

# SCARE TACTICS AND MISREPRESENTATION: AREA-BASED LICENCES DESERVE A SECOND LOOK



Earlier this year Dwight Yochim, our Executive Director, was heard to exclaim, “The more things change, the more they stay the same.” He was in the process of bundling up 70 years’ worth of TLA magazines which are being shipped off to the Royal BC Museum and his cursory look at articles over the years showed that we have the same issues cropping up over and over again. One of those recurring issues is the eternal debate over area-based tenures versus volume-based tenures.

This spring the Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations initiated an opportunity for middle-sized tenure holders now in the possession of volume-based forest licences, the opportunity to exchange them for area-based tree farm licences. On the surface this does not seem too dramatic a shift. The Crown still controls the land base while other rights holders and the public still have access over the land. Stumpage must still be paid to the Crown as economic rent and the same rules and regulations pertaining to good forest stewardship must be upheld.

There are some major benefits that accrue to both the Crown and to the tenure holder in shifting to an area-based model. Volume-based tenures such as forest licences and timber sale licences may have worked well in the 1950’s when there was plenty of land to go around and companies respected each other’s chart areas even though they had no legal status. Once one valley was logged a company could chart another adjacent area and use its volume allocation to keep harvesting with another multi-year harvest program. However, by the 1980’s and beyond this model did not work nearly as well and is now in a state of near collapse. There are no more unlogged valleys within the working forest and licence holders are constantly stumbling over and arguing about each other’s operating areas. The Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource

Operations does not want to be the referee here and we have the rather bizarre case of foresters running into each other as they stake out blocks for their respective companies. Not only does this create inefficient practices, it also does not make for good forest management.

Area-based forest management, whereby each licensee knows exactly where the company’s boundaries are, would go a long way toward redressing the problems with the future *Resource Road Users Act* which has been stumbling along for over a year but is far from being resolved. If a user does not have long-term rights over a certain area, why should a licensee be willing to maintain and improve the roads and bridges and other infrastructure in that area? These problems exist, in the main, in timber supply areas and not in tree farm licences. Area-based licences would have primary control over the roads and would charge user fees to other industrial users who wanted to use their road systems. We might gripe about the fee structure but the system works and the infrastructure is maintained.

It’s not as if area-based licences do not exist in this province. Tree farm licences, timber licences, woodlot licences, community forest licences, and the recently added First Nations woodland licences are all area-based and they work well. Several years ago small timber sale major tenure holders had the opportunity to convert their tenures to woodlot licences and my experience is that those who did convert were very satisfied with the outcome. To use an analogy if you own your house you will fix your roof, not so if you are merely renting.

What is the scare factor here? Well let us quickly look at an article earlier this year. “*Sneaky Liberals are Planning a BC Forest Giveaway*” by Ben Parfitt which stated that “*giving what remains of our forests away is lunacy*”. This fear mongering article distorts the facts and argues that area-based tenures are a

government giveaway to the big boys or as Ben states it “*semi-private fiefdoms.*” However, the largest corporations already have area-based tenures. It is the medium-sized tenure holders that were saddled with volume-based forest licences in the first place. The Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations also recognizes that there is a cost advantage to holding an area-based tenure. So if a tenure holder wants to convert, they must give up five per cent of their tenure, hardly a giveaway. This volume can then be reallocated to other licensees such as BC Timber Sales, community forests, or First Nations.

There are distinct advantages to both the Crown and the tenure holder. The area-based licensee would now be responsible for the silviculture in order to ensure a continuing source of timber in the future. Rather than renting the premises (volume-based), there are now attributes of owning the forests which means that more than minimum maintenance is carried out. Forest professionals know that tree farm licences have a higher degree of forest stewardship than volume-based tenures. And the woodlot owners I know are as zealous in the care of their small holdings as any farmer in the district.

The outcry by the likes of Ben Parfitt caused Minister Thomson to back away from this initiative yet it most assuredly deserves a close second look. What is in it for members of the TLA? Some of you are tenure holders and most of you work for a tenure holder. If area-based tenures are a better tool for forest management then the holders will prosper and annual allowable cuts may well rise under this type of stewardship which is a benefit to all. ♣

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