



Proposed Expansion of the Prince George Community Forest

The Prince George Community Forest currently holds a probationary, five-year license to harvest dead pine and high fire hazard sites on Crown land within the municipal boundary. We are seeking to expand the community forest area to include Crown lands outside of the municipal boundary to better address the fire hazard at a broader landscape level in order to protect our community. At the same time, our proposed approach to fuel management is complimentary to protecting the interests of agriculture and fostering opportunities for growth in the local agricultural sector.

A modeling analysis of anticipated fire behaviour was conducted in 2009, which led the City of Prince George to examine opportunities for wildfire mitigation activities outside of municipal limits. Through this analysis Agriculture Development Areas (ADA) and Settlement Reserve Areas (SRA) were identified, which typically consist of unmanaged forest stands until otherwise leased or acquired for development. Our analysis indicates that many of these stands exhibit one or more of the following characteristics:

- Component of pine over 60 years of age (which likely correlates to high levels of mortality due to the Mountain Pine Beetle infestation, and therefore represents a loss of value to future farmers or developers);
- Component of deciduous species over 60 years of age (which likely correlates to high levels of rot, leading to loss of value over the coming years); or
- Elevated fire hazard due to species composition, stand structure, topography, proximity to ignition sources, etc.

As a result, many stands are either losing timber value, are at risk of being lost from wildfire, and/or would support a landscape level fire that could threaten our communities. The timber on ADA and SRA lands was originally set aside to help offset the initial costs of putting land into agriculture production or the first stages of development; however in many cases it is becoming a liability and added cost as the stands continue to lose value in the next decade or two. The likelihood of these lands being developed drops with the value of the stand.

An expanded community forest license that includes ADA and SRA lands would therefore be an excellent tool for addressing some of these issues through an **integrated approach to wildfire mitigation and agricultural development in and around Prince George**. By reducing wildfire hazards while enhancing opportunities for long-term agricultural development, our proposed approach may stimulate economic diversification, support the local food movement, improve food sustainability, encourage innovation in agroforestry, and support the budding bioenergy sector.

Using a community forest license to achieve the integrated objectives of fire hazard abatement and promotion of agriculture is a novel approach. The worlds of forestry, agriculture, public safety, and settlement planning rarely interact through an integrated approach to landscape planning and operational context such as this. The City of Prince George has signed a Letter of Intent with the Lheidli T'enneh Nation and the Regional District of Fraser Fort George to examine opportunities for collaboration on this initiative.

The proposed approach would still actively address other objectives such as recreation, research, education, cultural heritage, visual quality, wildlife habitat, biodiversity, air quality, water quality, fish habitat, and nutrient cycles.

Given the ADA and SRA designations, these lands would still be available for interested farmers and developers through the regular Front Desk BC channels, and the community forest would be pleased to work with interested parties to ensure that wildfire hazard treatments are designed with the future agricultural end-use in mind.