

Location is Everything

Finding the best site for any type of demonstration project is essential. The 70,000 ha landscape bisected by Highway 40 that we chose for this demonstration of the effectiveness of using natural pattern knowledge as the foundation for operational-scale disturbance planning was ideal for several reasons:

- 1) **Landscape Integrity.** The existing forest composition, structure and natural disturbance patterns suggest that this landscape is an ecologically relevant entity. However, planning responsibility spans parts of a number of different jurisdictions, including the Weldwood, Alberta Newsprint Co., and Weyerhaeuser FMAs, the Willmore Wilderness Area, and several natural gas leases. Planning disturbance activities across administrative borders will have to become commonplace if we are to sustain ecological integrity.
- 2) **The Plan is “Real”.** The three forest management companies were all required to develop operational plans for this area this year according to their strategic commitments to the province. So this project is not creating any new work. In fact, an important question we are interested in answering is whether this new process requires *less* effort overall.
- 3) **A Challenging Area.** There are a large number of seemingly conflicting local values. The large amount of older foothills forest translates into prime Woodland Caribou habitat, high recreational value, and high timber values. However, it also represents a high wildfire threat, which puts all of these values at risk. The area is also rich in natural gas deposits. This complexity is the best possible situation for applying a natural pattern foundation to planning to see if it can provide sustainable planning solutions to meet all of the desired objectives.
- 4) **Knowledge Base.** We know more about the natural disturbance history of this area than almost anywhere else in Canada. We plan on drawing heavily on that knowledge during the planning process.
- 5) **Visibility, Access.** Consistent with the concept of a “demonstration”, we want to maximize the feedback and learning that takes place from this experience. Having a provincial highway running through the area is a tremendous advantage. We will be developing extensive educational opportunities for the public, other professionals, and academics.
- 6) **Creative and Adaptive Learning.** The unique location and combination of issues means looking beyond the traditional toolbox for some planning solutions. Prescribed burning, disturbing non-merchantable areas, clustering disturbance activities both in space and over time, and detailed long-term access plans will be among the key tools. Also, existing FMF wildlife research and census data gives us the opportunity to predict wildlife responses, learn something new through continued monitoring, and apply what we learn to the next series of operational plans here and elsewhere.

