

FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS AND TRENDS: FORESTRY CORPORATION OF N.Z. LTD'S PERSPECTIVE

**Ross Bawden
Manager Operational Planning
Forestry Corporation of N.Z. Ltd
P O Box 1748, Rotorua**

INTRODUCTION

For more than half a decade, the N.Z. Forest Industry has been aware of the harvesting progression from areas of relatively easy country in terms of physical harvesting and environmental requirements, into areas of much greater difficulty.

This paper will discuss two issues relative to the future success of our industry:

- **The movement in acceptable standards as witnessed in the Bay of Plenty.**
- **The difficulties of harvesting in areas with limited existing infrastructure.**

BAY OF PLENTY

Self imposed constraints are not new. As a trainee in the early 70's, the memory still remains of the wrath inflicted on a sub division O/C by one J.J.K. Spiers when he noticed that a tractor had walked across a stream in Kaingaroa Forest. The Forest Service in many areas maintained

environmental codes which, if followed, would have left us in a more secure position today.

To many people, the Bay of Plenty is the El Dorado of New Zealand logging locations. Sure it has advantages in its pumice soils however this asset has also been a liability - one with increasing implications.

Hydro electric dams have been built, tourism has developed e.g. white water rafting, and the general public have expected access rights into forest areas.

The Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) has focused a number of downstream resource users onto our activities and conferred upon them considerable status in the decision making role.

Since 1989, the Bay of Plenty Regional Council has been targeted by the Bay of Plenty Power Board who continue to blame forestry activities for the premature siltation of their Aniwhenua Dam. They are supported in this argument by various fishing and recreational organisations. This,

despite the fact that current sediment buildups indicate less than 50% of the expected yield from an unforested catchment and very limited harvesting operations in the actual catchments themselves.

This situation highlights probably the major issue for our industry. We have environmentally and socially enhanced many areas of the country through afforestation schemes which have allowed downstream developments to occur - come time to harvest these very developments may well signal our downfall.

SPECIFIC ISSUES

1) Sedimentation

We all know that logging and particularly roading operations, irrespective of how well performed, will increase the natural rate of sedimentation. What is deemed to be an acceptable increase (if any) will be dictated by downstream values. The Rangitaiki River on the eastern boundary of Kaingaroa Forest has three hydro power stations. The Aniwhenua plant operates off a small working head of about 1 metre depth rather than the conventional large dam. Since its completion in 1982, part of the storage area has been dredged twice to remove sediment. The Power Board's objective is clearly to achieve a nil or at least substantially reduced sediment load. This is a river system that has a high natural sediment loading by virtue of the soil type. Whilst the forest was there before the dam, it is possible in law that the Power Board has a strong hand under RMA. The

situation has not been helped by the dredgings being placed adjacent to the lake allowing redeposition of material washed off the mounds.

2) Flora/Fauna

In recent months there has been considerable interest from DOC and Eastern Fish and Game in the impact of harvesting on stream fauna. Whilst we have always paid attention to the larger rivers and streams, this renewed interest extends to the headwaters and wetlands.

The 1992 buzz-word is "riparian". In recent years there has been intense local debate on replanting boundaries. There is suddenly a need to create riparian zones in order to protect often unknown qualities (as evidenced by the frequent inability to answer the question "WHY".) This creativity exists on a national basis.

A Regional Council was recently asked how they would react to the destruction of a multi-specie indigenous forest which was home to a diverse range of wildlife, including Bush Robins and a resident Kokako. It also has a mature pine canopy. They were non-committal but could envisage third party interest in the decision making process because of the diverse flora/fauna association. It may be that the commercial objectives will not outweigh the environmental developments resulting from afforestation.

DOC's Regional Manager in Rotorua, at a recent workshop, asked why a 30 year old pine forest should not be classed as a natural asset and afforded suitable status.

3. Public Expectations

The "greening" of public attitudes has been given legal status by RMA. Members of the public have the right, and no doubt some will demand, an involvement in our management.

Maori issues have been rightly protected.

The public's enhanced expectations of public access and amenity values will further reduce our forest management options as evidenced in Whakarewarewa Forest in recent years. For example, large areas around the Blue and Green Lake can be selectively logged, providing the logs do not touch the ground - in effect, it is now under reserve status.

A local District Council is currently working on a District Plan that seeks to actively discourage afforestation, using the "social wellbeing of the community" (RMA Sec. 5, Pt. 11) as the justification.

Some commentators suggest the new OSH Act will be even worse.

OTHER AREAS

Forestry Corporation has commenced harvesting in two relatively new areas of the country.

WAIRARAPA

Until recently, logging in Wairarapa had been limited to a defined cut at Ngaumu and small cutting right areas held by local sawmills. With the increase in export opportunities, several of the larger companies saw

the opportunities of the area.

Issues

a) Soil & Water:

Wairarapa is clearly an area with considerable soil and water problems. Much of the resource was planted in eroding gullies for the express purpose of soil stabilisation. Despite this, we have found it a relatively easy area to operate in, probably due largely to the absence of public involvement in the decision making progress. This does not mean that standards are inferior or unacceptable. To retain this position industry must maintain as high a standard as they would expect on their own forests in terms of both the environment and wood utilization.

b) Trucking:

Considerable opposition to the increased use of public roads by logging trucks was encountered due to the perceived increased axle loadings and frequencies of truck movements on a road that may have a return school bus trip and one sheep truck per day. Immediately prior to commencing operations, we were advised by a Council Engineer that due to concerns, specifically regarding pavement performance, they were considering imposing weight limits of 50% class 1. This represented a payload of only six tonnes and it was only the personal intervention of the local mayor that saw the operation eventually commence. It is suggested that this scenario will be repeated around the country - eg Woodhill. Industry must take a strong interest in these issues at both NZFOA and company level, with a wide crossflow

of information between companies.

c) Contract Force:

The efficiencies of scale coupled with high skill levels are essential if the low valued radiata is to compete internationally. It is clear that considerable effort is required to achieve optimal returns from areas outside the current forestry centres. Alternatively, we may need to accept that many contractors do not have a "fixed abode" if they want continuity of work at the rates the grower can afford to pay.

MARLBOROUGH

Forestry Corporation are currently harvesting a block in Tory Channel. With more than a year passed since we commenced planning of the block, it is believed that, compared to the issues in the North Eastern Section of Kaingaroa, it is not such a difficult block to actually harvest.

Issues

a) Sedimentation

Whereas large quantities of pumice can "creep" along the bed of an otherwise clear river or stream, the Marlborough soils produce a highly visual fine sediment with potential to discolour large areas of seawater and to affect the marine environment at relatively low discharge volumes. Unlike the pumice which is ongoing, fine sediment tends to be produced during high rainfall events. We do not have total control and retainment facilities and must rely on prevention -

this leaves us open to potential discharges.

b) Public Perception

Whether it be mussel/salmon farmers or recreationists, there is a general mistrust of harvesting operations in this area as a result of previous activities. There is a need to co-operate with and educate these other "users". They must not be taken for granted. The R.M.A. confers on all people the right to comment.

c) Harvesting Technology

It is probable that N.Z. does not have the technology at this stage to completely optimise harvest operations in these sensitive sites. However significant moves in this direction have been made and with the assistance of LIRO, Russell Coker, local Regional Council staff and other interest groups, the cause will have to be advanced considerably on completion of the operation. Naturally Forestry Corporation would like to ensure that the inputs of time and expertise are rewarded by access to further blocks in this area.

d) Transportation

Road/tracking operations are always going to be expensive in terms of finance and environmental conflicts as well as being unreliable (eg inability to meet deadlines in wet weather).

Whilst log barging is not new, the scale of operation has dictated that such transport must be reliable, efficient and economic. To date the service has been all three. Perhaps the forest industry has spent considerable time and money

attempting to reinvent a transport system which has a very long history. The old adage "But forestry is different" is not so in this business and you will be surprised how easy and economic the system is if you let the barge operators have a say in how to set up the operation.

Contract Force

Bay of Plenty contractors were employed to do both the access tracks and harvesting. It is stressed that this was not due to any implied lack of local skills but rather both contractors having established an excellent record of high quality work at high production levels achieved with minimal supervision. Local Regional Council staff were familiar with their operations in the Bay of Plenty and the harvesting contractor was involved right from the outset in the planning and consent approval. It was important to reinforce to all parties the total commitment at all levels to the project. This highlights the need for all parties to be not only experienced but, perhaps above all, reliable to the point where a high level of confidence is held in their operations.

GENERAL COMMENTS

Planning Aids

Whilst good aerial photography is available in most areas, accurate topographical maps with good contour data is seldom found. Thanks to the efforts of LIRO, aerial photos, contour plans and enhanced topography has been most useful,

particularly in matching what was done with what was planned. It is believed there are still considerable advantages in not having such aids at the outset which forces the planner and contractor to become very familiar with the land itself, more so when sensitive areas are being considered. It is however necessary to raise the standard of plans generally to meet the expectations of regulatory authorities and interest groups. A photocopy of a 1:5,000 topo will not convince opponents that you are as professional as you claim to be.

Regulatory Authorities

Inevitably there are differences of interpretation and enforcement of rules from one area to another. This is particularly so in relation to those in Regional Council's charged with environmental management although it is also obvious in OSH, District Councils (public roads) and DOC.

Whilst personalities enter into the way rules are enforced it is believed that a major concern arises where people with no knowledge of the forest industry are able to dictate the way business is undertaken and indeed the eventual economics of the operation, be it of a grower, contractor or company. There are strong grounds to suggest that this situation may become the norm as local government is streamlined and Regional Councils may cease to exist.

Environmental Expertise within the Industry

There is generally a lack of professional environmental expertise within the industry. The employment

by the processing industry of environmental specialists will need to be widened to the in-forest operations where such duties as Environment Impact Assessments, Audits and the training of other staff will become important.

Whilst most planners have a good grasp of traditional soil and water issues, how many of us understand BOD, invertebrate diversity and other obscure terms. If we don't, the industry will be in no position to convince the regulators that operations will meet their required outcomes.

Whilst there may be room for consultants in the initial period, this is no panacea to the future of harvesting. - We need to understand the situation from the planning stage through to post-harvest management.

In accepting that the best harvesting job has a negative impact on the environment, it is vital that we build the industry around the key element of RMA,

"SUSTAINABILITY"

There is an urgent need to draw research data on harvesting and the environment together, identify the gaps and initiate the required research.

CONCLUSION

The time has come to stop talking about the need to be more professional. In sixteen months many people in this room will be looking at huge fines and imprisonment if they have not got their act together. It will

not necessarily be the Regional Councils who initiate action rather well organised, highly professional interest groups stacked with lawyers, scientists and professional environmental researchers. In the short time available we need to achieve equally high levels of professionalism and performance to avoid the Oregon/Washington scenarios.

It may well be that prosecutions arising under the R.M.A. will arise at the lower level of operator, tractor or skidder driver who transgresses in a non-acceptable manner.

To this end, the LIRO code of practice needs to be brought to their level, perhaps in the way the tree planting code was some years ago. It is not acceptable for the tractor driver or cross cutter to not know why he is doing a job the way he is.

At that point we should have a well trained enlightened workforce within the industry which can capitalise on the upgraded commitment at management levels to achieve a result which is beyond reproach by opponents.

As any collective is only as good as its weakest link, urgent attention must be given to a code of practice within the industry. It is clear that we will survive or fall on the performance of "fly by night" operators.

As an industry we have two choices - get rid of them or be regulated to their ability.