

8.0 Forest Access Road Development

Poor forest access road planning and construction is arguably the most damaging aspect of the forest industry and can have the longest lasting impact on the ecosystem. Improperly located or constructed forest access roads can lead to erosion of topsoil, siltation of streams, and destruction of fish habitat. Even well built roads can lead to environmental damage during major storm events. It is estimated that the physical act of constructing forest access roads removes as much as 10% from the productive forest landbase within an operating area. In addition, forest access roads open up new areas which often lead to other forms of human development which cause much more permanent changes to the ecosystem than logging - activities such as aggregate exploitation, cottage development, agricultural expansion, and pressure on game and fish resources. Development of other economic opportunities, such as out-fitting or adventure tourism, can be lost if strategic out-door tourism assets become over-exploited due to easy access provided for public use (eg. Trout stocks). It is important that access road development be carefully planned and implemented to mitigate harmful environmental aspects of this activity. It is also important that consultation occur with other stakeholders to ensure that other values are given reasonable consideration and incorporated into long term access road development plans. Adequate pre-planning and consultation combined with a strategic access road decommissioning program will help ensure that other landscape values are met.

Both crown and commercial operators are involved in forest access road construction in the District. All access roads must follow construction criteria included in the Department's Environmental Protection Guidelines (Refer to Appendix 2.5). Crown roads are located by Departmental staff and constructed under public contract with close supervision from the Department. Commercial operator built roads must be submitted to the Department for location approval and are monitored by District staff during the construction stage. The District will strengthen its involvement in operator built roads during the coming planning period, particularly from an environmental perspective. All water crossings, whether it be crown built or commercial operator built, must be submitted for approval by the Water Resources Division of the Provincial Department of Environment and Labour and the Federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans. All road locations must be submitted to an Interdepartmental Land Use Committee so that concerns from other land use agencies can be addressed.

Table 7.13 provides a schedule of crown and commercial operator roads that will be built in District 2 during the period 2006 - 11. The access road development schedule is shown in greater detail in Appendix 10. There are plans to construct 55 kilometres of access road under public contract and 32 kilometres by private commercial operators during the next 6 years. *This is a much more aggressive access road program than has been normal in District 02. It is necessary to meet the objective of the harvesting strategy and to meet the basic assumption in the wood supply analysis – that is to provide access to the older stands in the District.*

Table 7.13

Table 7.13 Summary of District 02 Access Road Proposals: 2006-11

| Year | Crown Built | Operator Built | Class | Length (km) |
|-----------|-------------|----------------|-------|-------------|
| 2006 | X | | C | 15 |
| 2007 | X | | C | 9 |
| 2008 | X | | C | 9.5 |
| 2009 | X | | C | 8.5 |
| 2010 | X | | C | 7 |
| 2011 | X | | C | 6 |
| Sub-Total | | | | 55 |
| 2006-11 | | X | D | 38 |
| TOTAL | | | | 93 |

9.0 Monitoring

It was a consensus amongst planning team members that it was important to establish and agree upon a monitoring process. Generally, planning team members felt that a monitoring team should do more than just monitor the implementation of the Five Year Plan. There was consensus that a monitoring team should have some real involvement in the future direction of the District. However, it was acknowledged that it would not be the role of the monitoring team to micro-manage the District. It was also generally agreed that the planning documents should be living documents and be adjusted/ revised with changing conditions and the availability of new information.

At this stage, monitoring in District 2 will be guided by the principles, criteria and direction presented below. Meanwhile, it is anticipated that the approach will evolve as the District moves through the implementation phase of the ecosystem planning process.

Guiding principles: (1.) The monitoring team will have real involvement in the future direction of the District through a consultative approach..

(2.) The Five Year Operating Plan will be a living document : revisions will be incorporated with changing conditions and with the availability of new information.

(3.) Initially, membership will include those members of the planning team who are interested in participating. Efforts will be undertaken to broaden the monitoring team to include a broader representation of stake-holders.

Timing of Meetings: (1.) *Meetings will be held on an annual basis.*

(2.) Meetings will be held to inform monitoring team members about significant changes in activities or direction within the District.

Information to provide to monitoring team members:

(1.) Update on activities within the District – on an annual basis.

(2.) Update on major changes in direction or in activities within the District.

(3.) Summary of formal amendments to the Five Year Operating Plan (ie. Harvesting, silviculture, or access road programs).

(4.) *Report on major incidents that occur within the District and may have an impact on sustainable resource management in the District.*

(5.) Report on the progress in meeting the objectives set out in the Planning document.

9.1 Amendments and Revisions

The implementation of this Sustainable Forest management Plan will be affected by many factors such as changes in economic conditions, market conditions, unforeseen operational and/or environmental constraints, changes in forest operations technology and unanticipated major environmental events like wildfires, or insect infestations. As we continue to operate in an environment of change there is a need to establish a protocol for ensuring adherence to obligations under both the Environmental Protection Act and the Forestry Act for review and approval of deviations from the approved plan while at the same time maintaining Planning Team involvement in such implementation.

Operational amendments within the allowable variance under current Environmental Assessment Regulations will be at the discretion of the director of Forest Ecosystem Management to approve, however all such amendments will be reported to the Planning Team for information purposes and included in the Annual Report of Operations by the District Ecosystem manager. Amendments, revisions or significant alterations to the Sustainable Forest management Plan that require environmental assessment registration will be developed through consultation with the planning team. In such cases, amendment details will be provided to the Planning Team as they are simultaneously submitted to the Director of Forest Ecosystem management and registered with the Department of Environment and conservation for the 45 day review period as required. If required, meeting of the Planning Team will be convened by the District Ecosystem manager to review the amendment and seek consensus prior to the completion of the Environmental Assessment review period.

10.0 The Consultative Process: Issues and Consensus

During January of 2005, planning was initiated for the consultative process for the District 02 five Year Plan: 2007-11. Public notices (refer to Appendix 13) were advertised in the Evening Telegram on March 25, 2005 and in the local paper, The Packet, on March 07 and 14. During early March, a letter of invitation was forwarded to all former planning team members and to a comprehensive group of stake-holders. A wide range of government agencies and non-government organizations were invited to participate in the District 02 planning process. Non-government organizations within the District that were invited to the planning team table included all municipalities, cabin associations, development associations, ATV trail associations and other interest groups. A complete list of individuals and organizations contacted is provided in Appendix 5.

The planning team meetings began on March 17, 2005. A series of 10 meetings were held during the following 5 months, with meetings being held approximately every two weeks. A first draft of the five Year Plan was circulated to planning team members during November of 2005. Planning team members were provided an opportunity to review the document and,

subsequently, provide additional input in a meeting held on December 08, 2005. The second draft was circulated to all planning team members in late March, 2006. (The release of the second draft was held until the Department of Natural Resources released the latest provincial wood supply analysis). A meeting was held on April 13, 2006 to discuss the revised plan and to seek consensus. Consensus was reached at that meeting subject to some specific rewording of text in Sections 1.0, 7.6.4 and 7.6.5. These changes have been made and are now incorporated into this document. A record of all stakeholder participation is included in Appendix 13.

Consensus included acknowledgement that a fundamental problem exists in the province with respect to land-use planning in Newfoundland and Labrador. The issue is referenced in the following excerpt from Section 1.0 Introduction. Considerable debate revolved around the status of land-use planning in the district (province); the fact that all sustainable development values may not be fully represented through current land-use planning protocol; and the apparent disadvantage that the forest sector experienced (relative to other sectors) as a result of the current public forest management planning process.

“A fundamental weakness has been identified which frustrates the success of stakeholder planning teams. The province does not currently have a comprehensive land use planning process which would guarantee that the opinions of all non-governmental organizations, the general public, or even all government departments or agencies are represented. Yet the District 2 planning process for multiple use forest management, mandates by legislative commitments for public consultation, invites and engages participation from all of these organizations, departments and the general public. Significant effort is marshaled in terms of human resources, the devotion of time and the accompanying financial costs but this effort is restricted by its mandate.

It is a consensus of the district 2 planning team that the provincial government should acknowledge the need for comprehensive land use planning, that government should create an expanded process which would specifically acknowledge that the existing commitment for public involvement in forest management planning would be honoured through such an expanded process. Government should advocate the merits of an open, inclusive and comprehensive land use planning process to all land-use stakeholders and tenants. This process should ensure that all identified values are fairly represented and that the resulting plan endeavors to achieve sustainability for all social, economic and ecological values.”

Other significant discussions revolved around the harvest strategy for district 02; riparian buffers; decommissioning of roads; and cottage development. The planning team was able to come to a consensus on three of these issues, including the harvesting strategy for the district, riparian buffers and decommissioning of roads. Consensus was not reached on management of cottage development within the District, but the main adversaries in the debate (forestry Branch of DNR and Lands Branch of Environment and conservation) did agree on a post-planning process to address the issue.

The harvest strategy will target the oldest stands in the district during the next 5-10 years. These stands are either 100 years+ or somewhat younger fir stands that have been severely stressed by insect episodes (hemlock looper and/or balsam woolly adelgid.) The annual harvest schedule will include approximately 65% old spruce, 25% old fir and 10% stands that have had varying degrees of past harvest or insect disturbance. Implementation of the harvesting strategy will require the local forest industry to utilize a poorer quality resource for a number of years. Altering from the prescribed harvest schedule in District 02 could result in as much as a 25% reduction in the District's sustainable harvest level. The forest harvesting sector had strong representation at the planning team table. There were no dissenting positions from any team

member with respect to the District's harvest strategy.

The function of riparian buffers and the appropriate local management of these ribbons of landscape generated considerable debate and some disagreement during the District 02 planning process. At this time, the minimum (and by far most common) riparian buffer requirement in the District is 20 metres. The District 02 planning team had a strong advocate for harvesting trials within these no-cut buffers. At the other end of the spectrum was a position that no harvesting should occur in the 20 meter buffers (refer to section 7.3.1.7). Consensus was achieved by an agreement that trials could be conducted in riparian buffers that were laid out in a wider configuration specifically designed to accommodate future trials.

The issues of road decommissioning and cabin development generated considerable debate, particularly between the Forestry Branch of the Department of Natural Resources and the Lands Division of the Department of Environment and conservation.

All parties eventually reached a consensus on decommissioning of forest access roads. It was agreed that other than strategic main truck roads, decommissioning would be confined to secondary haul roads. All roads that have potential for decommissioning during the 2006-11 period are identified in Appendix 7.0. There are no dissenting positions resulting from the planning process with respect to the scheduled road decommissioning activity.

Consensus was not reached on how future cottage development should occur in the District. It was acknowledged by the planning team that the cabin get-away offers a popular recreational opportunity to many Newfoundlanders and represents an important social value. Cottage development and use also provides an economic stimulus in rural Newfoundland. On the other side of the debate, cottage development is a permanent fixture on the landscape. It can have negative ecological impacts by potentially impairing water quality; encroaching upon wildlife habitat; increasing hunting and fishing pressure; and, in some instances, leading to ATV access into remote ecologically sensitive areas. Cottage development can also have negative economic consequences by potentially leading to crowding of strategic fish and game resources (and potentially abrogating tourism development opportunities) or by directly or, through its sphere of influence (ie. Protected buffers) indirectly removing productive forest land-base from access to the forest industry. The current crown land approval system does not provide an opportunity for all values to be fully considered when making crown land management decisions and therefore, crown land developments may compromise other sustainable development activities. The conflicting views in the debate were most strongly held by the forestry branch of the Department of Natural Resources and the Crown Lands Branch of the Department of Environment and Conservation. These two agencies have agreed to work in a collaborative effort in the future to develop a cottage development plan for the District.

11.0 Conclusions

The responsibility of managing the forest and wildlife resources of District 2 does not end with the completion and acceptance of the Five Year Operating Plan. Indeed, the greater responsibility and challenge lies with the implementation of the plan.

The success of the plan will be measured by the success in meeting the goals and objectives which are outlined within. The fundamental principle underlying the plan and the

parallel wood supply analysis process is that of sustainability. Appropriate silvicultural prescriptions have the greatest potential to influence sustainability of the forest resource. This includes practising silviculturally sound harvesting techniques; harvesting the forest strategically w.r.t. age and condition; conducting a silviculture program which improves productivity within the forest; harvesting within the limits of which the system can support. Prudence of action in these respects will help ensure a continued supply of fibre to the local industry, despite the reality of expansions in other industries (such as tourism and agriculture) which often presents competing use of the landscape.

The District will continue with its efforts to enhance the Public Relations and Ecosystem Education program. This program is critical in raising the awareness of ecosystem management issues and acceptance of management programs and will improve the profile and image of the Department. Including attitudinal surveys in the PREE program will provide a better understanding to DNR officials of the perspective of publics/resource users on natural resource management programs and give a better idea of their expectations from the local forest ecosystem. Ultimately, attitudinal surveys can help with the development of future policies aimed at balancing demands within the forest.

The District will continue with programs/projects aimed at understanding and addressing biodiversity issues. This includes support to the Newfoundland Marten recovery program in eastern Newfoundland; continuation of the moose/hare exclosure project; implementation of song-bird surveys, Christmas Bird Count, and raptor surveys; identification and protection of unique ecological niches; incorporation of biodiversity values in the District's silviculture program. The District will follow the work of the Provincial Riparian Zone Working Group and studies conducted in other jurisdictions in an effort to advance the understanding of the ecological importance of riparian buffers.

The greatest opportunity for economic expansion in the local forest industry still rests with the value added sector of the industry. The District will continue to support and promote the expansion of the local value added forest products sector during the 2006-11 planning period.

The approach used to prepare this plan again encompassed other landscape values. Opportunity was provided for all forest stakeholders to participate in the planning process and make a contribution to the preparation of the plan. This plan was prepared under the principle of providing for sustainable development of social, economic and ecological values.

It is still perceived by the District 02 planning team that one of the foremost weaknesses with the current process is the lack of input into other land use developments. It is a consensus of the District 2 planning team that opening forest management practises to the scrutiny and influence of all other land use tenants without giving the forestry community a similar forum to guide the management of other land use practises puts the forest industry in an unfair and a vulnerable position. As a result, it is a strong recommendation of the District 2 planning team that in the future the mandate of the District ecosystem planning process be broadened to include planning of other land use developments that will occur within the District or that a separate process be established to conduct integrated land-use planning through full consultation with concerned stakeholders.

The completion of this plan does not indicate the ending of the planning process. A monitoring team will be established to review progress on reaching objectives stated in the plan and to provide an opportunity for consultation with stakeholders during the implementation

period.