



Navigating in a sea of information

by Liz Osborn, *Current Results Nexus*

The World Wide Web revolutionized our access to scientific journals. Thousands of peer-reviewed research journals are now at the fingertips of anyone who searches on-line. Unfortunately, useful information is available, but widely scattered. Here are some tips to help you navigate the sea of new information.

Except for FORREX's *BC Journal of Ecosystems and Management (JEM)* and *Streamline*, few journals focus on British Columbia. In addition to these FORREX resources, rich sources on BC forestry include the *Canadian Journal of Forest Research*, *Forest Ecology and Management*, and *The Forestry Chronicle*. But dozens of other journals occasionally publish highly relevant research. Articles on BC forestry recently appeared, for example, in *Society and Natural Resources* (Lewis and Sheppard 2005) and in the *International Journal of Climatology* (Wang *et al* 2006). The flow of new science is immense.

The major publishing firms, among them Elsevier and Blackwell Publishing, set high technological standards for providing scientific literature over the Internet, and most smaller publishers have followed suit. Beginning in late 2005, abstracts in *The Canadian Field-Naturalist* appeared on-line and *The Forestry Chronicle's* abstracts came on-line with its Jan-Feb 2006 issue. Individual articles in *The Forestry Chronicle* can now be purchased by non-subscribers over the Internet on a pay-per-view basis.


The other high standard that major publishers set is price. While abstracts are usually free on-line, this is seldom the case for the full text of an article. *Forest Ecology and Management*, for instance, costs either US \$3,773 for a year's subscription, or US \$30 per article. Unless you access

journals through your affiliation with an institution that subscribes, such as a university or government agency, costs are prohibitive. This puts small businesses, including self-employed consultants, at a disadvantage.

The high cost of scientific information has generated plenty of complaints and ongoing innovation. In response, some smaller publishers have championed the open-access cause. *JEM* and *Streamline* are two journals where all content is available on-line and free of charge. Anyone on the Internet in Canada can also freely access the fine stable of National Research Council of Canada publications, including the *Canadian Journal of Forest Research*. A few journals have been launched as paperless, open-access Web publications, for instance *Ecology and Society*, and new from Canada, *Avian Conservation and Ecology*.

Another means of reading journal articles for free exists through public libraries that subscribe to EBSCOhost Academic Search Elite, a journal database that patrons can access on-line using a password. However, many key forestry journals are absent, and journals often have a 12-month embargo, which means the full text of articles only becomes available a year after publication. If it isn't available in their area, BC residents can reach the database through the Vancouver Public Library's loan card. Although free, BC residents outside of the Lower Mainland must renew their card in person at the Vancouver Library every three months.

Subscribing to the free Table of Contents alerts that most publishers send by email when a journal issue is published helps readers keep up-to-date on new literature. Still, it takes considerably more time than most natural resources practitioners can spare to sift through these and find relevant articles. When an article of interest surfaces, it may require substantial effort to decipher the specialist language. In the information age it's easy to become swamped by extraneous material.

To enable anyone to bypass these time-consuming steps, I began publishing *Current Results*, BC's natural resources research digest. I regularly scan over 300 peer-reviewed journals and publications of research organizations to ferret out the gems of new information about BC's environment and its stewardship. Each month, (but August) the on-line newsletter provides straightforward summaries of key findings from more than 50 new articles. With a \$55 annual subscription to *Current Results*, you can handily stay atop the waves of research literature. 

Resources

Avian Conservation and Ecology
<http://www.ace-eco.org/index.php>

BC Journal of Ecosystems and Management
<http://www.forrex.org/publications/jem/jem.asp>

Canadian Journal of Forest Research
http://pubs.nrc-cnrc.gc.ca/cgi-bin/rp/rp2_desc_e?cjfr

Current Results
<http://www.currentresults.com>

Ecology and Society
<http://www.ecologyandsociety.org/>

Forest Ecology and Management
<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/journal/03781127>

Streamline
<http://www.forrex.org/publications/streamline/streamline.asp>

The Canadian Field-Naturalist
<http://www.ofnc.ca/cfn/index.php>

The Forestry Chronicle
<http://pubs.nrc-cnrc.gc.ca/tfc/TFC.html>

Vancouver Public Library
<http://www.vpl.vancouver.bc.ca/extDB/login.remoteDB>

Lewis, John L. and Stephen R.J. Sheppard. 2005. Ancient Values, New Challenges: Indigenous Spiritual Perceptions of Landscapes and Forest Management. *Society and Natural Resources*. 18(10):907-920. To search go to: <http://taylorandfrancis.metapress.com>

Wang, T., A. Hamann, D.L. Spittlehouse and S.N. Aitken. 2006. Development of scale-free climate data for Western Canada for use in resource management. *International Journal of Climatology*. 26(3):383-397. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/joc.1247>