Forum

Editorial/Éditorial

Declining Forest Industrial Forest Management Research in Canada

Although the Canadian forest industry continues to expand and is very prosperous and contributes massively to the Canadian economy, the amount of industrial forest management-related research remains extremely small; recently calculated as less than 2% of total Canadian forest management research expenditures in 1985. This is not a new situation, but many foresters thought that as the industry accepted more corporate responsibility for forest management under Forest Management Agreements, CAAF or Tree Farm Licences, corporate interest in forest management research would expand. There has been little sign of it.

Even as the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council and the federal government are making available larger sums of money and incentives for cooperation with industry, there has been little industrial response. Corporate interest has naturally always been high in fire protection, wood products and logging research where there is a close connection between delivered wood cost and short-term merchantable timber supply and research results.

Fundamentally, the corporate lack of interest in forest management research is largely due to the absence of a clear connection between silviculture practices, second-growth performance, inventory and allowable cut. The rate of harvest is not quantitatively connected by management systems to regeneration performance and growth and yield of cutover Crown lands. Even the forest inventory is still in a primitive state of data collection. The inability of the provincial governments to set up effective forest management systems is not due to lack of expertise. We have great elegance in geographic information systems, data handling, satellite imagery and computer development. There are just no strong incentives for industry to set up such systems on Crown lands; although on the few large blocks of private forest lands in Canada, it is notable that such systems are being developed and used.

In a real sense, this lack of research is the 'Tragedy of the Commons' all over again expressing itself this time in Canadian forestry. Everybody wants to graze his extra cow on the commons, but who is willing to develop and manage an effective range analysis system to prevent overgrazing. The federal government clearly has no business in this field, leaving the Canadian Forestry Service without a mandate for leadership.

In some ways, the forest industry is more powerful than our elected provincial politician; there is a tendency towards over-exploitation (Baskerville 1988) and harvest levels are still under close political control. A wood supply crisis seems to be necessary to precipitate industrial interest and, thus, provincial action, as was seen in New Brunswick.

It is sad to see lack of corporate leadership in developing Crown land forest management systems.

One can argue that it is not reasonable for the apartment tenant to tell the landlord how to manage the apartment building. But the reality of financing research in developing forest management systems that can handle the realities of forest dynamics requires a long-term statesman-like approach by industry. It is time that industry responded. Cooperative industrial leadership in growth and yield and management systems is needed. Individual corporate actions by a few outstanding leaders is not enough.

Is the old adage true? The industry doesn't need research in good times, and can't afford it when times are bad?

Recently at a technology transfer meeting, it was suggested that Canada's national sport should not be hockey, but rowing — the only sport where, by sitting on one's rear end looking backwards, one hopes to get ahead of everybody else. Are we rowing ourselves into problems of continued supply of high value, operable and internationally profitable timber? It is difficult for the provinces to give us a clear answer; Ottawa certainly cannot. The industry should have a good idea and be taking action where needed.

The recent May 1988 CFS workshop on timber supply pointed to the need for regional supply studies to be integrated into a national supply model and "National Network of Excellence" has been proposed. An independent study of Ontario's forest resource inventory has pointed out that it was only designed for macro planning. It was not designed for use at an operating level and increased competition for forest resources means users need more precise data in assessing available forest resources. Five years ago, the Canadian Forest Industry Council gave CPPA the responsibility to prepare a timber supply strategy based on a clear philosophical position, a statement of objectives and a policy framework. No action has been taken.

Ignorance on "operational" wood supply and added value benefits is not bliss. We badly need sophisticated forest management systems for Crown lands. Why cannot the Canadian Pulp and Paper Association and the Council of Forest Industries take some initiatives. Effective regeneration performance is not enough.

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References

Baskerville, G.L. 1988. Management of publicly owned forests. *For. Chron.* 64: 193-198.