B.C.'s Northern Interior Forests: Planning for Sustainability in a Dynamic Landscape

April 26, 2006, Prince George

Decision Support Tools In Land Use Planning - Overview:

Stuart Gale provided an overview presentation of decision support tools and their use in land use planning. This session was followed by a facilitated discussion period with the workshop participants. The key points from this discussion are summarized below.

Summary of Discussion

Science based approach – scientific principles

Q. Do you think that the process we have now for science based forest management on the public land is unbiased?

- Many feel that there is bias.
- Can result in parallel analyses being done – Government does their analysis, First Nations do their analysis, ENGO's do their analysis, industry does their analysis.
- Can happen if there is distrust between the groups.
- Have to be clear that use of science should be as support
- Have to use adaptive management. Try what we know now and if that doesn't seem to work or if new information becomes available then we will have to change/adjust what is being done.
- Research $ controlled by economic sources – therefore research may be becoming more and more biased.
- There also seem to be an increase in the amount of control over what results get published. Do they support the position of the funder? If yes, allowed to publish. If no, restrictions put on publication.

Huge array of decision support tools

- Biggest challenge/implications
  - paralysis by analysis
  - level of technical complexity of models and ability to use them can create power imbalances at the table.
  - People with a knowledge of models can steer the conversation, lead the conversation and debate to advance their position. Most people wouldn't do this but there are some who would.
  - Need to simplify the tools so that doesn't happen or to reduce the chance of that happening.
- Need to keep in mind that these are decision *support* tools. They are not the decision.
- Tendancy to use the latest and the greatest.
- Keep in mind that the end of the day you are trying to make a decision.
- Start of the process – discuss the limitations of the tools and the things to be aware of when using them.
- Care needs to be taken so that you are not fighting the tool more than dealing with the issues

- Have to be careful to bring the tools in at the right time – the group has to be ready for them before you introduce it. If you bring in a tool or the results of a tool too soon it can result in serious set backs in the progress that the group is making.
- Keep in mind that the group will have different skill levels in their ability to interpret the results that the tools are providing. Different levels of understanding.

Timing of when you bring in certain tools is critical
- People have to be ready to accept the results - if not people will attack the tool.
- Question assumptions, data used, etc.

Bring the info in at the right point

Cumulative impact management/modelling
Need to consider
- money available
- Time available
- Level of knowledge of participants

An example from participant
- Literature indicated that they should go with modeling
- Was complex and they didn't understand all of the processes and date requirements.
- Some data not available.
- Understanding limited.
- But this took the biggest chunk of their money
- Trying to model future development of forestry and oil and gas in their area
- Think that if they had used another approach that they might have gotten further.

Technical presentations from experts
- Can get overburdened by technical presentations.
- People tune out and can misinterpret the point that the expert is trying to make.
- May just hear selective statements which can be taken out of context.
- "Liquidate the old growth" was one example that a participant provided of people tuning out and then all of sudden perking up when this statement was made. But because they tuned out of the rest of the presentation, the statement could easily be taken out of context or misinterpreted.

Reliance on indicators and models
- Models based on state of knowledge at the time they were developed.
- Then something comes along like the Mountain Pine Beetle (MPB) which takes things completely off the scale of what we have ever seen.
- Prince George LRMP – replied heavily on timber supply impacts as an indicator for strategies.
- Now MPB has made that indicator completely irrelevant.
- MPB is going to override all of the impacts that we have under land use plans.
- MPB has made the impacts of the strategies and objectives small, relatively speaking.

Humility in using science is important.

- Have to be careful with tools.
- Lots of different ways of looking at a situation
- System set up to use these tools
- Step back and take a look at what we are trying to do.
- Have to keep in mind accuracy of the tools – GIS – garbage in - garbage out.

- Important to educate people about the information itself, as much as it is to educate them on how to draw conclusions about it or how to use it to make decisions.
- Transfer of information between people can introduce bias as well.
- Can be difficult to be objective a lot of the time. Everyone has their own biases and it is very difficult to remain 'neutral'.

Education

- when you produce stuff and hand to people – you don't get buy in.
- need to put the time in upfront – but government is getting away from that because of resource limitations – but this may end up costing them more in the long run.
- need to get back to the table and back to consensus approach.
- We seem to be in a **Decide – Announce – Defend** - decision making process. May be okay in some situations but not all situations.

Not productive to throw more and more tools at the problem.

Tools are not making the decisions – We are.
Tools are just the support to help us make the decision.