

*Biodiversity,
Our Priority*

Forests

Newsletter from Québec

Over the last two years, Québec has been engaged in a major forest-related process, the review of its forest regime. Indeed, although the Forest Act, on which the regime is based, has been amended on several occasions to reflect the changing needs of Québec's society, the current operation is of major significance in that it involves all Québec's forest sector players.



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Sustainable development

A MAJOR OPERATION IN QUÉBEC: THE FOREST REGIME REVIEW

The operation is based on the participation of every individual and group concerned by the management and sustainable development of Québec's forests.

The Québec government, which is the main forest manager, was keen to ensure that any modifications to the regime were the subject of a broad consensus by all forest users.

Québec's forest regime, already considered one of the most avant-garde in Canada, has been in existence for only twelve years. Nevertheless, the Québec government has agreed to modify it, so that it responds to the new issues raised by the question of sustainable forest development.

Sustainable forest management must, among other things, take into account the social values and quality of life of the population, and promote a fair division of resources and wealth in the community. Accordingly, it is based on the presumption that the communities are able to take part in decisions concerning forest use, and that they receive a significant portion of the spin-offs generated by the forest environment.

In 1996, the Québec government amended its *Forest Act* to include the six criteria for sustainable development agreed upon at the 1994 *Earth Summit* in Rio de Janeiro. Four of these criteria are concerned with ecological aspects, advocating the conservation of biological diversity, improvements to forest ecosystem productivity and the conservation of water and soil resources, and stipulating the role played by forest ecosystems in protecting global ecological cycles.

The other two criteria state that sustainable forest management must protect the social and economic benefits provided for society by the forests, and that development choices must take into account the values and needs of the population.

The updating of the forest regime, the substance of which will be incorporated into the *Forest Act* next spring, will provide legislative, regulatory and normative confirmation that the principles of sustainability form the basis of forest management and development in Québec.



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THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE ENTIRE POPULATION

All Québec's forest sector players are involved actively in the updating of the forest regime – the forest industry, employees' unions, educational institutions, research institutes, wildlife protection bodies, the government, professional associations, sporting associations, the Aboriginal nations, and others. The general public is also called upon to contribute, at public hearings held in every region of Québec.



APES, ANTON FERCHER

The Québec government believes it is primordial for as many Québeckers as possible to take part in this important consultation. It also hopes that a broad consensus can be reached concerning the proposals it has made for the updating of the regime.

The updating of the forest regime is a major step in the development of Québec's forest sector. It began two years ago, when the ministère des Ressources naturelles decided to review the current regime, document new forest management issues and make some preliminary proposals for modifications to the regime. Its proposals were debated throughout the fall, at consultation hearings.

Québec's entire forest community, including the general public, is involved in the updating of the regime.

Before the end of the operation, other government departments with an interest in the forests will also be consulted. A summary of the consultations will be published, and a legislative framework will be established. The framework will be used to incorporate the modifications to the forest regime in the legislation, regulations, standards and programs governing all aspects of forest-related activity in Québec.

POSITIVE RESULTS

The Québec government has taken advantage of the updating process to carry out a review of the forest regime. The present regime is based on the Forest Act, which came into force in 1986. Its initial objectives were:

- to protect the forest environment and promote different uses of the forest;
- to ensure compliance with the allowable annual cut;
- to enhance the responsibility of the forest companies;
- to promote the development of the forest sector;
- to protect the public interest.

The review has shown that most of these initial objectives have been achieved. Generally speaking, the regime has helped promote the growth of the forest sector, in particular by enabling the sawmill industry to expand and by allowing the timber from the public forests to be used more efficiently. In Québec, 90% of the forests are publicly owned.

Analysis of the forest regime also reveals that the *Forest Act* has helped ensure compliance by Québec's forest companies with the allowable annual cut and forest management strategies. In addition, it shows that Québec's forest environment is now better protected than ever before during the last decade.

Pierre Cornellier, Executive Assistant to the Associate Deputy Minister, Forests (left) and Marc Ledoux, Associate Deputy Minister, Forests, ministère des Ressources naturelles, during consultations on the forest regime.



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These gains have been ascribed to some of the strategies proposed by the government, including the Forest Protection Strategy, the forest ecosystem supervision apparatus, the knowledge and conservation program for exceptional forest ecosystems, and others.

Lastly, the review has shown that forest management in Québec is now better suited to the needs of the community. For example, the dues paid to the government by the forest companies for the timber they harvest are eight times higher than they were ten years ago. In addition, the planning of forest operations now takes into account the aspirations of the general public, which was not the case a decade ago.



THE NEW CHALLENGES OF FOREST MANAGEMENT IN QUÉBEC

The principles of sustainable development form the basis of Québec's new forest management issues. The updating of the forest regime confirms the importance the government ascribes to the universal development principles stating that forest management must no longer be aimed at satisfying the needs of target groups, but must instead be based on social, economic and environmental concerns.

The updating of the forest regime was needed to enable Québec to face these new challenges, using sustainable forest management approaches:

forest management for and by the people;

forest management for the biosphere and the natural environment;

forest management for resources and the economy.

Forest management for and by the people means:

mobilizing local and Aboriginal communities around forest management projects;

allowing the communities to benefit from forest resource development spin-offs;

promoting transparency in decision-making;

encouraging local and Aboriginal communities to take part in the decision-making process.

Forest management for the biosphere and the natural environment means:

helping preserve the major planetary cycles and the ecological functions of forest ecosystems;

protecting ecosystems (especially exceptional ecosystems), fragile environments, vulnerable species, etc.

promoting the economic use of forest resources by encouraging recycling, waste recovery, energy savings, etc.

Sustainable forest management for resources and the economy means:

creating companies that develop the different forest resources;

improving resource processing;

consolidating rural communities by using and developing forest resources to the maximum;

adapting management methods and systems in line with the rules and demands of sustainable forest management.



THE OBJECTIVES OF THE UPDATING PROCESS

The purpose of the updating process is to bring forest management in Québec into conformity with the values and aspirations of the community. If this ultimate objective is to be achieved, it is important for the population to participate in the planning of forest management and development activities, and for management methods to be both sustainable and transparent.



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Accordingly, the success of the renewed forest regime depends on four general objectives, each generating a number of specific objectives:

1 Compliance with the deep-seated values of the population, and satisfaction of the population's needs

Increasing participation in the forest management process by the general public, the communities, the Aboriginal people and local and regional institutions;

Increasing the social and economic spin-offs from forest development at the local and regional level and in the Aboriginal communities.

2 Preservation of forest ecosystem viability

Protecting biological diversity;

Preserving the ecological functions of the forest ecosystems;

Assuring the government that resources will be used economically.

3 More social and economic spin-offs from forest use

Increasing resource production;

Making optimal use of the timber resource;

Improving the industry's competitiveness;

Improving resource processing;

Assuring the government of a fair return on the use of public forest resources.

4

Greater transparency in forest management

Improving the public accounting process;

Enhancing the transparency of the roles assigned to every player in the forest environment, whether public or private.



ASSEMBLÉE NATIONALE

For Jacques Brassard, Québec's Minister of Natural Resources, the updating of the forest regime provides eloquent confirmation that the principles of sustainability form the basis of forest management and development in Québec.

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