BC coastal needs assessment summary: Who, what, where, and how?

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What are the key coastal conservation issues, who needs information on them, where are the challenges, and how do we best pass on new information? These topics were addressed in the recent survey conducted by the FORREX Landscape Ecology and Conservation Biology extension program. The responses to these questions will form the building blocks for developing our program this fiscal year and into the future.

Alan Burger photo

Julie Schooling photo

Top: *Species at risk, such as the marbled murrelet, are one of the top priority topics identified in the needs survey.*
Bottom: *Lush undergrowth on Vancouver Island.*

To assess these knowledge needs, last April we launched a web-based survey to identify and prioritize the extension needs of our clients. This coastal needs survey targeted people of diverse natural resource backgrounds who have experiential knowledge about coastal issues. In the survey, many open-ended questions were asked to allow a free flow of information from our collaborators. Although this approach encouraged a wide range of responses both temporally and spatially, respondents repeatedly indentified certain subjects as important. Some consistent topics appeared as top priorities and they are ranked in order of importance as follows:

1. Climate change (adaptation tools, hydrology, forest management, vulnerability, protected area management, and carbon dynamics)
2. Species at risk (habitat inventory, species inventory, lack of implementation of *Species at Risk Act*, and habitat loss)
3. Salmon (conservation, aquaculture, sea lice, and overexploitation)
4. Timber species and age composition/distribution/proportions
5. Independent power producers (riparian and biodiversity effects)
6. Timber harvesting practices (high-grading, leave trees, coarse woody debris, patches, and coastal Douglas-fir conservation)

Interestingly, 77% of the respondents said that these issues were not unique to the coastal ecosystem. This indicates that information gained from the coastal survey will have broader ramifications for natural resource practitioners.

The groups identified as most in need of coastal extension, ranked in order of importance, are 1) government, 2) First Nations, 3) environmental non-government organizations, and 4) industry (including timber, oil and gas, and mining). The groups identified as the least in need of extension were consultants and the tourism sectors.

As an extension organization, our focus is on using the best tools possible to deliver information to our clients. Respondents had consistent preferences for type of extension method used and identified the following, in order of preference: 1) listservs, 2) extension notes, 3) workshop/technical sessions, 4) websites, and 5) conferences. The least preferred methods of extension were multimedia products, mailed hard copies, and one-on-one assistance. This survey indicates that natural resource professionals have moved into the age of electronic information, can make use of more cost-effective delivery tools, and are moving away from more personal or time-consuming methods of information exchange.

When asked what they saw as the most important future challenges to coastal conservation and management, respondents listed the following:

- Climate change
- Ecosystem-based management
- Keeping human communities socio-economically and environmentally viable
- Integrating and exchanging information with First Nations
- Degraded forest health

This survey used innovative techniques that FORREX has used in the past, including a web-based questionnaire and some questions that are open-ended rather than multiple choice. The survey differed from previous FORREX needs assessment surveys in that it focused specifically on coastal conservation biology rather than forestry or watershed (specifically targeting information for the Landscape Ecology and Conservation Biology Program extension efforts).

File Report available

The final report will be published as a FORREX file report on our website (***www.forrex.org/publications/other/FileReports/fr09-03***) in the near future.