

Issue Resolution Process

Westwind carries out the forest management planning, silvicultural planning and compliance/reporting for forestry activities on Crown land in the French-Severn Forest. It is recognized that both Indigenous communities and community stakeholders have direct interests on the same Crown lands. While forest management and other forest users have existed with minimal disagreements for decades, it is recognized that real or perceived differences in land uses can occur.

The development of forest management plans considers a wide range of objectives to ensuring forest sustainability including social, economic and environmental objectives. Striking a balance when those objectives sometimes seem to conflict can be challenging. Because forest cover is at least partially retained through the major use of partial harvest systems in this forest with only a small percentage of harvests occurring through clearcut management, the balance is much easier to find. {Note that clearcutting has many advantages, many of which are ecologically based but are more likely to be less compatible in areas of high visibility close to human habitation}.

Often perceived conflict is temporary with forest access often being a point of discussion. For instance, with partial cutting in particular, the forest industry comes into an area every 20 years or so which can be seen as a disturbance to some but can also improve access road conditions for cottagers, recreational camp owners, snowmobile clubs and others.

The major process in avoiding, minimizing or at least reaching decisions on competing land uses when it comes to forestry is through the formal Ontario Forest Management Planning Manual (FMPM) (current manual 2024 version) that can be found online. Issues are best avoided at the planning stage instead of the implementation stage of forestry activities. Note that Forest Management Plans are documents to guide the next 10 years of forestry activities but they forecast forest condition for 100 years.

The FMP provides for the following items

- Planning inventory requirements
- Development of social, economic and environmental objectives
- Adherence to a number of science supported guidelines such as the Guidelines for the Conservation of Biodiversity at the Stand and Site Scale, the Forest management guide for Great Lakes-St. Lawrence landscapes, Forest Management Guide to Silviculture in the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence and Boreal Forests of Ontario, Forest Management Guide for Cultural Heritage Values as well as regulated manuals like Ontario Crown Scaling Manual, Forest Information Manual and Silvicultural Effectiveness Monitoring Manual for Ontario.
- Identifying a wide range of forest values that require some sort of special approaches to ensure sustainability at finer scales. These may include Conditions on Regular Operations that set standards for site and tree damage as well as requirements for water crossings and maintenance of specific targets for cavity trees, mast trees, conifer trees in hardwood stands, super canopy trees and other wildlife trees.
- Area of concern prescriptions for values such as various water values, recognized trails, portages, bear dens, many hawk nests species at risk habitat and many other features. These areas of concern may include any combination of restrictions on activities at all (e.g. reserves), modified areas for timing of operations, amount of retained forest cover requirements, and restrictions to roads, pits, log landings and their usage.
- Identifying the parameters that make a forest stand eligible harvest
- Criteria on how stands will be selected in any given management plan.
- Computer modelling that includes multiple objectives and targets to determine an available harvest area or “allowable cut” to not only ensure a long term sustainable wood supply but also to ensure the forest provides for a desired future forest condition that provides many goods and services including broad habitat requirements across the landscape

- Allocation of specific areas for harvest, renewal and tending
- Identification of roads for construction or maintenance activities
- Method to report on compliance to all standards as identified in the FMP according to aforementioned Guides and Manuals as well as monitoring on the success of forest renewal efforts.

In order to develop a forest management plan, the District Manager of the local Ministry of Natural Resources identifies a planning team comprised of

- i) MNR foresters, biologists and other staff
- ii) Westwind team members including the Plan Author as identified by Westwind's General manager
- iii) A representative of each Indigenous community in the forest or that have traditional use of the forest
- iv) Representation by a Local Citizen's Committee member.

The District Manager also identifies members for a Local Citizen's Committee (LCC) that advises the District Manager through the planning team on all components of the FMP. LCC members generally include members with backgrounds reflective of stakeholders such as those municipal government or services, unionized labor, trappers, anglers and hunters, hunt camp owners, waterfront property owners, naturalists and snowmobile clubs. There is also opportunity for Indigenous representation on the Local Citizen Committee although they are not considered a stakeholder.

The process involves 4 or 5 formal periods for public and Indigenous consultation throughout a 2.5 to 3-year planning process and includes at least one physical open house. During this process there is an opportunity for Issue Resolution to be invoked and the FMP outlines this process. In addition, customized consultation approaches are offered to each indigenous community with traditional use of the forest.

The FMP Issue resolution process can be invoked on some amendments to the Forest Management Plan. In any case, a range of results may result from issue resolution and will ultimately be determined by the Ministry of Natural Resources as to the validity of a complaint relative to the guides, manuals and other considerations such as the Sustainable Forest License that Westwind holds.

FMP issue resolution starts with a discussion with the Plan Author and often an exchange of information can satisfy concerns.

Each year an Annual Work Schedule is developed with a review period and opportunity to meet with Westwind by Indigenous communities before this annual plan is posted for broader public inspection.

While the FMP process provides a comprehensive and balanced approach to dealing with concerns brought forward by groups or individuals, often concerns are raised after the approval of a Forest Management Plan. In most cases these concerns are dealt with to a satisfactory measure by Westwind and very often by the logging industry themselves. There is a spirit of recognizing that we are all are benefiting from the goods and services our Crown land Forests provide and generally information sharing alleviates stated concerns while in some cases voluntary concern mitigation efforts are put in place even though it is not required by the Forest Management Plan or Crown land policy.

Both Westwind and the MNR do get inquiries and expressions of concern during the implementation period of a FMP. If these concerns cannot be accommodated by Westwind and logging companies conversations will naturally occur.

Both Westwind and MNR are able to carry out inspections that can inform how a complaint can be handled without undue hardship of the forest industry that already has a well-consulted, professionally

developed and government approved Forest Management Plan that authorizes the activity. Inspections conceivably could reveal that the rules of the FMP are not being followed – examples theoretically could include activities occurring in the reserve zone of a forest value (which could be a previously unknown value in that location) or stand or site damage standards being exceeded. If such a case were to occur, Westwind’s compliance efforts would most likely result in the practices being corrected. Alternatively, MNR can make an enforceable compliance decision to deal with the complaint. That decision could lead to operations ceasing in the specific area or within the harvest block. Such a decision may include a temporal aspect (e.g. operations cease until weather conditions improve) a geographical aspect (e.g. shift operations out of the immediate area where the non-compliant activity is occurring) and may require corrective actions (e.g. repair of damage to site, planting of trees) as well as other compliance measures as identified in the Forest Compliance Handbook). The Crown Forest Sustainability Act also identifies for MNR to take such corrective action.

To recap how individuals and groups may express concerns:

- Participate in the Forest Management Planning process and provide input early
- Follow the Issue Resolution Process as identified in the Forest Management Planning Manual if concerns cannot be fairly accommodated
- Inspect Annual Work Schedules and inquire with Westwind about planned operations to get information early
- Work in a proactive manner and clearly identify specific concerns during plan implementation that recognizes that forestry workers have a legal right to what they are doing in the forest and that their work supports social, economic and environmental objectives for our communities and our Province, even though those benefits may not be obvious in relation to your specific concern.
- Discuss concerns early as possible in any process with Westwind, MNR and directly with logging companies if appropriate. Recognize that although people are struggling to make a living for their families in the forest, that all are ultimately respectful of competing Crown land concerns even though not all concerns can be reasonably accommodated while many can.
- Complaints that are the due to forestry activities not be in conformance with rules and regulations including those standards described in the FMP will be inspected and appropriate action to take place. Requiring the ceasing of operations is one potential for MNR to use if the inspections merit that action. That ceasing of operations can be either temporal, spatial or both.

Forest Management Plans and amendments, Annual Work Schedules and associated revisions can be found on a government website for all management units in the province. Search “Ontario Forest Management Plans online” to access the Natural Resources Information Portal and select the French-Severn Forest by either the interactive map or from the drop down menu. Both Westwind and the Bracebridge-Minden-Parry Sound District MNR. The link to that website is found below.

https://nrip.mnr.gov.on.ca/s/fmp-online?language=en_US