Dynamic initiatives on the sustainable forest management journey¹

by T.M. (Mike) Apsey²

It is almost a century since the Canadian Institute of Forestry was formed. Over that long history the CIF has become ever more sophisticated in the work it undertakes on behalf of its members. Just as forestry itself has grown to incorporate wider concepts, the CIF has broadened the scope of its vision and endeavours and has increased its value to its membership.

I think it is worth reflecting on the decisions of those people who recognized the need for, and advantages of, having an organization for those with common interests in forestry matters. The accomplishments of the CIF since its formation speak to the wisdom and foresight of those visionaries of 1908.

There are lessons for us in the actions they took. They saw the value in associating with their fellows in the combined pursuit of more knowledge, of advanced practices, of greater efforts and of supportive and reinforcing energies to be drawn from the comradeship of their professional peers and others with an abiding interest in forests.

The value and importance of joint efforts lies at the heart of this article.

I want to share information about two sets of initiatives that are working to focus and coordinate efforts on the sustainable forest management journey in our country. These are, first, the Canada Forest Accord together with the companion document, the National Forest Strategy; and second, FORCAST, the national non-profit organization newly incorporated to provide direction and infrastructure to ensure that forest science and technology activities play their essential role in meeting national, provincial and local priorities.

In order to attract the essential support of the forest community that these initiatives require, it is important that we be clear about what they are directed toward.

Simply put, they are two critical elements in the immediate next step in the continuing evolution of our country's management of its magnificent forest resources. The principles and actions inherent in them are directed to the objective of moving us resolutely into the sustainable forest management (SFM) era. That era is evolving throughout the entire global forest community. And it is our challenge, as informed, involved Canadians interested in forests, to ensure that Canada continues to demonstrate its tradition of forest management leadership as we move forward in this enlightened next phase in our relationship with our great forests.

You will note the deliberate use of the word "we." I want to stress that word in discussing this critical challenge. We must avoid looking to "they" either to foist the onus for moving forward onto others, or to assign blame for inaction.

And by "we" I mean the broad forest community as found in government, in the public service, in industry, in academia, in institutes, in various interest groups and in the public at large. It includes all who are bound together in their desire for a forest future that will fulfill the legitimate ambitions of all interests, be they environmental, social, economic or cultural.

It can't and shouldn't be otherwise. The collective "we" has the interest, the knowledge, the experience and, I believe, the energy and foresight to move these issues as they can and must be moved.

The current National Forest Strategy embraces the period from 1998 to 2003. This most recent edition builds on the success and momentum of the series that began in 1981. It was redetermined in 1987 and again in 1992. Each of the respective strategies was developed through a comprehensive program of consultation, review and consensual determination within the national forest community. Each was designed to reflect the current level of knowledge about our forests, their limitations and their potential. It follows that the series illustrates the pattern of broadening considerations and interests in respect of Canada's forests.

The 1998 to 2003 National Forest Strategy is sub-titled "Sustainable Forests—A Canadian Commitment." It has been described as a "progressive agenda for Canada's forest stewardship." Its goal is:

...to maintain and enhance the long-term health of our forest ecosystems, for the benefit of all living things both nationally and globally, while providing environmental, economic, social and cultural opportunities for the benefit of present and future generations.

Briefly, the Strategy:

- Has as its objective sustainable forests nationwide
- Includes nine strategic directions/themes
- Contains 121 commitments
- References and is strengthened by the second Canada Forest Accord.

The nine strategic directions or themes are:

- Forest Ecosystems: Multiple Values
- Forest Management: Practising Stewardship
- Public Participation: Many Voices
- The Forest Industry: A Global Competitor
- Forest Science and Technology Management: A Team Approach
- Communities and the Workforce: Living with Change

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²Mike Apsey, R.P.F. is a former British Columbia Deputy Minister of Forests and the Past-President and Chief Executive Officer of the Council of Forest Industries. He currently is Chair of the National Forest Strategy Coalition and Executive Director of FORCAST, a coalition for the advancement of science and technology in the forest sector. He is an international consultant on forest and trade policy.

- Aboriginal Peoples: Issues of Relationship
- Private Woodlots: A Growing Opportunity
- The Global View: Canada on Stage

As mentioned, the Strategy was developed through a cooperative consultative process involving a wide spectrum of forest-interested organizations and individuals. The inclusiveness of the Strategy's development process is illustrated by the nine strategic directions listed. It very clearly is not a document that is the creature of any single agency or a particular bloc of interests.

The general organization and administration of the Strategy is as follows:

- The Canadian Council of Forest Ministers acts as Public Trustee for the Strategy and reviews progress at its annual meetings.
- Implementation of the Strategy is overseen by the National Forest Strategy Coalition. It is my honour to have been elected Chair of this body.

The Coalition is comprised of the signatory members of the Canada Forest Accord. The Accord is the signed, formal undertaking of support, cooperation and commitment to the Strategy's principles, objectives and action items. Government ministries, professional associations (including the CIF), research agencies, industry trade associations, environmental interests and individual forest-caring Canadians have signed the Accord.

- A panel of experts offers advice and independent evaluations of progress to the Coalition.
- An Executive Committee and two special function committees, one responsible for evaluation and the other for communication, round out the organization.

I want to speak for a moment on the importance of the second of those functions: communication. Stripping away the niceties, the fact is that the forest sector has not been as accomplished as other sectors in the job of bringing the various publics in this country up to speed on critical matters. Nor has it been as effective as its critics in capturing media interest.

That is unfortunate because there is a great deal going on, throughout the sector, that is worthy of telling and which could help to reassure a lay public about the current and future state of forest matters in this country.

And we need a populace that is informed and enlightened about forest issues, a populace that is involved and committed to the sustainable forest management of Canadian forests. A well-informed public is an imperative bulwark against irrational or shortsighted decisions on forest issues. That includes knowing about the mistakes and difficulties in the sector as well as its accomplishments.

I referred earlier to the necessity of dropping the "we/they" dichotomy as we move into the SFM era. We must generate a sense of partnership that reflects the stake all have in the destiny of our forests. We can only get to that point if we commit to an open, sustained, comprehensive approach to the vital communication function.

Returning to the Strategy and the Accord/Coalition, be assured that the Strategy is more than just words. It includes some 121 action items that signatory organizations are working to implement in their own circumstances. Inherent in all the action plans is that there must be an ability to measure progress. Flexibility in approach also is a basic characteristic. Results are more important than the process taken to get them.

As indicated earlier, a key part of the Coalition's organization is a panel of experts to oversee and direct a mid-term evaluation of progress being made toward the Strategy's objectives.

Serving on that panel are:

As Chair, Ted Boswell, past President and CEO of E.B. Eddy Forest Products Ltd., and immediate past chair, Chair of the Nature Conservancy of Canada.

Members are:

Al Davidson, well-known naturalist and past President of the Canadian Geographic Society,

Gilles Frisque, retired from the Conseil de la recherche forestière du Québec,

Tim Peck, former Chair of the Board of the European Forest Institute and

Ross Risvold, Chair of the Foothills Model Forest and Mayor of Hinton, Alberta

This past February, at the Coalition's Annual Meeting, the panel of experts reviewed with us the status of the mid-term evaluation of progress on the commitments given by signatories to the current Forest Accord. Its report is scheduled for release late this Spring.

We are encouraged to believe that the panel will report substantial movement of the sector toward realizing the commitments that were undertaken. At the same time it will indicate what needs to be strengthened in the remaining half of the current Strategy's life and will provide some direction as to what the next edition of the Strategy will have to include.

A follow-up article on the results of the evaluation will appear in the next issue of *The Forestry Chronicle*.

Over the coming three years a number of key events are slated to monitor the progress of the current Strategy and to begin the process of preparing for the post-2003 period. These will culminate in April 2003 in a new Strategy and Accord to succeed the current editions.

The target timing is excellent as it will enable us to showcase Canadian efforts and accomplishments to the thousands who will come from around the world to attend the World Forestry Congress to be held for the first time in Canada in Quebec City in the fall of 2003.

Membership in the Coalition is not limited to organizations. It is also open to individuals and they are encouraged to participate. The Coalition's Web site, <http://nfscc.forestry.ca>, provides more information.

The second initiative I want to discuss flows directly out of the National Forest Strategy's "Strategic Direction Five," which has the title, Forest Science and Technology Management: A Team Approach.

As the Strategy was being developed it became clear that in working to achieve and maintain a sustainable forest management ethic in this country there would be a great reliance on the products of science and technology (S&T) as applied to the entire range of forest values, and to the harvesting and the processing of the products from the forests.

In addressing this imperative the Strategy defined a number of Principles:

- Achievement of the goals stated in Canada's National Forest Strategy requires a concerted and continuing commitment to forest S&T, including long-term, stable funding by all partners.
- Strong linkages between researchers and practitioners are essential in order to ensure the relevance and application of the results of forest S&T.
- The results of forest research must be communicated and applied quickly and effectively.

These were followed up by a Framework for Action designed to respond to the knowledge and S&T needs of Canada's forest community:

- By establishing a national forest S&T course of action to meet the commitments outlined in the National Forest Strategy and to engage the forest sector S&T community in collaborations to increase the efficiency of science expenditure.
- By establishing and periodically reviewing Canada's national forest sector S&T priorities.
- By establishing a mechanism to foster cooperation and facilitate communication among Canadian forest S&T organizations, to champion investments in forest sector S&T and to evaluate progress on the national forest S&T course of action.
- By tracking and reporting periodically on the level and allocation of Canada's investment in forest sector S&T in relation to forest economic activity, as well as in comparison to other sectors and nations.
- By promoting interdisciplinary collaboration in research and facilitating local, national and international liaisons.

You might agree that these are noble ambitions. But you might wonder how they were to be realized. The answer was to create a national communication and coordination mechanism with a mandate to make the National Forest S&T Course of Action a vibrant and relevant document.

That mechanism has been established and incorporated as a private, non-profit entity. Its name is FORCAST. It is a coalition open to groups involved in developing, providing and/or using forest-related science and technology in Canada.

Some two dozen government departments, universities, forest sector associations (including the CIF) and research institutes, aboriginal and conservation interests, and private companies became the founding group and lent immediate stature to the initiative. Current membership is thirty-two.

FORCAST has a Board of Directors and a roster of Officers. I am delighted that I have been asked to be involved in FORCAST as its Executive Director.

Let me give you an outline of what this coalition for the advancement of science and technology in the forest sector is about.

Our vision for FORCAST is of Canada as world leader in forest sector innovation and knowledge application.

Our mission is to achieve forest sector recognition and commitment to knowledge and innovation as crucial elements to sound forest stewardship and global competitiveness.

Our roles are:

- to be "the voice" for forest sector S&T
- to promote the alignment of S&T activities with national, provincial and local priorities
- to champion investments in S&T
- to promote coordination of S&T activities, and
- to promote knowledge application, training and education.

Our tools are information and knowledge exchange, analysis and advocacy.

Our audiences embrace government, business and civil society.

Our style is to influence change through collaboration, networking and alliances with the use of strategic information.

As I said, our mission is to achieve forest sector recognition and commitment to knowledge and innovation as crucial elements to sound forest stewardship and global competitiveness. These are not merely words.

We are completing a strategic plan for the period 2001–2003. For each of the FORCAST roles, we are developing goals and actions. A member or members of FORCAST have accepted the challenge of acting as "Champions" for each of the actions developed. They will work to established time schedules. Success will be achieved through participation by all members.

I can't overstate how important I consider science and technology to be in the SFM scheme of things. I am absolutely certain that the Canadian forest sector's course in the Sustainable Forest Management Era will be smoothed, transformed, driven, directed and enriched by the developments that emerge from the creative energies at work in the science and technology world.

S&T is already the driving force in many other sectors, some of which are our competitors. We must not be—we cannot be—the poor kids on the S&T block relying on the hand-me-down developments and advances of other sectors or countries.

Our forest sector is unique—essentially working with a Crown resource, many jurisdictions, a range of species, ages, climates and geography. We must develop a uniquely Canadian approach to the challenges of SFM.

While many valuable results have come from forest sector S&T in the past, activity in this area has not tended to be central to our thinking, planning or our investment decisions. I believe the culture of our sector must become one where S&T is central to our planning, is central to our objectives and is central to our strategies. It follows that S&T must not be relegated to secondary or peripheral budget considerations.

You and your organizations can help ... join now! For more information visit the FORCAST Web site: <http://for-cast.forestry.ca>.

In recognition of the importance of S&T *The Forestry Chronicle* will devote its Jan/Feb. 2002 edition to the subject.

Some will ask why we believe these initiatives will succeed where others striving for similar goals in the past have not. The simple answer is that they must. The course of events is moving at an ever-accelerating rate that doesn't allow foot dragging or laissez faire drifting in our actions to meet the SFM challenge.

I also sense a growing desire on the part of groups and individuals in this sector to participate in the activities that will set us on the path toward the kind of forests we want in the decades to come. I detect a widening understanding of the appropriateness of the word "must" as it applies to the decisions and actions to be taken in order to get on that path. "Should" is out; "must" is the operative word. I am aware of an increasing ambition to free ourselves from the inertia that has come to afflict action on many initiatives across the sector.

Famed economist John Maynard Keynes once said, "The difficulty lies not in the new ideas, but in escaping the old ones." I believe we are becoming more adept at loosening our grasp on old ideas that have served their purpose and their time.

So then, is this enough? Will this get us from here to there; there meaning being fully engaged in the SFM journey? Sorry; as valuable and important as these initiatives are, and as these encouraging signs are, by themselves they are not the total package. Other areas need to be strengthened as well.

Critics of the forest sector still abound. Negativity continues to find fertile ground in many parts of our society. We still make mistakes and they make us vulnerable to the campaigns of those who would exploit the apprehensions of an ill-informed public. So, I refer back to my earlier comment about the value of a forest-wise public.

Those involved in the evolution of the National Forest Strategy have worked hard to get where we are today. They have estab-

lished within the Strategy a vision of what it commits to work toward. It is a unifying vision. It has three qualities that I consider essential to any vision for our sector in today's reality:

- It must be bold. This is a time to question existing concepts and conventional wisdom. Physicist Madame Marie Curie once said that "Humanity needs practical men ...but humanity also needs dreamers..." In forest matters it is time to stretch our imaginations to reach for new and greater goals than we have until now thought possible.
- The vision must be doable. Without contradicting the need for boldness, there is a fine line between pie-in-the-sky and pushing our efforts to the limits of the possible. Our vision must be grounded at the outside boundaries of the achievable.
- The vision must be "buyinable." In this era of integrated interests our vision must invite inclusiveness. All the partnered interests in our forest sector community have a contribution to make to achieve effective SFM and the vision settled on must be attractive and sensitive to all.

I believe the National Forest Strategy passes the foregoing tests. Some may consider it to be too bold, or not doable, or that it isn't buyinable, or that it is not specific enough. I urge any who might hold those views to join in the processes available to them and make their contribution to the implementation of the current strategy and to the development of the next Strategy.

But it is not enough merely to lend your name to these initiatives; your direct involvement is required. Years ago a government program coined a term that I think neatly describes what is needed from individuals in these forest initiatives. The term is "Participaction."

As we strive to position our sector to best meet the challenges ahead there is a continuing need for good, sustained, committed leadership. Effective leaders are not in abundant supply in any sector and that is equally true in the broadly defined forest sector. That may explain our propensity to study and agonize over issues, seemingly eternally, at the expense of taking action to move on them. We need leaders who will change that unfortunate habit. We need people to step forward whose energy, ideas, style and stature will propel the sector forward. And that leadership must be secured and maintained over the long term.

These people are out there in our sector. Some are readers of *The Forestry Chronicle*. Some have latent leadership qualities that are waiting to be triggered by the right cause or challenge. The message to them is, "Look no further ... this is it."

The world's journey into the SFM era has begun. We must not hesitate to leave today behind and get on with tomorrow.

With the support of people like the members of the CIF I am confident that the Canadian forest sector will enhance its reputation as a world leader. I urge readers, if you or your organization have not yet done so, to add your signatures to the National Forest Accord and thus endorse and support the National Forest Strategy. As well, become an active member of the National Forest Strategy Coalition and FORCAST.

If you are already engaged in these I urge you to be a missionary for the cause. Use your influence to get others committed so that the "WE" partnership will be as inclusive as possible.

The National Forest Strategy, its Accord and Coalition, and FORCAST are truly forest sector ideas whose time has come. I hope you will invest your "participaction" in them.