

**Public Involvement in Forest Management and Planning in Manitoba:
The Role of Stakeholder Advisory Committees (SACs)**

by

Brett C. McGurk

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Natural Resources Management

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Abstract

It is now widely accepted that public involvement is a critical component of sustainable forest management (SFM). However, achieving meaningful participation continues to be a challenge. Problems with public involvement in SFM tend to be directed at the continued use of passive involvement techniques such as open houses by forest products companies (FPCs) and governments at the expense of more participatory methods. In an effort to provide more active involvement, many FPCs have started to use an advisory committee approach. There are few empirical studies, however, that evaluate advisory committee processes, and that clarify the roles of such committees in forest management and planning. The purpose of the study was to help fill these gaps. The specific objectives were to: 1) establish the degree of overall success of stakeholder advisory committees (SACs) in forest management and planning in Manitoba; 2) determine the involvement techniques used in the advisory committee processes and identify the preferred techniques; 3) consider whether informal learning occurred among the participants on the committees; 4) determine what barriers exist to involvement on the committees; and 5) provide recommendations on how to improve the public involvement capabilities of SACs in SFM.

The study focused on the advisory committees of the three FPCs that hold forest management licences in Manitoba, Canada: Tembec, located in Pine Falls; Louisiana-Pacific, in Swan River; and Tolko, based in The Pas. A qualitative research approach was used to address the goals of the research, including: 1) standardized open-ended interviews with selected members of each committee (N=25); 2) a meeting with key



actors in the forest policy community; 3) participation observation; and 4) document review – literature review and reviewing the minutes of meetings of the committees. Atlas Ti, a qualitative data analysis software program, assisted with data analysis.

Results established numerous strengths and weaknesses of the committees relating to both processes and outcomes. Respondents identified: 1) the use of appropriate involvement techniques; 2) good facilitation; 3) openness; 4) effective conflict management; 5) learning; 6) committee members' optimism about advisory committee processes; 7) relationship-building; and 8) ability to influence site-specific forest management and planning decisions as the strengths of the committees. Notable weaknesses were: 1) insufficient breadth of involvement; 2) lack of Aboriginal involvement; 3) poor attendance; 4) representation problems; 5) membership changes; 6) complexity of language (terminology); 7) infrequent meetings; 8) inadequate involvement in forest management and planning decisions; and 9) issues surrounding time.

While the advisory committee approach shows promise in a forestry context, its potential has not been fully realized. The committees and their respective sponsors had difficulty engaging members meaningfully, thus marginalizing the ability of the committees to play an important role in forest management and planning.



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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The forests and forest industry are of fundamental importance to Canadian society. Beyond their significant contributions to the Canadian economy, they have both played an important role in developing our society culturally. Of the total amount of legally defined forested areas in Canada, approximately 94 per cent are held in the public interest by federal and provincial governments (World Resources Institute 2000). However, most decisions pertaining to Canada's forests have been made bilaterally between provincial governments and forest products companies (FPCs) with minimal or no public input (Tanz and Howard 1991; Higgelke and Duinker 1993; Howlett and Rayner 1995; Blouin 1998; Cote and Bouthillier 1999). The result has been the degradation of forest resources due to the continued reliance on the market-oriented "sustained-yield" forest management paradigm (Tanz and Howard 1991; Bengston 1993; Adamowicz and Veeman 1998). This paradigm emphasizes the need to have a constant yield of timber with extraction of merchantable timber the paramount goal.

The current state of Canada's forests, coupled with the lack of opportunity for public involvement in managing this public good, has left the public critical of forest management and planning throughout Canada. The public has started to speak out about the inadequacies of decisions that have been made without public involvement (Higgelke and Duinker 1993). "Citizens, stakeholders and communities across Canada are seeking to democratize forest policy processes through increased citizen decision-making power and devolution of management control to community levels" (Robinson et al. 2001).



This push to democratize forest decision-making was one of the catalysts for the paradigmatic shift that recently occurred in forest management and planning – sustainable forest management (SFM). SFM is “management that maintains and enhances the long-term health of forest ecosystems for the benefit of all living things, while providing environmental, economic, social and cultural opportunities for present and future generations” (Natural Resources Canada 2001). This management approach is more holistic than conventional reductionistic methods of forest management and planning and advocates the inclusion of public involvement in all stages of decision-making.

As FPCs and governments begin to develop a better understanding of SFM, and realize the inadequacies of conventional methods of involvement in forest management and planning, new methods of involvement have been and need to be developed. One recent addition to the public involvement landscape in an attempt to engage the public more directly in SFM is the use of advisory committees (Duinker 2001). An advisory committee can be defined simply as “a relatively small group of people who are convened by a sponsor for an extended period of time to represent the ideas and attitudes of various groups and/or communities for the purpose of examining a proposal, issues or set of issues” (Lynn and Busenberg 1995). In the province of Manitoba, Canada, all three FPCs that hold forest management licences (Tembec, Tolko, and Louisiana-Pacific (LP)) are legally required to use advisory committees to aid in their forest management and planning activities.



1.1 Purpose/objectives

The purpose of the study was to improve understanding of the contribution that advisory committees make to public involvement in forest management and planning including SFM. The specific study objectives were to:

1. Establish the degree of overall success of SACs in forest management and planning in Manitoba;
2. Determine the involvement techniques used in the advisory committee processes and identify the preferred techniques;
3. Consider whether informal learning occurred among the participants on the committees;
4. Determine what barriers exist to involvement on the committees; and
5. Provide recommendations on how to improve the public involvement capabilities of SACs in SFM.

1.2 Significance of the study

The results of the research will have benefits extending far beyond the immediate study location. Few studies have examined SACs in a forestry context. The research will build on existing studies by analyzing dimensions of public involvement from the perspectives of the participants themselves, not just theorists and practitioners. The findings from the research will also enrich our understanding of the learning that occurs during public involvement activities. Furthermore, the findings could have implications for policy reform in the forestry sector in Manitoba and abroad.



1.3 Study sites

The study sites chosen for the research included the head office locations of the three FPCs that hold forest management licences in Manitoba: Pine Falls (Tembec), Swan River (LP), and The Pas (Tolko). Data were obtained during site-visits to each town where the SACs meet regularly. According to Hreno (2001), all three FPCs use their respective committees to varying degrees in their decision-making activities, and all have had varying degrees of success in obtaining input to their decisions from SAC members. Figure 1 indicates the location and geographic area of the forest management licence area(s) (FMLA) of the three FPCs being considered, as well as the two integrated wood supply areas (IWSAs) that are managed by the province. Tembec has the first right to purchase wood from the IWSAs, but its forest management and planning responsibilities are confined to FMLA-1.

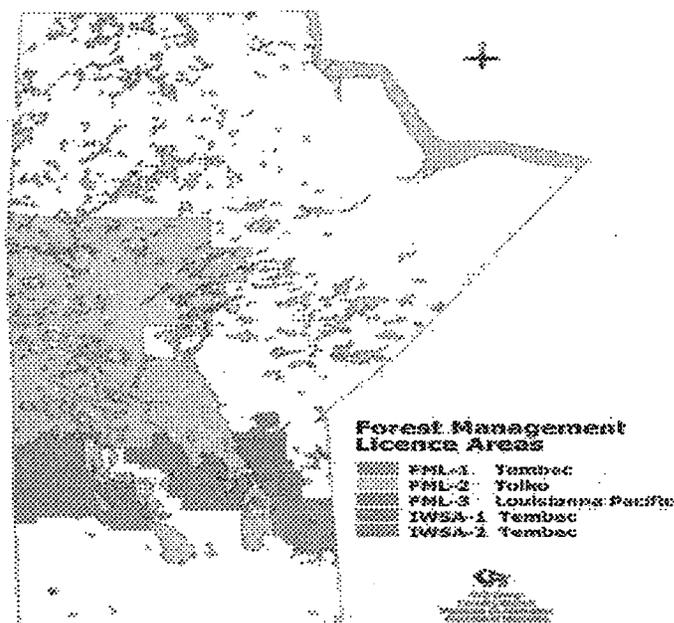


Figure 1: FMLAs and IWSAs of the three FPCs that hold forest management licences in the province of Manitoba, Canada (Map by Manitoba Conservation)



1.4 Methods

The research approach was qualitative and consisted of three components. First, secondary data were obtained through reviewing the relevant literature on the thesis topic and reviewing the minutes of meetings of the three committees. Second, in-depth interviews were carried out with SAC facilitators, selected members of each committee, and non-SAC members who were key actors in the forest policy community. The interviews were conducted during site-visits to the location where each committee operates: Pine Falls, Swan River, and The Pas. Third, I was a participant observer at four of Tembec's committee meetings. A detailed description of the research methods can be found in chapter 3.

1.5 Organization

The thesis is organized into six chapters. Chapter 1 provides an introduction, states the purpose and objectives of the research and discusses the research methods. Chapter 2 provides a review of the relevant literature. The review presents a background on the rationale for public involvement, the benefits of public involvement, a chronological overview of public involvement in forest management and planning in North America, and an overview of the advisory committee approach.

Chapter 3 discusses the methodological framework and the specific research techniques employed in this study. In chapter 4, results are presented. This is followed in chapter 5 by a discussion of the results. The final chapter contains conclusions and recommendations relative to the objectives of this study.



CHAPTER 2: PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN FOREST MANAGEMENT AND PLANNING

2.1 Definition of public involvement

Numerous definitions of public participation, also commonly referred to as public involvement, are offered in the literature. A key difference among the definitions is the degree to which the public is able to influence, share and control decision-making (Roberts 1995). For example, Praxis (1988) defines public involvement as “a means by which public concerns, needs, and values are identified prior to decisions, so that the public can contribute to the decision-making process.” Bregha (1978) describes public participation as “...active involvement and commitment to a collective action.” Connor (1992) claims that public participation is “a communication process between planners and the public with the objectives being to share in the decisions that are made in the formulation and implementation of projects.”

For the purpose of this research, Roberts’ (1995) definition has been adopted. Roberts’ (1995) postulates that public involvement includes both public participation and consultation: “...consultation includes education, information sharing and negotiation, with the goal of better decision-making by the organization consulting the public.” Public participation, on the other hand, involves bringing the public into the decision-making process (e.g., co-management or shared decision-making). This distinction has also been made in Arnstein’s (1969) seminal work “A Ladder of Citizen Participation,” where she correlates the degrees of power with levels of involvement describing consultation as mere tokenism and citizen participation as “true” citizen empowerment.



2.2 Rationale for public involvement

Throughout the literature, several rationales are provided for increasing opportunities for public involvement in all decision-making contexts. Six reasons for this are commonly cited in the literature.

First, the public no longer perceives its governing institutions as credible. The traditional structures and methods of government decision-making that tend to exclude the public are no longer viewed as acceptable. In the words of Pal (1997), "People want to be consulted, they want to participate, and they want their voices heard."

Second, governments have started to look beyond their traditional decision-making networks as a result of fiscal constraints. In regard to environment portfolios, this has meant that environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOS) have been used to provide information and quasi-regulatory services to governments at both the federal and provincial levels (Macdonald 1991).

Third, the economic and political influence of interest groups can significantly hinder governments' ability to manage public goods such as forests in the best interest of the public. Therefore, obtaining input from the "general" public can aid governments in developing balanced decisions that are beneficial to the general population and not just polarized interest groups.

Fourth, interest groups and the general public have successfully used the judicial system to halt mega-projects as a result of inadequate public involvement (See *Rafferty-Alameda and Oldman River Dam* federal court decisions) (Macdonald 1991; Vanderzwagg and Duncan 1992).



Fifth, in the context of this research, it is advocated that publicly owned forests must be managed according to the values and preferences of its owners. In Canada, 94 per cent of forested areas are public lands; therefore, their management "... must be decided by the owners of the forests and deserve the greatest possible public participation" (Baskerville 1988).

Sixth, public involvement is a fundamental component of democratic governance, especially within the ideals of representative and, even more so, participatory forms of democracy. A deeper understanding of these governance models is imperative to realize why public involvement has taken the form it has, and why there is renewed interest in employing a more participatory form of democracy.

The catalysts for representative democracy theory were the exponential growth and complexity of governments (Pateman 1970). Although the ideal democracy is the rule of the people through maximum participation (i.e., participatory democracy), the considerable growth and complexity of bureaucracies had rendered it infeasible (Pateman 1970). As a result, the resurgence of representative democracy occurred during the early 1900s and participatory decision-making had only a marginal role.

Representative democracy can be defined simply as the voting of elected representatives to act on behalf of the citizenry. Representative democracy theorists believe there are inherent dangers in broad-scale public involvement in politics, and that increased levels above what is required results in the destabilization of the workings of government (Pateman 1970). This sentiment, in conjunction with the fact that the citizenry was perceived as apathetic and incompetent to participate in civil society activities, were the justifications for the limited role of public involvement during the



beginning of the 20th century (Pateman 1970; Moote et al. 1997; Overdevest 2001). This style of governance often centralizes decision-making authority and disempowers citizens, reducing their ability to influence decisions that affect their lives. As Pateman (1970) asserts, often the only participation that took place by the vast majority of the public was in the election of government legislators.

The resurgence of participatory ideals in the latter half of the last century was the result of two aspects found in western democracies: 1) considerable growth in functions performed by the state; and 2) increased concentration of decision-making authority by the governing elite (Pateman 1970; Cook and Morgan 1971; Webler and Renn 1995). Unlike the representative theorists interpretation of democracy, the participatory view of democracy is based on the premise that people whose lives are affected by a decision must partake in making that decision (Gibson 1975; Naisbett 1982; Howell et al. 1987; Overdevest 2001). The reason being is that “it has been established in democratic thought that each adult is assumed to be the best guide to his welfare” (McAllister 1982). Therefore, individuals need to have the opportunity and be encouraged to participate in decisions that affect their lives, especially considering that they are ultimately the ones who know how they feel (Cook and Morgan 1971). Naisbett (1982) argues that the lack of empowerment afforded through representative democracy has catalyzed a societal shift toward participatory democracy. This trend has been labeled one of the ten largest megatrends occurring in American society and institutions (Naisbett 1982).



2.3 Benefits of public involvement

Numerous public involvement practitioners and researchers have written extensively on the benefits of public involvement in all decision-making contexts. The following captures in part the numerous benefits of public involvement, many of which embody the rationales outlined earlier.

2.3.1 Involvement and creativity

Through public involvement, there is an opportunity for participants to expand their knowledge, enrich debate and provide alternatives in matters to be solved (Howell et al. 1987; Praxis 1988; Connor 1992; Mitchell 1997). According to Praxis (1988), “...many times agencies have discovered that the public’s expertise and creativity was invaluable in contributing to the development of sensitive compromise solutions to problems.”

2.3.2 Effective decision-making

Public involvement contributes to the effectiveness of decision-making because those with authority to make decisions and those affected by decisions have the opportunity to develop solutions that accommodate rather than compromise the participants’ interests (Howell et al. 1987; Praxis 1988; Owen 1998). Cook and Morgan (1971) argue that in some occasions amateur experts (i.e., the public) are “...equal to, if not more important than elected officials in decision-making because their feelings, reflections and experiences lead them to better choices of ends and means.”



2.3.3 Credibility

Substantive public involvement often results in participants perceiving decision-making processes, their outcomes, and those facilitating the process as credible. The result is greater support for the plan, program or policy to be implemented, which helps build working relationships with potentially affected and interested individuals (Creighton et al. 1980; Howell et al. 1987; Higgelke and Duinker 1993; Roberts 1995; Mitchell 1997; Blouin 1998).

2.3.4 Reduce conflict

Public involvement in decision-making, specifically the discourse among participants, has been known to avert and/or reduce conflict (Roberts 1995; Blouin 1998). Wilmot and Hocker (1997) assert that it is through discourse that parties in conflict realize they do not have incompatible goals (i.e., shifting from positions to interests), win-win solutions are possible, and the negative attributes that each party associates with the other party are often incorrect.

2.3.5 Acquisition of information

Since most decisions facing modern societies are qualitative rather than quantitative in nature (Cook and Morgan 1971), substantive public involvement is crucial for soliciting information from citizens on their goals, preferences, values and attitudes (Creighton et al. 1980; Mitchell 1997). Higgelke and Duinker (1993) claim that "...local people can provide information that is otherwise unattainable."

