

Canadian Institute of Forestry/Institut forestier du Canada
“Voice of Forest Practitioners”

Policy Paper

Forest-Based Communities

Background

There are over 300 communities in Canada where the forest industry accounts for over 50 % of the community’s local economic base, and many other communities where the forest industry plays a significant role in the community’s economy as a provider of jobs and income. Although the commercial economic benefits derived from the industrial use of forests are extremely important, forests provide much more. Forests contribute to the “sense of place” for many residents of forest-based areas. Forests provide places for members of forest-based communities to travel to for outdoor recreation experiences. Residents of Aboriginal and non-aboriginal communities in forest regions often have close cultural links with woodlands and may rely on forests for important subsistence, traditional, and other social activities that reinforce cultural capital, provide spiritual renewal and/or provide nutrition. Residents of forest-based communities also benefit from various environmental services provided by forest ecosystems including clean air and water, erosion protection, and the provision of wildlife habitat. Thus, the financial, psychological and social well-being of those that reside in forest-based communities is closely tied to forests and forest ecosystems.

Public involvement

The use and management of local forests in a way that does not consider local benefits and interdependencies can have negative consequences on the well-being of local populations. Therefore, it is vital that local preferences and uses and social conditions in communities be considered in forest planning and management and in the development of forest policies.

Non-local stakeholders (such as the urban population) also value certain features of forests. Forest values held by non-local forest stakeholders are legitimate and must also be taken into account in land use decisions, forest management policy and planning and forest management practices.

The sustainability of Canada’s forest resources requires the attainment of a forest condition that balances the needs of local communities with other outside interests. In cases where local values and preferred uses conflict with those that reside outside the area, finding a balance that is acceptable to all may pose a significant challenge.



Nevertheless, decisions will need to be based on the best available information and knowledge regarding forest values, conflicts, and the local and widespread social and economic impacts of forest policies and alternative management regimes. One means of identifying and evaluating the diverse needs of those that reside in forest-based communities is through public involvement. In pursuing sustainable forest management, it is important that public involvement processes are open, inclusive, broadly-based, representative, and provide opportunities for meaningful involvement. Consensus may not always be possible, but it is important that stakeholders, including residents and representatives of forest-based communities, have an opportunity and willingness to be meaningfully involved in policy and planning. The process of public involvement can lead to more informed public opinion and in some cases mutual learning and convergences of opinion.

Capacity building

There are a number of trends impacting forest-based communities. They include globalization of markets, changes in industrial organization, certification, changes in management paradigms, softwood lumber duties, urbanization and an increase in the role and importance of science and technology in society. Climate change may also have an increasing influence on forest based communities in the future.

Forestry communities are continually changing and evolving in response to these on-going economic, social, institutional and competitive market processes. Some communities will inevitably grow and diversify while others that ignore these processes may decline over time. Maintaining communities or preventing decline as an objective of social policy may be, in some cases, unrealistic. In response to inevitable changes, the emphasis should be placed on encouraging self-sufficiency, maintaining resiliency in rural social systems, fostering adaptation capacity and flexibility and on facilitating orderly transitions in communities where the forest industry is downsizing.

The capacity of forest-based communities to respond and adapt to changing circumstances depends on a number of interrelated factors. These factors include :

- skill and education levels of the local work force,
- the existence of opportunities for continuing learning,
- the role and position of the community in the regional economy,
- attractiveness as a place for investment,
- social amenities,
- presence of strong and dynamic local leadership,
- the existence of local institutions and social organizations and networks to mobilize the community to come together to develop plans and strategies for the sustainable development of the community,
- the presence and/or lack of required infrastructure,
- the science and technology capacity of local firms,



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- the degree of community autonomy or control relative to local decisions.

The capacity of communities to adapt to external effects may (in some cases but not necessarily all cases) be enhanced by their ability to influence or make decisions regarding the management of forest resources. There are a number of innovative mechanisms that could be further explored including community tenures and management by objective policies that attempt to decentralize some aspects of forest resource decision making.

CIF/IFC policy on forest-based communities

- CIF/IFC emphasizes the importance of sustainable forest management to healthy and prosperous communities where local forest sustainability is defined as maintaining healthy local forest ecosystems while providing a balance of environmental, economic, social and cultural opportunities to both the local population and non-local forest stakeholders.
- CIF/IFC supports public involvement in decision-making and recommends that public involvement processes allow for representation of local communities and local stakeholders, as well as interests outside the local community, in forest decision-making. Forest-based communities and other publics are key stakeholders and they must be provided an opportunity to participate fully in discussions about resource management issues that affect them in a meaningful way.
- CIF/IFC supports the strengthening of informed dialogue and interaction between community leaders, the forestry workforce, resource practitioners, landowners, tenure holders, Aboriginal Peoples, non-government organizations and the interested public. Informed dialogue results in informed public opinion.
- CIF/IFC supports initiatives that lead to improved capacity of forest-based communities to respond and adapt to new circumstances. This may involve strengthening or improving local social networks and institutions, leadership development, providing opportunities for adult education and learning, helping communities understand planning processes at various levels including forest management planning, attracting investment, and encouraging entrepreneurship. The main effort will need to come from the communities themselves, however, a number of different groups can contribute to, support and/or work with communities in enhancing their capacity to evolve and change including professional foresters and other forest practitioners, local forestry based companies, educational institutions, governments, science and technology organizations, and universities.



The CIF/IFC

The Canadian Institute of Forestry / Institut forestier du Canada (CIF/IFC) is a national voice of forest practitioners. The CIF/IFC, formed in 1908, represents members who are foresters, forest technologists and technicians, educators, scientists and others with a professional interest in forestry. The Institute's mission is "*to provide national leadership in forestry, promote competence among forestry professionals, and foster public awareness of Canadian and international forestry issues.*"

We are people with a professional interest in forestry, working in government, industry, academic and consulting fields. Our members use their education, training, and experience to help manage the forests of Canada and to make the Canadian public aware of forestry.

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