the efforts of FREP. Nevertheless, considerable opportunities exist for synergy between these two systems, and FREP managers should consider the possibilities that forest certification and other monitoring and assessment initiatives offer by way of streamlining government and industry monitoring efforts.

The recommendations provided by Dr. Innes will be presented to the Executive of the Ministry of Forests; Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection; and Ministry of Sustainable Resource Management, as well as the Minister of Forests' Practices Advisory Council. These groups will in turn provide direction to FRPA Resource Evaluation Working Group on how to address the recommendations.

More Information

For additional information on FREP, or to view a copy of the full report, please refer to our website at: <http://www.for.gov.bc.ca/hfp/frep>, or contact any member of the FRPA Resource Evaluation Working Group:

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