



Input from the Federation of Mountain Clubs of BC **re amendments to the Private Managed Forest Land Act**

The Federation of Mountain Clubs of BC (FMCBC) is a province-wide affiliation of 44 clubs representing more than 5,000 individuals. While our primary interest is non-mechanized recreation such as hiking, climbing, skiing and snowshoeing, we generally need vehicles to get to our starting points. We are committed proponents of the “Leave No Trace” and “Right to Roam” principles.

At a time when interest in outdoor recreation is growing everywhere, we are particularly concerned that the Private Managed Forest Land Act (PMFLA) makes no mention of recreation as one of its core values. There are 800,000 hectares of privately-owned forested lands managed under the PMFLA. They all receive a substantially reduced land assessment which results in lower taxes. There should be greater benefits returned to the public as a result of these tax concessions including allowing public recreational use of and access across PMF lands.

Formerly, on Vancouver Island, where nearly 600,000 hectares of PMF lands are located, the public was able to make full use of them for recreation. In the 1960s and '70s, roads were open 7 days a week, and both tourists and locals had access to the lakes, rivers and mountains for camping, fishing and hiking. Over the last few decades more and more gates have been installed and locked. Now much of this area is closed to the public altogether, and the remainder restricted to weekends only, for 8 hours a day. Not only does this cut off access to large areas of land, it also means the public's ability get to several provincial and regional parks and recreation sites is dependent on the decisions of the PMF landowners whose roads are the only way to access them. Even getting permission for hiking corridors has been difficult. As an example, the Vancouver Island Trail is still missing two key sections that pass through PMF lands.

We feel that vehicular access on any PMF lands greater than 500 hectares should be the same as it is on Crown lands, with roads open except when logging equipment is on site or when the forests are closed due to serious stage fire risk. Western Forest Products on northern Vancouver Island have always operated their Private Managed Forests Nos. 29, 31, and 61 in that way - to the great appreciation of visitors and locals alike.

The use of access agreements with waivers, which some companies have recently been offering to clubs or other organizations as a condition of allowing passage through their locked gates, should not be considered a solution to the access problem. Such a policy excludes the rest of unaffiliated users including casual family outings and tourist visits. The risk to landowners of being liable for injuries suffered by recreationalists using their property has already been removed by the changes made in 1998 to the Occupiers Liability Act and requires no further paperwork. We feel the principles recognized by one's "Right to Roam" is the goal we should be aiming for - as is being successfully practiced in eight other countries.

There is increasing public demand for more areas for outdoor recreation and our provincial parks are seeing serious capacity pressures. Reopening PMF lands will help alleviate these issues. To this end, the FMCBC recommends that "recreation" be added to the values managed for on PMF lands, and that vehicular access be allowed on all Private Managed Forests lands greater than 500 hectares.

On a matter of broader interest, we would also like to see "sustainability" added to the values managed under the Act. The current rate of harvest appears to be greater than regeneration, and we are concerned that this escalated rate of cut threatens both long term employment and ecological values.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments. The FMCBC appreciates the opportunity to be part of this revitalization initiative of our provincial forests.

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Executive Director