

Atkinson Creek Collaborative Planning Session
April 26th, 2018
Summary of Stakeholder Comments and SLS Response

Spray Lake Sawmills (SLS) hosted a collaborative planning session to discuss the planned timber harvest in the Atkinson Creek compartment. SLS reviewed the planning hierarchy and government submissions required prior to harvest operations. The group then discussed SLS and stakeholder values in the area, both specific and general.

Attendees:

- Allen Mottet – Spray Lake Sawmills
- Katherine Calvert – Ghost Watershed Alliance Society

Subject: Access Management

The impacts of roads on resource values may require mitigation through access control measures.

Discussion / Comments:

- Stakeholder asked for information on SLS's access control policy, specifically on the reporting process to GOA regarding witnessing access control violations.

SLS Response:

Wildlife, sensitive areas, protection of road quality, and safety are reasons for implementing access control. A number of strategies and tactics are available for controlling or restricting access:

- Physical barriers (gates, barricades, piling, crossing removal)
- Road conditions (berms, ditches, road stands, selective grade removal, roll-back, no snow removal)
- Regulatory (sanctuaries, timing restrictions, signage)

SLS does not have the right to restrict access, but works with GOA to control access to these areas, which are jointly monitored. This applies to non-designated trails as well. SLS will reclaim all blocks, roads, and crossings following harvest operations.

SLS does not have a formal process for tracking or reporting access control violations to GOA. Violations are reported as witnessed, typically verbally or through email. SLS holds no authority to control access.

Subject: Planning Process

SLS's approval process is described in Operating Ground Rule (OGR) 3.1, with all documents in alignment with the Integrated Resource Plan (GOA) and Forest Management Plan (SLS).

Discussion / Comments:

- Stakeholder had general inquiries regarding approvals and planning process.
- Discussed planning horizon of 200 years of projecting future forest state
- Discussed the difficulty in balancing the wide range of values across the landscape

SLS Response:

SLS manages all operations according to FMP objectives to ensure the desired future forest is realised. SLS predicts this future state in the Timber Supply Analysis (TSA) models and monitors the regenerating stand through a series of surveys and analysis. SLS selects a preferred forest management strategy by running multiple scenarios to evaluate against a number of objectives to reach the desired future state of the forest.

To ensure the regenerating stands reach the desired future state and meet approved regeneration standards, SLS implements a reforestation program, as required by GOA under the Timber Management Regulation. SLS tracks regenerating stands to ensure harvesting and reforestation methods are achieving the desired outcomes through updating the forest inventory every ten years and surveying regenerating stands.

SLS is committed to following the preferred forest management plan as laid out in the TSA and the spatial harvest levels in the Spatial Harvest Sequence (SHS). This plan is based on long-term sustained yield and will be adhered to ensure sustainable forest management.

Please see Chapter 8 – Timber Supply Analysis of the DFMP for more information of the models run, age-class distributions, and the preferred forest management strategy on our website: www.spraylakesawmills.com.

Subject: Wetlands

Discussion / Comments:

- Discussed how wetland and riparian areas are incorporated into the SLS planning process
- How is SLS protecting these areas from harm?

SLS Response:

SLS does not harvest in wetlands and will follow OGR Section 6.0 Watershed Protection to manage the implications of timber operation on water quality, quantity, and flow. All streams, rivers, lakes, wetlands, and riparian areas are high value resources and receive special management through normal operations. All wetland and riparian areas are field verified to ensure the correct management strategy is being implemented.

An important component of SLS's water quality protection strategy includes the use of bridges and native timber bridges when crossing most live streams. A box crib stream crossing structure acts similarly to a bridge, whereby the stream bed and banks are protected and stream flow is unrestricted as compared with a typical culvert installation. Utilizing these structures reduces earthwork and eliminates modifications to stream channels. These structures also support fish passage, minimize alteration of fish habitat and sediment delivery. Please see the OGR Section 11 for SLS requirements for road planning, design, classification, construction, maintenance, reclamation, and watercourse crossings. Roads are monitored throughout operations by SLS staff, contractors, and GOA staff to ensure OGR's are met. At the completion of SLS operations and generally less than three years from the road construction date, SLS schedules its roads and stream crossing structures for removal.

If road building must cross a wetland area, SLS will work with Alberta to reduce the negative impacts on the wetland to the smallest practicable degree. To date SLS has no area where avoidance and/or minimization efforts were not feasible or effective.

Forest regulations require that actual harvest levels are reconciled with the water yield modelled. SHS is used to ensure harvest levels meet or are below modelled thresholds. Regional targets for watershed resource monitoring are found in the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan (SSRP). Timber harvest has no measureable impact on the natural variability of stream quality or quantity. OGR Section 6.0 Watershed Protection defines stream classifications and associated buffers. These buffers are the proven distance required to eliminate any significant impact on water quality, quantity, and flow. All streams, rivers, lakes, wetlands, and riparian areas are high value resources and receive special management through normal operations.

For more information, please visit the water quality page on our website:
<http://www.spraylakesawmills.com/water/>

Subject: Wildfire Emulation

Discussion / Comments:

- General discussion about fire emulation, harvest area boundary design, riparian area protection and how it drives the need for sustainable forest management.

SLS's goal as forest managers is to attempt to keep up with the fuel loading by replacing the natural process of wildfire with responsible timber harvesting and reforestation. The variability of natural disturbances will be considered when planning harvest area size and shape. This variability will help to provide habitat for species that are dependent on natural disturbance regimes. Harvest strategies include emulating natural disturbance patterns and retaining structural diversity. This natural-state structural diversity provides habitat opportunities for wildlife species that would not otherwise be available.

In terms of landscape management, SLS is addressing the findings of the fire disturbance research in several ways. SLS is increasing the size of harvest blocks by adjoining blocks while leaving a patchwork of island remnants and preserving travel corridors and shelter for wildlife. SLS is also increasing the amount of patterning of a harvest block to make them more visually appealing, reminiscent of fire boundaries and increasing edge habitat for a variety of species. Larger block sizes are consistent with natural conditions and generally provide higher quality habitat conditions.

Additional SLS comments

Supplemental to the OGR, SLS developed a series of resource management objectives designed to measure performance in meeting the stated goals identified in the DFMP. Some of the plan metrics include water quality, road access and reclamation, reforestation program, biodiversity and wildlife habitat supply, soil disturbance, and sustainable timber supply. SLS has consistently met or exceeded all of the stated plan objectives. Please see the SLS Stewardship Report, which summarizes the annual and five-year monitoring deliverables in reference to the planning objectives identified in the DFMP at <http://www.spraylakesawmills.com/woodlands/forest-management-planning/detailed-forest-management-plan/>

SLS would like to thank all those who participated in this year's collaborative planning sessions and all of our public consultation; your interest and comments are greatly appreciated.