

# On the brink of knowing

CHRIS HOLLSTEDT

*“If resource management is inherently uncertain, then surprises become opportunities to learn rather than failures to predict” — Kai Lee, 1993*

I read this quote several years ago and wrote it down to remind me how humbling it is to be a professional forester. I was reading up on sustainable forest management. For some reason this quote captured the essence of my quandary. If resource management is risky business, what is my role in limiting the risk?

Well, the fact is that resource management is risky, but it is managed risk. The province of British Columbia has invested in research and technology development for over 50 years. Much of this information is reflected in the practices of today. But the new challenges of ecosystem-based management and the creation of policies and practices that can withstand the scrutiny of the global community put new pressures on us to know more. We must be able to demonstrate that we are managing sustainably. We must admit when we're not sure and make a concerted effort to study our effects on society and the land.

Resource management in British Columbia is moving from timber-based management to ecosystem-based management. The new-age natural resource professionals (and organizations) must manage for a balance of social, economic, and environmental needs while ensuring future generations have the same opportunities. They must be students of the sciences, of risk, ecosystem, and adaptive management, as well as sustainability, social forestry, indigenous knowledge, global economics, forest certification, and information technology. And last—but not least—forest policy. This is not an exhaustive list, but it does demonstrate the need to integrate across disciplines and organizations to achieve the balancing act.

Now, more than ever, we must plan for future conditions and be prepared for the inevitable surprises so that we can continue to learn and be ready for the next era in natural resource management. We are on the brink of knowing what we don't know and leaning over the edge to an era of community-based learning.

This gathering is about being prepared for that future, while managing for today. I was tempted to call this the “no surprises forum,” but in reality there will always be surprises. We should look to them as opportunities to learn, rather than failures to hide. This forum is called “From Science to Management and Back.” I encourage you to share your ideas on the information presented, to discuss how this information might be used in your management now, and to identify opportunities to work together to find solutions for future management. When you come across a “surprise” you will be able to share your story at the next forum.

On behalf of the Partnership, welcome.

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## CITATION —

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