

Wayne Bessie

Foothills Model Forest

1996 - 1998

***Communications
Strategy***

Foothills Model Forest Communications Strategy

INTRODUCTION

Research conducted in the spring of 1996 showed Albertans would be receptive to the FMF if the organization was appropriately positioned. The research also indicated the people of Alberta had not heard of or did not understand the role of the FMF, or if they had, questioned the involvement of the government and "big industry". As well, research showed that many Albertans do not have a clear understanding of the forestry as a whole.

"The general public feels they should be aware of the FMF. As one participant stated, 'awareness creates credibility.' Communications efforts to date have not created the awareness or interest the public thinks it should have." (CUE Research, April 21, 1996)

The FMF communications committee recommends positioning the organization, its structure, its activities and its results with a varied group of audiences living or working within the province of Alberta. This attached plan documents a process to achieve this.

The communications committee is comprised of:

- Bob Udell
- Rick Blackwood
- Hilary McMeekin
- Jeff Anderson, Jasper National Park
- Lee Funke, AEP Communications
- Bob Newstead, CFS
- Mike Voisin, Weldwood.

The communications goal of the FMF is: *to build recognition, among Albertans and other stakeholders, as a credible research partnership developing practical tools for sustainability and stewardship in forest ecosystem management.*

This communications plan is scheduled for the next 30 months. At the end of these 30 months, the communication needs of the organization will be revisited, determining the necessary actions for the remainder of the five year period. Due to the cost of formal evaluation, the FMF will look to simple audience feedback measures to monitor the success of the tools being used.

Target audiences, by priority, as determined by the research and the communications committee include:

- employees of the FMF
- educators
- community residents of FMF landbase
- community residents of large urban centres. ie. Calgary and Edmonton
- media representatives, locally and in Calgary and Edmonton
- partner organizations and their employees
- network members
- resource management agencies
- government representatives (elected and civil servants)

It should be recognized that there are a variety of levels of audience understanding, however, not all audiences will be important at the same rate by the end of the 30 month time frame. This communications strategy will realistically ensure high recognition of the messages within the communities of the FMF landbase, and a broad recognition of the messages in the large urban centres; Calgary and Edmonton.

STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS

There are certain positive and negative extraneous factors that could impact this communications strategy.

- The research showed a great deal of audience receptivity to the FMF messages.
- The FMF is considered one of the strongest model forests in the network, which adds to its credibility. As well, another message is the relative size of the FMF in comparison to other model forests.
- Jasper National Park, a prime protected area, is part of the FMF, which adds to the credibility.
- Canadian Forest Service research has become more focussed on global issues, leaving the FMF and other model forests to step in and play a lead role in “on the ground” forestry research. This provides an opportunity for the FMF.
- New FMA’s require a certain amount of research per cubic metre of wood, providing partnership opportunities.
- There is a strong desire in lodgepole pine regeneration/productivity to cooperate in research for forest management, also opening up the possibility of more partnerships and more implementation of FMF research results.
- The FMF activities directly support the Alberta Forest Conservation Strategy, which sends a strong message in Alberta.
- To effectively and efficiently communicate externally (to Albertans) the FMF must have full support for communications internally. Currently this does not exist.
- The NCE has a strong communications program, building credibility for its programs. The FMF suffers by comparison and the forestry community is looking for knowledge on FMF programs.
- Currently there are few examples of FMF research that has been applied “on the ground.”

- The reality of reduced CFS funding could impact the communications budget.
- The Alberta government has passed research on to other agencies, no longer supporting even the Forest Development Research Trust Fund.
- The possibility of a network expansion, specifically another model forest in Alberta, could cloud the strength of the FMF messages.
- The distribution of staff to three different offices impinges on internal communication, and the unity of external communication messages.

THE EXTERNAL IMAGE

As previously stated, there is an opportunity for the FMF to revise the external image, making it more understandable and identifiable.

A tag line, in conjunction with the name Foothills Model Forest, is recommended as a solution to this challenge. The tag line will explain the meaning of “model forest”. The tag line suggested is: **“Researching today’s forests for tomorrow.”**

KEY MESSAGES

- The FMF will create better forestry practices.
- The Foothills Model Forest is a unique partnership of the federal government (CFS and Jasper National Park), provincial government (AEP), and industry (Weldwood of Canada Ltd.) cooperating towards a common goal: the sustainability of Alberta forests.
- The Foothills Model Forest is a credible, partnership developing practical, “on the ground” tools for sustainability.

INTERNAL RELATIONS

Objective

Implement and maintain a comprehensive communications process to encourage understanding, participation, and pride among employees of the FMF.

Strategy

Keep all employees informed, in a timely fashion, of any messages from the Board of Directors, administrative issues (policies and procedures), and general knowledge of all the projects on the FMF landbase.

Develop the presentation and media relations skill set of the employees of the FMF.

Actions

Keep all employees informed, in a timely fashion, of any messages from the Board of Directors, administrative issues (policies and procedures), and general knowledge of all the projects on the FMF landbase.

- Motivate employees through recognition and team building.
- Produce and distribute a bi-monthly employee update.
- Maintain monthly staff meetings.

Develop the presentation and media relations skill set of the employees of the FMF.

- Employee media and presentation training.

EDUCATIONAL RELATIONS

Objective

Create a broad understanding of the FMF's commitment to unbiased research and provide information on sustainable forest ecosystem management.

Strategy

Design relevant educational information and face to face opportunities for communication.

Actions

Design relevant educational information and face to face opportunities for communication.

- Align with credible third-party organizations - FEESA, AEP Education
Utilize personnel and materials, assist in resource development, attract groups to hold tours and local events at the FMF, and provide any additional materials (posters).
- Participate/host tours, presentations, participation in education forums, lectures and debates, fairs, and award programs.
- Create a large, annual environmental educational conference.
- Distribute the external quarterly newsletter.

COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Objective

Create awareness of the FMF and its activities with the residents of the communities within the FMF landbase, and the residents of Calgary and Edmonton.

Strategy

Develop and maintain a communications process that pro-actively provides information about the FMF and its role in sustainable forest management.

Actions

Develop and maintain a communications process that pro-actively provides information about the FMF and its role in sustainable forest management.

- Target employee presentations at local community meetings, seminars, events.
- Schedule key audiences to visit and tour research project sites.
- Submit stories on the FMF for partner/other interested group newsletters.
- Consistent and effective “Did You Know” advertising in local papers and the major Alberta dailies.
- Participate in partner events, and create one large annual event together with partners. Eg. Hinton’s 40th Anniversary (Weldwood) event, or “Sustainability Days” in Hinton.
- Build relationships with Provincial tourism groups.
Eg. Alberta Tourism Partnership
- Create a recreation map that details the whole landbase.
- Displays at town events, meetings, common areas, lobbies of partner

- organizations and other interested organizations.
- Link with partners to participate in other displays.
Eg. The AFPA's involvement in forestry displays at the Calgary Zoo, Calgary International Airport.
 - Signage at the FMF offices, ETC, and on the landbase as it is entered and left.
 - Develop further tourism/interpretation efforts with Jasper National Park.
 - Encourage partners to use FMF logo on related printed material.
 - Develop novelty items with the FMF logo and tag line.
 - Develop a demonstration forest in the Cache Percotte Forest.

MEDIA RELATIONS

Objective

Build credible relationships in the media based on mutual trust that results in fair and accurate presentation of FMF information and position.

Strategy

Establish a relationship with media representatives, encouraging them to use the FMF as a resource, and to fairly and accurately cover FMF issues.

Actions

Establish a relationship with media representatives, encouraging them to use the FMF as a resource, and to fairly and accurately cover FMF issues.

- Develop a list of key media representatives for local and provincial regions.
- Schedule regular meetings with those media representatives to inform, update, or educate.
- Initiate editorial board meetings.
- Encourage coverage of special events.
Eg. Hinton's 40th Anniversary (Weldwood).
- Organize and invite media on a fun/educational tour of the FMF.
- Distribute proactive releases regarding events or specific information.
- Distribute backgrounders and invitations to important functions or events.

Monitoring

- Consistently monitor and correct large errors or inaccuracies.
- Train employees to deal with the media, particularly those chosen as spokespeople for the FMF.

PARTNER/NETWORK RELATIONS

Objective

Create and maintain a communications process to inform partner organizations, employees of those partner organizations, members of the Model Forest Network, and resource management agencies of the latest developments and results of the FMF.

Strategy

Initiate and maintain communication with partner organizations.

Initiate and enhance the relationship between other members of the Model Forest Network and the Foothills Model Forest.

Actions

Initiate and maintain communication with partner organizations.

- Redefine the meaning of a “partner” organization, reclassifying and creating categories for organizations that desire to obtain information, or those that wish to be involved.
- Provide communications support to partners for informing and educating their employees.
- Transfer technical data to partner organizations via seminars, tours, report distribution.
- Distribute external newsletter, annual “highlights” report.
- Produce and distribute Annual Report
- Rotate display through partner organizations.
- Enhance and provide research results on the web page.

- Participate or observe relevant partner committees and special interest groups.

Eg. FRAG and the AEP Environmental Education Committee.

Initiate and enhance the relationship between other members of the Model Forest Network and the Foothills Model Forest.

- Attend and participate in network communications committee.

GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

Objective

Establish and maintain communications with government (elected and civil servant) representatives to ensure understanding of FMF progress, policies and research projects.

Strategy

Develop a government relations process that effectively communicates with all areas of government that could potentially impact the FMF.

Actions

Develop a government relations process that effectively communicates with all areas of government that could potentially impact the FMF.

- Schedule regular interface opportunities with key Federal, Provincial, and local government representatives.
- Distribute the external newsletter to SPC members, local MP/MLA and other key representatives.
- Create and invite key representatives to regular (annual) tour/event.

PROACTIVE TOOL DEVELOPMENT

To accomplish the communication goal and objectives of this plan, a package of tools with clear, concise and consistent messages must be developed. This package must include:

- a new logo (with the new tag line), letterhead, envelopes, business cards, folders, publication covers, fax cover sheet template
- a new brochure
- an area map
- an information backgrounder
- a newsletter template
- digital image file
- a new display
- a poster

COMMUNICATIONS SITE MANAGEMENT

To facilitate the move into a second iteration and a newly refined communications process, the FMF requires revisions to its administrative structure. The revisions are as follows: creating one FMF office that houses all employees and all necessary infrastructure; organizing phone lines that connect at one central location and then can be transferred to necessary individuals; more administrative assistance for organizing meetings and simple information transfer; and, use one type of computer system.

**COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY
BUDGET**

October 1996 - March 31, 1997

<u>Activity</u>	<u>Cost</u>
Internal Relations	
Staff Training	\$ 2,500
Tool Production	
New Logo/Stationary Production	\$ 5,000
Brochure Design and Printing	\$ 15,000
Newsletter Template Design	\$ 1,500
Poster Design and Printing	\$ 10,000
Photograph storage to CD	\$ 1,000
General Promotions/Novelties	\$ 3,000
Signage	\$ 20,000
Recreation Map Production	\$ 25,000
Display (System and Design)	\$ 12,000
Total	\$ 92,500
Partner Relations	
Annual Report production and printing	\$ 3,000
Tech Transfer	\$ 5,000
Duplicating	\$ 3,000
Total	\$ 11,000
General Expenses	
Newsletter Production and printing	\$ 10,000
Website update and maintenance	\$ 2,000
Vehicle	\$ 5,000
Travel	\$ 5,000
Misc.	\$ 3,000
Professional Development	\$ 500
Cost of Salaries	\$ 30,000
Total	\$ 55,500
<u>Total Budget</u>	<u>\$161,500</u>

April 1, 1997 - March 31, 1998

<u>Activity</u>	<u>Cost</u>
Educational Relations	
Educational Partnerships	\$ 20,000
Educational Conference	<u>\$ 15,000</u>
Total	\$ 35,000
Community Relations	
Advertising	\$ 80,000*
General Promotions/Novelties	\$ 3,000
Jasper Interpretation/ Tourism efforts	\$ 11,000
Tours	\$ 9,000
Demonstration Forest	<u>\$ 9,000</u>
Total	\$112,000
Media Relations	
Media Tour	\$ 3,000
Partner Relations	
Annual Report production and printing	\$ 3,000
Tech Transfer	\$ 10,000
Duplicating	<u>\$ 8,000</u>
Total	\$ 21,000
Government Relations	
VIP Event/Tour	\$ 5,000
General Expenses	
Newsletter Production and printing	\$ 40,000*
Website design and maintenance	\$ 10,000
Vehicle	\$ 5,000
Travel	\$ 10,000
Misc.	\$ 3,000
Professional Development	\$ 1,000
Cost of Salaries	<u>\$ 60,000</u>
Total	\$129,000
Total Budget	\$305,000