

Sustainable forestry changes conversation about wood

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Concerns about the environment are growing and echoing in every quarter of the world. Controlling global warming through effective reduction in carbon emissions and switching to greener alternatives in every sphere of consumption is the focus of efforts towards a sustainable future.

The construction industry by itself has a huge carbon footprint. Mining for construction materials, transportation, noise and dust during the construction process are factors pointing towards the need for switching to greener, natural materials.

Wood is one of the most natural resources and has been a material of choice for design and construction for centuries. However, illegal logging and thoughtless deforestation has cast a stigma over extensive use of wood. Apart from this perception, issues like poor quality and lack of standardisation of material have led to limited use of wood in building spaces.

However, the fact is that when done right, use of wood in design and construction can actually benefit the planet profoundly.

Canada is home to 10% of the world's total forests and British Columbia (B.C.), which represents 50% of Canada's lumber production, is a global leader in sustainable forest management. B.C. is at the forefront of demonstrating how using wood from sustainable sources can actually have an overall positive impact on the environment.

Forest practices

About 95% of B.C.'s total 135.9 million acres of forests are government-owned and only 40% of that forest is available for commercial harvest. Less than 0.5% of B.C.'s commercial forest is logged per annum.

By law, all harvested areas must be regenerated with native species within a specified time frame. B.C. is the largest exporter of forest products in the world and its forest management practices more than offset the carbon footprint generated during production and transportation of sawn lumber.

B.C. has advanced forest policies that evolve to meet current needs and to reflect the latest research. An independent study in 2009 found that the region has some of the most demanding legislation in the world.

About 95% of B.C.'s forests are publicly owned and priorities for the use of these lands are developed through community based consultation and strategic planning that establishes land use direction and objectives.

The Forest and Range Practices Act governs the activities of forest and range licenses in B.C. and legislates on-the-ground results. It is built on a foundation of professional skills and accountability and ensures public lands provide a mix of benefits such as timber, recreational opportunities, water quality, wildlife habitat and countless other values.

The Act requires that licensees prepare forest stewardship plans that show how operations will be consistent with objectives set by government. It also regulates construction, maintenance and deactivation of forest roads.

The regulatory regime specifies requirements to conserve soils, provide sustainable reforestation, and protect riparian areas, fish and fish habitat, watersheds, biodiversity and wildlife.

B.C. is well positioned to support results-based forest regulations. It has registered professionals and a multi-faceted compliance and enforcement regime.

The programmes used in B.C. – the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC), Canadian Standards Association (CSA), Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) – all promote principles, criteria and objectives that are viewed around the world as the basis of sustainable forest management.

Similar to B.C.'s regulatory regime, they all ensure that biological diversity is conserved, timber is harvested sustainably and wildlife habitat, soils and water resources are conserved.

B.C. has more third-party forest certification than any other jurisdiction except for Canada as a whole, providing added assurance of sustainable forest management.

