
Commission for the study of public forest management in Québec
Final report summary
December 2004

Foreword

The mandate of the Commission for the study of public forest management in Québec, which was set up in October 2003, was to examine the management of public forests and make recommendations in response to the needs and aspirations of the population of Québec. This report is principally the result of public consultations held in 16 cities and four Native communities across Québec, where 303 briefs were submitted, as well as of external studies and meetings with various representatives. A wide range of proposals were submitted to the Commission, indicating how important forests are to the population for the development of Québec and its regions, in harmony with the environment.

The issues addressed permitting, this report has been designed to be reader-friendly for any person concerned with the management of forests in Québec. It includes descriptive elements, situation analyses and potential solutions. Within the scope of its mandate, one of the Commission's objectives was to make recommendations that are as operable as possible. Subject to government decisions, the Commission feels that the implementation of these recommendations should begin as soon as possible.

Although the Commission elected to give a broad interpretation to its mandate, it does not purport to cover all the aspects of the Québec forest system in this report. It is aware that its choices may not satisfy all the requests expressed during the hearings and in the briefs. In fact, many of the recommendations were made in previous consultations. This undoubtedly means that the time has come to move in a more decisive way.

For the sake of conciseness, the use herein of the term "*Department*" refers to the ministère des Ressources naturelles, de la Faune et des Parcs du Québec.

Chapter 1. Québec Forests: A Historical Perspective and a Look to the Future

This chapter examines forests and their management from a historical perspective. This approach revealed that the current concerns are not all new ones—some even date back many years. These concerns are generally well documented, and the solutions well defined. We need to build on this experience to prepare the future. The change in our social values, a better understanding of forest ecology, and the geographic limits of forest productivity require that new ways of seeing and dealing with forests be adopted. We must keep in mind that future generations will inherit the forests we are managing today.

After careful consideration, the Commission proposed the following vision for the future of Québec forests.

Québec forests are part of our collective wealth and are appreciated for each of the values they represent. They are a diversified collection of ecosystems producing important renewable resources that contribute to the quality of life of the people, including the First Nations, for whom forests are the very roots of their cultures. They play a critical social, environmental, and economic role for both the regions and Québec society as a whole. They provide raw materials for a strong industry which is favourably positioned in the global market. They are a vast natural

environment at the basis of tourism, vacation and outdoor activities. They form a complex and ever-changing mosaic of landscapes. They are central to the natural cycles of water and carbon. They are full life, rich in fauna and flora. Their capacity to provide all the benefits to which Québeckers are entitled directly depends on the diversity and quality of these forest ecosystems.

Chapter 2. Québec Forests: Territory, Resources, and Uses

This part of the report briefly describes the biophysical territory of Québec, the diversity of its resources, and the main economic activities associated with Québec forests. This overview will enable the reader to understand the diversity of this ever-changing environment, the multiple uses of its timber and other resources, and the importance of the jobs and economic activity generated in all the regions of Québec. This chapter also broadly addresses some of the issues relating to the harmonization of uses, the vitality of the regions, the global situation, and the prospects for forest products.

Chapter 3. Research, Knowledge Transfer, and Forest-Related Education

Managing forests is also, in a certain way, managing knowledge. This involves acquiring, sharing, transferring and, where needed, popularizing this knowledge. It also means taking into account the values the population associates with forests and ensuring these values are based on accurate perceptions of the forest environment and related activities. This chapter essentially deals with the following: research and knowledge of the territory (inventories, monitoring of silvicultural activities, etc.), knowledge transfer, information and education.

The Commission's examination deals more specifically with the overall organization and funding of the acquisition and transfer of knowledge in Québec, with a view to ensuring that decisions fully take into account the best knowledge available. It is indeed essential that the decisions made by managers and other forest stakeholders be based on the most rigorous science in order to enable forest professionals to make the right choices in their operations. The Commission has found serious gaps in the available knowledge. These are addressed in the next four chapters, which deal with protection, conservation and multi-resource management, the state of the forests, prediction of timber volumes, silviculture and forest management.

The education and awareness aspect, more specifically for the younger generations, is aimed at coordinating and promoting forest and environment educational organizations, education institutions, and other local and regional organizations.

Recommendations:

- 3.1 That the *Forest Research Branch* of the Department become the *Territory Knowledge and Expertise Branch*, whose mandate would be to coordinate the acquisition of knowledge on forest resources and on the various silvicultural processes.
- 3.2 That the activities relating to the acquisition of knowledge of the territory, work monitoring, etc., be more decentralized in the Department's regional offices.
- 3.3 That the *Forest Act* be amended to modify the composition and operations of the current *Forest Research Advisory Council* to enable it to better play its advisory role.

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- 3.4 That the *Fonds québécois de la recherche sur la nature et les technologies* (FQRNT) have access to the budgets required to fund the forest research projects deemed eligible according to the strategic objectives established by the new *Forest Research Advisory Council*, based on the criteria generally used for regular programs. These budgets should be of a minimum initial amount of \$2.5 million and be gradually increased to \$10 million annually over 5 years.
 - 3.5 That the Department create a "Provincial Knowledge and Education Transfer Unit," and that the Conférences régionales des élus (CRÉ) set up "Regional Knowledge and Education Transfer Units," mandated to work in close cooperation with regional and local organizations for education and information on forests and the environment.
 - 3.6 That the Conférences régionales des élus (CRÉ) establish coordination relationships with school boards and the regional branches of the Department to put more emphasis on activities with educational institutions, in particular those for students from 9 to 14, for the dissemination of structured information, the development of appropriate teaching tools, the establishment of networks of cooperation, and the logistical support of teachers.

Chapter 4. Protection, Conservation, and Multi-Resource Management: Directions for Change

This chapter is devoted to resource protection, conservation and development through ecosystem-based management. Discussions deal more specifically with the establishment of protected areas, the use of genetically modified organisms (GMO), the application of sustainable forest management criteria, forest resource development and protection objectives, fauna resources and landscapes, integrated resource management, protection against natural disruptions, climate change, the strategic role of forest roads, and watershed management.

The current management of public forests is strongly oriented towards the production of timber, while providing some protection for other resources. However, ecosystem-based management—aimed at maintaining the environmental processes required to preserve the composition, structure and functions of the ecosystems—clearly seems more promising, not only for protecting the environment and achieving a better balance in development priorities, but also to ensure long-term viability for timber processing companies.

As regards protected areas, the Commission observes that Québec is lagging behind compared to the other Canadian provinces, and compared to its own target. The Commission also recognizes the role of the *Bureau d'audiences publiques sur l'environnement* (BAPE) for broadening consultations and maintaining public confidence as regards the environmental aspect of public forest management.

In a context where management strategies for Québec forests are being redefined, the Commission also sees the implementation of a forest road program as a priority. In boreal forests, this program would make it possible to harvest a higher number of presently inaccessible overmature stands, while meeting environmental protection objectives and maintaining biological diversity. In the southernmost part of Québec, priority should be given to a forest road strategy that would take into account multi-resource land development.

Recommendations:

- 4.1 That ecosystem-based management be central to Québec public forest management.
- 4.2 That the objective of the Government to protect an area equivalent to 8% of the forest territory be met, in each natural province, by 2006.

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- 4.3 That 12% of the area of each natural province located in Québec's boreal forest be part of the protected area network by 2010.
 - 4.4 That any use of genetically modified organisms (GMO) in Québec's forests be rigorously submitted to generic hearings conducted by the *Bureau d'audiences publiques sur l'environnement*.
 - 4.5 That the sustainable forest management criteria defined by the Canadian Council of Forest Ministers be more integrated into the scope of the *Forestry Act*, by identifying, for each criterion, indicators to be used as a basis for periodically circulating a public report on the progress achieved in meeting sustainable forest management objectives.
 - 4.6 That the *Regulation respecting standards of forest management for forests in the public domain* become the *Regulation respecting sustainable forest management*, which should include all the environment protection conditions applicable to Québec public forests and be subjected to generic hearings, every five years, by the Bureau d'audiences publiques sur l'environnement.
 - 4.7 That the *Forestry Act* clearly stress the requirement for integrated resource management before any licence be granted on structured areas and areas located near identified salmon rivers, and that these territories be given specific protection.
 - 4.8 That the forest system give special prominence to landscape protection and development, notably through a new *Regulation respecting sustainable forest management*, and that specific conditions be defined by regional forest commissions.
 - 4.9 That the Department better coordinate sustainable forest development and multiple use objectives with integrated forest pest management activities.
 - 4.10 That the Government invest in the acquisition of knowledge on forest pests to allow for an integrated management of these pests.
 - 4.11 That the *Société de protection des forêts contre les insectes et les maladies* (SOPFIM) refocus its activities on its basic mission, consisting in the protection of the forests of Québec.
 - 4.12 That the *Société de protection des forêts contre les insectes et les maladies* (SOPFIM), which is responsible for forest pest control, and the entomological and pathological components of the Department's Conservation Branch, which are responsible for detection, surveillance and prevention, be grouped into a single corporation.
 - 4.13 That the legislative provisions pertaining to territory access control be relaxed in order to facilitate the temporary or definitive closure of permanent forest roads or operations.
 - 4.14 That the forest road network be planned by all territory users as part of the regional forest development plan process.
 - 4.15 That a forest road system assistance program be set up in order to allow for the construction, rehabilitation, closure or access control, and maintenance of the main road network.
 - 4.16 That, in the wake of the *National Water Policy*, the watershed approach be adopted for the preparation of each regional forest development plan.
 - 4.17 That within each forest management unit, whose delimitation will be in effect at the next planning cycle, the watershed approach be predominant.
 - 4.18 That the regional forest development plans, prepared by the regional forest commissions and renewed every five years, be submitted to a public consultation conducted by the *Bureau d'audiences publiques sur l'environnement*.

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- 4.19 That the integrated forest management plans (IFMP), general and dynamic, be the result of a dialogue between the users present in the forest management unit. In the case of a conflict that cannot be resolved at the local or regional level, the Minister of Natural Resources, Wildlife and Parks may make a decision, ask the *Bureau des audiences publiques sur l'environnement* to carry out an environmental impact assessment of the general IFMP, or use other arbitration mechanisms.

Chapter 5. State of the Forests and Timber Volume Predictions: Directions for Change

In this fifth part of the report, which is central to the Commission's mandate, the Commission examines the processes for assessing the state of the forests, notably using the ten-year inventory system, and the methods used to determine the availability of timber for harvest. This chapter also provides some answers to specific questions: Based on the current levels of harvest, can our forest capital be maintained, and can its long-term yield be guaranteed?

Following the analysis of timber quantity, quality and accessibility, one of the Commission's conclusions is that, considering all the other pressures exerted on forests, their timber is overharvested, and this overharvesting is directly associated with the fact that a large part of silvicultural management is inadequate.

In hardwood forests, there has been high-grading. To this day, selection cutting has only been applied partially, and the Commission recommends a widespread rehabilitation program for degraded hardwood forests. As for softwood forests, the Commission observed a disturbing reduction in timber between the last two forest inventories. This reduction indicates that the combined wood removal factors—harvest, losses due to natural disruptions, and tree mortality—are now greater than the timber yield softwood forests are able to provide.

The Commission has also identified serious flaws in the methods currently used to measure the state of the forests and estimate timber yield potentials. Specific recommendations are made for corrective actions to be integrated into the next management plans that will be developed throughout Québec.

Meanwhile, the Commission feels that care should be exercised with respect to the volumes of timber that are actually available for harvest in public forests, while ensuring that Québec timber processing companies, which generate thousands of jobs and significantly contribute to Québec's economy, have access to a stable supply base.

Recommendations:

- 5.1 That the contours of the survey units used in the inventory system be made consistent with forest management units, as proposed by the Department for the fourth ten-year inventory program.
- 5.2 That sampling and stratification be reviewed to provide a level of precision that is consistent with the Department's precision objectives. On the one hand, the "temporary" sample plots used in the inventory system will need to be increased to limit the use of "recruited" and "updated" plots. On the other hand, the basic principles of sampling theory will need to be more consistently adhered to.
- 5.3 That, for the purpose of calculating timber yield potential, "recruited" and "updated" sampling plots be used only for the parameters for which precision is too low. The use of these types of plots should be controlled in such a way that they will reflect the conditions in which they are applied.
- 5.4 That the analysis system for calculating timber yield potential be more favourable to broader inventory sub-populations in order to achieve more precision in wood volume estimations.

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- 5.5 That new technologies for acquiring knowledge of the territory and its resources be integrated into the inventory system.
 - 5.6 That the "passage rate" growth module used for calculating timber yield potential in uneven-aged populations be replaced by a tool including the accessibility dimensions of timber, in space and time, and which is more consistent with the precision obtained with forest inventory data.
 - 5.7 That the methodology for estimating timber yield potential for uneven-aged populations be improved, mainly by eliminating conservation equations in the "growth curve" module, and by integrating spatial dimensions (accessibility in time and space).
 - 5.8 That audit tools be included in timber yield potential calculations, and that these calculations be better supervised by the professional judgement of the forest manager, so as to be more consistent with the biophysical reality of each forest management unit.
 - 5.9 That the next general integrated forest management plans (IFMP) be based on timber yield potential estimations that take into account the spatial dimensions surrounding the available volumes of wood, including the principle of "sustained yield at variable harvest levels" for uneven-aged populations.
 - 5.10 That major changes be made to silvicultural strategies in the next integrated forest management plans (IFMP), for both softwood and hardwood forests, to ensure a sustainable development of the Québec forest heritage.

Chapter 6. Silviculture and Timber Management: Directions for Change

In this chapter, the Commission proposes several major shifts in silviculture and timber management. The topics covered include a major re-engineering in management approaches and the management of silvicultural credits eligible for the payment of dues, hardwood forest rehabilitation, intensive silvicultural projects, and inhabited forest projects. Other issues include the key role played by private forests, in a context of complementarity with public forests, the value of forest work, and the necessary rationalization of the wood product industry.

Faced with a major deficit in quality hardwoods and the need for a downward review of the maximum sustainable yield estimates for softwood forests, the Commission recommends a series of solutions to bring wood production to new levels. In addition to completing the protected area network and applying ecosystem-based management principles, this new silvicultural balance must be geared, on the one hand, toward the wood production capacity of forests and, on the other, toward the ability of a wood processing industry to compete on world markets.

The Commission questioned, among other things, the notion of yield effect. Depending on the percentage of harvested volumes the yield effect represents, there is no question that using it when allocating wood volumes entails certain risks for the long-term future of forests, companies and communities that depend on them. The search for a new general balance in the forest system involves a major shift in silviculture and timber management, which should be part of the silvicultural strategies that are based on an ecosystem-based management of the forests and that take into account the spatial and economic aspects of the actions, that are more oriented towards results, associated with adaptive management and concerned with rigorously monitoring actions and favouring innovation, based on a functional zoning of the territory.

During the Commission's consultations, several stakeholders also said they would like to see more diverse forms of organization on the territory. Some of them stated that they were interested in inhabited forest projects. Among the pilot projects undertaken in Québec in the

1990s, some are still active, even though they are isolated initiatives that receive little support. The Commission recommends that the government make it easier to carry out inhabited forest projects, by granting long-term usufruct contracts for resources, based on contracts specific to this type of project.

The low utilisation rate of the wood processing industry's capacity, along with the anticipated decrease in timber yield potentials and resulting allocations, the precarious conditions of the newsprint sector and fierce international competition for standard softwood lumber products seem to indicate that the trend toward consolidation in the Québec industry will accelerate in the coming years. The Commission considers that Québec companies that process wood fibre clearly need more flexibility so that they can adjust to changing economic conditions. The advantage of being close to the American market will always exist, but the government must definitely act as a facilitator in the rationalization of the primary processing industry.

As regards private forests, the Commission observes that these play an important strategic role, and that it is in the interest of the public that the investments made in these forests over the last thirty years pay off. Furthermore, private forests should continue to be an active part of wood supply for the future and contribute in a positive way to the development of non-timber resources, the preservation of forest ecosystems, and the conservation of the environment. In this respect, regional private forest development agencies should be maintained; private forests should provide a fair share of the intensive silvicultural effort and participate in inhabited forest initiatives; and woodlot owners should be encouraged to actively participate in the conservation of forest ecosystems.

During its work, the Commission was especially concerned about the fate of forest workers, be it for their difficult working conditions, including low wages and the loss of prestige in their trades, or the precarious situation of the companies that hire them. Despite efforts to improve the situation in recent years through various initiatives, their situation remains uncertain. The Commission believes that it is important to continue and increase measures not only to attract and retain workers, but also to create the conditions that will enable forest management companies to develop over the long term. It is essential that forest management work be realized and timber be harvested, while ensuring that working conditions reflect the importance Québec society places on its forests.

Recommendations:

- 6.1 That the maximum level of annual harvest for each forest management unit be determined by various inputs—one of the most important of which is the estimation of potential timber yield—and that this level be determined according to a basic management assumption (harvested site put back into production with full stocking) which does not automatically anticipate the management strategy yield effect without considering the risks and assessing the impacts.
- 6.2 That, consistent with sustained yield, the maximum level of annual harvest, reviewed every five years for each forest management unit, be allocated according to two components: recurrent volumes, and non-recurrent volumes.
- 6.3 That the Department adopt a more objective-oriented management model by implementing a global framework that defines broad sustainable management guidelines for Québec forests and enables regional authorities to adapt these guidelines to regional and local realities.
- 6.4 That the Department, together with regional authorities, review the *Forest Management Manual* and its *Relative Instructions*, with a view to developing a silvicultural guide that would be reviewed on a regular basis.

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- 6.5 That the Department implement a full reforestation policy after harvesting, at the operator's expense, in all Québec public forests, based on the quality and the biophysical characteristics of the sites.
- 6.6 That the Department implement a major hardwood forest rehabilitation program.
- 6.7 That the Department implement an intensive silvicultural strategy aimed at increasing timber yield through specific projects on high-potential sites in both public and private forests. This strategy should include the following main elements:
- a functional zoning of the territory in each region;
 - territories targeted for their high timber gain potential;
 - calls for proposals managed by regional authorities;
 - a contract between the promoter and the Government;
 - the profitability of each project;
 - two types of projects: intensive silviculture in natural forests, and tree farming;
 - types of wood offered on the market;
 - follow-up mechanisms;
 - silvicultural investment protection strategies.
- 6.8 That the Department make it easier to carry out inhabited forest projects, by granting long-term usufruct contracts for resources to communities that have demonstrated their commitment to such projects, notably by including private land and intra-municipal lots in their projects.
- 6.9 That the Department initiate a diversification of the types of public forest management contracts in Québec.
- 6.10 That the Department adopt a proactive strategy aimed at providing a greater margin for manoeuvring to timber-processing companies to adapt to the difficult situation they are in, while minimizing impacts on employment.
- 6.11 That the Department adopt a transition strategy for readjusting the overall budget based on the following priorities:
- the acquisition of knowledge;
 - a forest road program;
 - the rehabilitation of the hardwood forest;
 - intensive silvicultural projects;
 - inhabited forest projects;
 - a program to support forest stakeholders.
- 6.12 That the Department efficiently apply the residuality principle in cases of major natural disasters (ice rain, epidemics, etc.) so that lost timber in private forests can be recovered.
- 6.13 That basic tripartite funding (Government, industry, woodlot owners) be provided for regional private forest development agencies to enable them to adequately perform their functions, which include concertation, planning, private forest protection and development, project management, auditing and monitoring, training, information, and knowledge transfer.
- 6.14 That regional private forest development agencies include firewood in management strategies and harvested volumes.
- 6.15 That intensive silvicultural projects in private forests be managed by regional private forest development agencies.
- 6.16 That owner organizations submit wood marketing to forest and environment best practices, notably by applying forest management plans and implementing certification processes.
- 6.17 That the Department support the development of forest certification systems that meet the specific requirements of woodlot owners.

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- 6.18 That the Government and regional private forest development agencies diversify the conservation incentive mechanisms for owners (property pooling, long-term leasing, property purchasing, payment for environmental services, restoration of fragile environments, postponement of the harvest period, etc.).
 - 6.19 That the *Labour Code*'s definition of the term "logging operation" be extended to include commercial work, such as wood harvesting, and non-commercial work, such as pre-harvesting preparatory activities and silvicultural work related to forest regeneration; and that the "presumption method" used to identify the entity formally responsible for management activities and which is deemed to be the employer of all the salaried workers in its operation be maintained.
 - 6.20 That the *Act respecting occupational health and safety* be modified to designate the body responsible for forest management as the main contractor, who would thereby become responsible for the health and safety of the workers performing the work.
 - 6.21 That the *In-Company Labour Development Support Program* be restored, and that the *On-the-Job Training Program* be maintained.
 - 6.22 That, for all work performed in public forests, accreditation of forest management companies be required as a mandatory prerequisite for the completion of work in all forest management units.

Chapter 7. Integrated Management, Decentralization and Transparency: Directions for Change

Some of the themes that were central to the Commission's consultations include decentralization, transparency and the active participation in forest management from the regional and local levels. In this chapter, the Commission addresses the methods for managing Québec's public forests. The Commission recommends several changes to the role of the Department and its interactions with regional authorities and stakeholders within the forest management units. The creation of a new function, that of Chief Forester, is a central element of these changes. It is also in this chapter that the Commission discusses issues relating to control, wood scaling and the certification of forest practices. Finally, a few directions are proposed regarding the forest/factory connection in order to allow for more flexibility in the flow of wood between factories and move toward the creation of a market for timber harvested in public forests.

During the public hearings, several participants called for a decentralization of land-use management and planning, and more power for regional managers of the Department. For their part, the Conférences régionales des élus (CRÉ) strongly emphasized their desire for a true regionalization of forest management and one that is better adapted to each community's specific situation.

In this chapter, the Commission stresses that access to relevant and quality information, along with the ability to respect multiple points of view, are key elements for true participation by local and regional stakeholders. All this will only be possible to the extent that processes are credible and transparent, with one of the main goals being to regain the public's trust in the forest sector. The Commission therefore made several recommendations pertaining to organizational structure.

Recommendations:

- 7.1 That a unified Regional Branch of the Department be set up in each region, joining Forêt Québec and Faune Québec, with an increased deconcentration of personnel and an increase in powers.

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- 7.2 That the Government table in the National Assembly, as soon as possible, a bill creating the position of "Chief Forester" of public forests lands, specifying its incumbent's nomination conditions, determining his or her responsibilities, and establishing an institutional framework reflecting independence, neutrality and scientific integrity requirements.
 - 7.3 That the Conférences régionales des élus (CRÉ) be designated as the regional political points of contact responsible for the implementation of the "regional forest commissions," the approval of the "regional forest development plans," and the approval of intensive silvicultural and inhabited forest projects.
 - 7.4 That, in each region interested, a regional forest commission be set up, with specific responsibilities for the preparation of the regional forest development plan, coordination between the various parties involved, and the analysis of intensive silvicultural and inhabited forest projects.
 - 7.5 That the Government make the necessary changes for establishing, on each forest management unit, a local planning organization responsible for producing the integrated forest management plans (general and dynamic), for conducting public consultations, for coordinating the work, and for certifying land management practices.
 - 7.6 That the five-year forest management program and the annual forest activity plan be merged into a single operational plan, i.e. the dynamic integrated forest management plan (IFMP), including a detailed biennial planning of activity sectors and infrastructures, as well as planning orientations for the three subsequent years.
 - 7.7 That, throughout Québec, the submission of the general IFMP be spread over five years. This spread could be initiated following the completion of the next general plans, based on a schedule reflecting the context of each region.
 - 7.8 That the Government create the position of Forest Auditor, linked to the office of the Québec Auditor General and responsible for examining whether forest management is consistent with established quality rules and criteria.
 - 7.9 That the Department clearly define an evaluation framework for the forest management system and identify the indicators to be used as the basis for the supervision and control of forest management activities.
 - 7.10 That the Government of Québec carry out a thorough benchmarking exercise of its forest management relative to other jurisdictions, in order to identify any significant gaps and related causes.
 - 7.11 That the Department publish departmental scaling audit results each year.
 - 7.12 While ensuring transparency in the fee system, that all merchantable and non-merchantable wood harvested in public forests be scaled, including stems with a diameter of 9 cm or less, and that the stumpage fees from these small stems be collected directly.
 - 7.13 That the Department implement mechanisms to enable the *Association des mesureurs de bois licenciés du Québec* to participate in the development of frameworks relating to the evaluation process for issuing and renewing culler's licences, and to the processing of culling complaints.
 - 7.14 That the computerized culling management tool "*Mesubois*" be improved so as to better integrate the Department's culling audits in order to help analyse, manage and disseminate the results.
 - 7.15 That all forest management units in Québec public forests be engaged in a forest certification process under an internationally recognized standard by the end of 2007.
 - 7.16 That the Department adopt a proactive forest certification approach, notably in the following areas:

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- promoting forest certification in Québec and actively supporting territorial certification procedures by developing policies and guidelines to assist in their adoption;
 - seeing that third-party participation processes for planning forest management activities be recognized by the certification systems to avoid duplications in concertation actions;
 - participating more actively in the development and improvement of forest certification systems.

Chapter 8. Natives and Forest Management

Several parts of the report deal with the special relationships the First Nations have with forests. This chapter, however, deals more specifically with the Native aspect of forest management in Québec. The situation of these communities should lead to specific consultation and harmonization measures. This chapter is therefore devoted to communication, participation, and regional concertation aspects in planning forest management activities. Also covered are Native employment development and the active participation of Native forest operations in forest management.

The Commission based its recommendations on an increasingly growing consensus according to which Natives, because of their legal situation, are called upon to play a specific role in the management of natural resources, including forests.

Recommendations:

- 8.1 That the political authorities of Native communities located in forest regions meet with the political authorities of these regions (RCM or CRÉ) to harmonize communication and participation strategies and agree on the established concertation mechanisms.
- 8.2 That training and job creation programs be extended so as to favour the development of Native silvicultural labour.
- 8.3 That Native forest operations be invited to actively participate in intensive silvicultural and inhabited forest projects, and that the conditions facilitating their stability and the development of their management capacities and professional skills be implemented (accreditation, increased planning responsibility, management contracts extending over periods of 3 to 5 years, more flexibility in the performance of work, etc.)

Chapter 9. Implementation of the Changes

This last chapter concludes the report with a reminder of the proposed shifts. An implementation framework for the recommendations is proposed for completing the transition and coordinating the changes. Operational priorities and a financial framework are also discussed. The Commission stresses the global nature of the proposals and on the necessity to conclude implementation agreements with the parties involved.

Furthermore, the Commission took into account the Government's limited margin for manoeuvre. Its proposals are therefore consistent with current budgetary allowances. In a sustainable development perspective, the Commission attempted to respond, in a balanced way, to social, economic and environmental concerns and aspirations.

Special attention was also paid so as to avoid adding new management structures. Furthermore, the proposals should not be seen as rigid measures, applicable everywhere and uniformly. The Commission is also aware that its recommendations are made at a time of transition, with measures that have already been stated, particularly by the Department, but that have not been fully implemented.

The Commission considers that the governing principle in the sustainable development of Québec forests should be ecosystem-based management, which should translate into concrete actions that recognize the predominance of ecosystems. This recognition is in fact the recognition of the very nature of the forest and requires that it be managed as a whole, considering all its aspects.

To be significant, this shift towards ecosystem-based management involves two conditions:

- a true and official political will that this shift be that of political authorities;
- the implementation of concrete measures to give life and a critical mass to this change.

The Commission can only firmly recommend that the Government meet the first condition. The decision is theirs to make.

The second condition involves a more complex scenario. The Commission is aware that completing all the changes at the same time has risks. However, with good planning and coordination, these risks can be managed. On the other hand, if exaggerated caution should set in, there are very strong possibilities that bureaucratic inertia would also set in, for both the Government and other stakeholders, and then caution would become resistance to change.

The Commission believes that the current conditions are appropriate for implementing major changes. The nature of these changes has been explained throughout the report. Over the next two or three years, it will be essential to open wide the windows of the "forest house" to let in the fresh air that will act as a wind of change at a time when changes are inevitable anyway.

With dynamic coordination, many changes can be made at the same time: a work group making the necessary changes to the software program Sylva and the potential timber yield estimation process; a CRÉ implementing its regional forest commission and the Government adopting legislative changes for the creation of a Chief Forester position, thus enabling his or her appointment and the formation of his or her team. All these actions, and many others, should not follow a chronological logic but a simultaneity logic; most changes targeted by the Commission are linked and have interlocking influence, thus it is necessary to quickly achieve a critical mass of concrete results.

It should be stressed that these shifts should be part of other processes already underway, including the development of the general forest management plans to be executory on April 1, 2007.

Finally, the Commission believes that true changes will emerge from clearly expressed major shifts and from an operational roadmap. It is the responsibility of the various parties concerned to do what it takes in the coming years to ensure the operation will be successful.

Recommendations:

- 9.1 That the next integrated forest management plans (IFMP) become effective on April 1, 2008 instead of 2007, as initially planned.
- 9.2 That, until the 2008-2013 IFMPs become effective, the potential timber yield for FSPL group (fir, spruce, jack pine and larch) be reduced by 20% from the sustainable yield presently in effect in each of the public forest's territorial units, and that the allocations be adjusted according to the specific situation of each territorial unit.

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- 9.3 That, until the 2008-2013 IFMPs become effective, the potential timber yield for all groups except FSPL, as established for the general plans presently in effect in each territorial unit, remain unchanged.

Considering the decline for the FSPL group and the impact this may have on the harvest of hardwoods in mixed wood stands, it will be important to ensure that authorized harvest volumes for hardwoods do not exceed the potential yield in these stands.

- 9.4 That an implementation team be set up as early as possible in 2005, for a period ending on December 31, 2007, to determine the timelines, the work plans and the form of the reports to be submitted to the Minister.
- 9.4 That priority be given to the implementation of the following simultaneous actions:
- a organizational structure re-engineered to accommodate an integrated, supervised, decentralized and transparent management;
 - potential timber yields calculated on new bases;
 - a re-engineering of programs oriented towards economic choices;
 - more flexibility to enable the industry to adapt to the situation;
 - a more favourable context for forest workers and management companies.

The Commission has charted the course for the major changes that should be progressively implemented, by early 2008, to achieve a critical mass of concrete results that will help move the centre of gravity of forest management. These changes, formulated above and explained in the previous chapters, are based on five major shifts:

1. Managing the Forest as a Whole, Based on an Ecosystem Approach (Chapters 1, 3, 4 and 7)

To complete the transition between a forest being mostly managed according to a resource—timber—and a forest managed as a whole, according to ecosystems, it is important to integrate the new social values for sustainable development, the environment and the preservation of biodiversity. Knowledge, methods, techniques and forest operation expertise must also be developed, in particular for ecosystem-based management to become operational. The necessary balance to achieve multi-resource management will require close cooperation between the Government and forest users. As this takes place, the shape of the forests to be built for the future will be defined.

2. Allocating Timber According to the Quality and Accessibility of Available Volumes (Chapters 5 and 6)

This shift consists in moving from timber management based on volumes to broader management of hardwood, mixed, and softwood forests which, aside from quantity, is also based on tree quality and stand accessibility, in time and space. This involves physical (roads) and economic aspects as well as the restrictions that apply to environment protection objectives and other uses of the land. It is critical to improve, and in certain cases to change, the methods for assessing the state of forests and determining the availability of the timber to harvest.

3. Producing Wood the Right Way, at the Right Place, at the Right Time (Chapter 6)

The silvicultural shift proposed by the Commission consists in targeting the right treatments, at the right place, and at the right time, to produce more and better, taking into account the scarcity factor of both timber and the financial resources to manage it.

From a silviculture seeking the yield effect throughout the territory, the shift is towards a silviculture that is more refined, more conscious of its intrinsic profitability, and better targeted, on sites with the greatest potential timber yield or from increased exploitation throughout the range of possible activities, in both public and private forests.

4. Preparing the Inevitable Consolidation of the Wood Product Industry (Chapters 2, 6 and 7)

The low utilisation rate of the wood processing industry's capacity, along with the anticipated decrease in timber yield potentials and resulting allocations, the precarious conditions of the newsprint sector and fierce international competition for standard softwood lumber products seem to indicate that the movement toward consolidation in the industry will accelerate in the coming years. Faced with this strong trend, it is imperative that a series of actions be implemented to facilitate consolidation—consistent with maintaining industrial forest development—and minimize the negative impacts. The regions should be supported to help diversify their economy, develop niche products (2nd and 3rd processing), facilitate rationalization, and increase comparative advantages, for example by favouring forest certification.

5. Decentralizing Forest Management with Transparency, Information and Participation (Chapters 3, 7 and 8)

This shift is aimed at moving from a normative centralized management to a management where powers are regionalized and decentralized, thereby enabling the communities to more actively participate in the protection and development of the forest environment, while allowing the population of Québec to take control of their public forests. It is necessary to establish a supervised but decentralized forest system, more oriented towards regionally defined results and objectives, the achievement of which is measured periodically and interpreted according to an adaptive strategy favouring innovation and experimentation, in a nonetheless rigorous framework. The situation of Native communities must lead to particular conditions, notably as regards communication, participation and regional concertation aspects when planning and carrying out forest management activities. This will only be possible if processes are transparent and restore confidence in the forest industry.

The Commission is well aware that achieving these shifts, by the implementation of the major directions for change and in a context of re-engineering of existing financial resources, represents a challenge for all stakeholders.

The Government, the Department and its implementation committee will need to perfect the strategy for the recommended changes, define each element more precisely, establish the course they will take, assess their impacts for both the Government and companies, and harmonize their implementation so as to minimize any risk of major drifting. The key is to achieve a critical mass of the targeted changes in the coming years.

As for the wood product industry, which is already in a difficult situation, it should view this change as an opportunity to quickly adjust and benefit, on the one hand, from the clarity of the orientations, and on the other hand, from the greater flexibility and new programs it is offered.

Finally, for the many parties whose concerns are about forest work, protection, conservation and multiple uses of the forest environment, these changes should be an opportunity to rebalance their concerns with those of their industrial counterparts.