

Indicator 6.1.1

Activities that Allow Interested Parties to Participate in the Decision-Making Process

[1] Foothills Model Forest value

Meaningful public involvement.

[2] Objective

Ensure broad participation of interested parties in the decision-making processes.

[3] Statement of indicator

Activities that allow interested parties to participate in the decision-making process.

[4] Indicator measure

This indicator provides a summary of the public participation opportunities and activities undertaken by a number of the companies that work within the Foothills Model Forest (FtMF) landbase. However, not all companies that conduct public participation activities on the FtMF landbase contributed to the data, so public participation opportunities may be underrepresented in this indicator.

[5] Rationale for Indicator

a. Significance of indicator to landscape-level management

A strong public participation process is a vital component of sustainable forest management in Canada. Involvement of interested parties is the best way to ensure that the broad views of society and local communities are recognized and addressed across the landscape. The vast majority of the land within the FtMF landbase is public – it is the responsibility of those companies and organizations that work on this publicly owned landbase to develop, maintain, and continually improve a public participation process that meets the public's demanding requirements.

b. Meaning of indicator

This indicator provides an indication of the type and range of public consultation and participation activities that occur across the FtMF landscape. Both government and industry conduct public consultation and provide opportunities for participation and/or input into decision-making; however, not all activities that allow interested parties to participate in the decision-making process are the same, and not all groups (i.e., government and industry) keep the same types of records.

For example, some companies keep track of the number of people who attend open houses, while others do not. These discrepancies make it difficult to report on these activities using a common format.

c. Relation of Indicator to Foothills Model Forest and to sustainability

Public participation activities are relatively common throughout the FtMF landbase and are generally hosted either by the provincial government, by Parks Canada, or by a company working on the FtMF landbase. Because most of the land in Canada is public land, any measure of sustainability needs to take into account public input. Part or most of the definitions of sustainable forest management (SFM) include the provision that the same values present on the landscape today should be there for future generations to utilize and enjoy. To determine whether that definition of SFM is being met (i.e., are we losing or maintaining values?), the public needs to be given the opportunity to provide input into how those values are being managed.

[6] Current status of indicator

Each of the FtMF partners has developed their own public consultation and participation process that provides interested parties with the opportunity to provide input into and participate in decision-making processes. These methods range from municipal, county, and provincial elections, to public advisory groups, to a commitment to respond with information when a question or concern is raised.

The following information, provided from a sampling of FtMF partners, gives a summary of the activities that allow interested parties to participate in decision-making processes within the FtMF landbase.



This well-attended meeting is an example of public participation in the decision-making process

Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (ASRD)

Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (ASRD) is the major approving agency for all forestry-related activities that take place on the non-protected portion of the Foothills Model Forest landbase. This includes approving long-term plans such as the detailed forest management plan, as well as shorter term plans such as the annual operating plan, which provides a forest company with approval for harvesting cutblocks, building roads, and conducting reforestation activities. ASRD is also responsible for coordinating all forest-fire-related activities (in both protected and non-protected provincial land), such as approving fire control plans, carrying out fuel reduction strategies (such as those associated with the FireSmart program) and fighting forest fires. Table 1 outlines a sampling of public participation opportunities from 2002 to 2006.

Table 1 – Opportunities for public participation provided by ASRD, 2002 -- 2006

Mechanism for public participation	Summary of opportunities for public participation
FireSmart public events	ASRD, in conjunction with its FireSmart partners, held public awareness events in Hinton and Edson. From 2002 to 2006 there were six FireSmart events (five in Hinton, one in Edson), with approximately 1300 people attending. The intent of these events was to raise the awareness of the FireSmart Program, which involves taking measures to protect community infrastructure and development from the dangers of wildfire.
FireSmart community protection plans: open houses/public meetings	Between 2001 and 2005, ASRD hosted ten meetings to present and seek feedback on FireSmart plans that had been developed to protect specific communities. There were two meetings in 2001, two in 2002, and six in 2005. A total of 133 people attended.
Willmore Wilderness Park: Fire Management Plan consultation	In 2006, various stakeholders were sent a copy of the draft fire management plan for Willmore Wilderness Park, and invited to attend presentations to provide their feedback; 20 people attended the presentations.

The Minister of Alberta Sustainable Resource Development is also responsible for the Natural Resources Conservation Board (NRCB). The NRCB reviews applications for approval of major natural resource developments projects in Alberta. Projects reviewed under the NRCB Act include those from the forest, recreation, tourism, mining industries, as well as water management projects and projects referred to the NRCB by the Alberta Cabinet. The NRCB must decide if these projects are in the public interest, and in making this determination, must consider social, economic and environmental effects. NRCB approvals must be authorized by the Alberta Cabinet, and are in addition to any licenses, permits or approvals stipulated by other acts, regulations or bylaws. Where unresolved concerns remain, the Board responsible determines whether the concerned parties are directly affected (the Alberta Environmental Appeals Board (AEAB) must also determine whether the issue is environmental in nature), and may initiate a public hearing process. Following the hearing, the Board responsible may issue the approval, direct changes to the plan, or refuse the proposal.

Alberta Energy and Utilities Board

With the boom in the oil and gas industry over the last five years, development associated with energy exploration has dramatically increased within the Foothills Model Forest landbase. Energy developments are regulated primarily by the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board (AEUB), whose mission is to ensure that the discovery, development, and delivery of Alberta’s energy resources occurs in a manner that is fair, responsible, and in the public interest. Before any permits or licenses are issued, the AEUB requires development proponents to inform potentially affected parties, including other industrial users and the public, of the nature of the proposal and invite their comments or concerns. The extent of public consultation expected is related to both the size and type of proposed projects. Consultation and discussion may include public meetings and open houses. Project proponents deal directly with the concerns identified by providing more information, detailing justifications, or by altering their project plans.

Alberta Environment

Some larger projects may also require approvals from Alberta Environment. This process may involve specific environmental planning or impact assessment protocols and may require public notification. This provides another opportunity to deal with the public’s unresolved environmental concerns before projects proceed. The

public can contest approved projects by appealing to the Alberta Environmental Appeal Board (AEAB). The AEAB will determine if parties are directly affected, and may conduct a public hearing.

Alberta Tourism, Parks, and Recreation

The Ministry of Tourism, Parks, and Recreation, is responsible for the management of the provincial protected areas within the Foothills Model Forest landbase, such as Switzer Park, Willmore Wilderness Area, and Sundance Provincial Park. Its responsibilities include enforcing provincial legislation regarding the use of parks, as well as the development of park management plans, which give longer-term direction about how a particular protected area will be managed. Table 2, below, describes recent opportunities for public participation in the management of these areas.

Table 2 – Opportunities for public participation provided by Alberta Tourism, Parks, and Recreation, 2002 – 2006

Mechanism for public participation	Summary of opportunities for public participation
Public discussion forum followed by individual meetings	A park management plan was developed for Sundance Provincial Park. An initial public meeting was held in 2000 at the Marlboro Community Hall to help identify a list of interested stakeholders; 26 people attended. In 2001 and 2002, individual meetings were held with identified stakeholders. Meeting notes were recorded by the planning team and sent to the participants to validate.
Open houses	The draft of the Sundance Provincial Park Management Plan was reviewed by the stakeholder group and members of the public. Two open houses, attended by 120 people in total, were held in Edson during 2002 to facilitate feedback.

Jasper National Park – Parks Canada

In Jasper National Park, the public is consulted on a range of issues from the development of the Park Management Plan to proposed changes in fishing regulations. A routine opportunity for public participation occurs as the park executes its duties for projects, which are subject to the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act. Under such projects, a range of public participation occurs from informal/passive offers of involvement to structured formal consultative processes. Likewise, the building permit/development review process also provides opportunities for public participation in decisions.

Other opportunities are created as needs arise, such as the creation of a Trail Stewardship Program, where a diverse group of stakeholders and park staff work to address trail issues and concerns. Table 3 outlines a sampling of public participation opportunities within Jasper National Park.

Table 3 – Opportunities for public participation provided by Jasper National Park, 2001 – 2006

Mechanism for public participation	Summary of opportunities for public participation
Regular meetings	Jasper Trail stewardship program – regular meetings since 2001 with stakeholders to address trail issues
Public meetings	Jasper Planning Forum public meetings – a total of four meetings were held between 2003 and 2006; approximately 50 persons attended.
Public meetings	Eagle Ridge Comprehensive Study – four public meetings were held in Calgary, Edmonton, and Jasper
Regular meetings	Jasper Trail project – during 2006 and early 2007, 25 meetings were held, with attendance varying between 12 and 60 people.
Meetings, newspaper notice, planning forum	Jasper River Use Guidelines Review – in 2003 public participation in the development of river use guidelines was sought by Jasper National Park. Two meetings were held, and 14 people attended.

Hinton Wood Products – a division of West Fraser Mills Ltd.

Hinton Wood Products (HWP) is the major forest tenure holder within the FtMF landbase. The HWP Forest Management Area (FMA) is approximately one million hectares in size. Table 4, below, outlines some of the public participation opportunities provided by HWP from 2001 to 2006.

Table 4 – Opportunities for public participation provided by Hinton Wood Products, 2001 – 2006

Mechanism for public participation	Summary of opportunities for public participation
Forest Resources Advisory Group	The Forest Resources Advisory Group (FRAG) is a multi-stakeholder group that was established in 1989 to provide organized and regular public input into planning and operations within Hinton Wood Products' Woodlands department. FRAG was also established to select or respond to issues, and consider and recommend actions and policies to Hinton Wood Products. From 2001 to 2006 FRAG held 63 meetings (including field trips) dealing with a wide range of topics.
Open houses	Open houses are held each year in the three largest communities within and/or adjacent to the Hinton Forest Management Area: Grande Cache, Edson, and Hinton. Occasionally, open houses are also held in the smaller hamlets within or adjacent to the FMA, such as Robb and Brule. From 2001 to 2006, HWP held 21 open houses, including one in Brule and one in Robb. On average, 135 people attend these open houses each year.
Public notification of the initiation of the compartment planning process	When HWP initiates planning in a new compartment, it places advertisements seeking public input in local newspapers. The public is encouraged to share its local knowledge of terrain and resources, resource use patterns and timing, any inter-resource conflicts of which they are aware, and other preferences and opinions. From 2001 to 2006, HWP placed 22 notices in local newspapers (each running twice); only 5 responses were received.
1-800 number	HWP provides a toll-free telephone number (1-800-293-6955) for public inquiries – all calls (which total 12 to 20 per year) are responded to and tracked. The large majority of these calls relate to road safety issues (e.g., reckless drivers, dust, poor road conditions, etc.).
Annual operating plan summary document	This document provides a simple overview of the general areas HWP plans on developing during each operating year (May to April), as well as showing areas where approval has already been gained. The document also contains information on how to provide input to HWP planners, and information on various HWP sustainable forest management practices. This document has been produced and sent out with HWP's company newsletter since 2005, resulting in a distribution to approximately 1700 households.
Ipsos Reid SFM survey	In 2006, HWP contracted Ipsos Reid to carry out a survey to determine how satisfied the public was with HWP's sustainable forest management (SFM) practices, as well as how effective the public believed HWP was in communicating with the public and allowing opportunities for public participation. Over 1000 residents were surveyed in Hinton, Edson, Jasper, and Grande Cache. The results are on HWP's website, www.westfraser.com/hintonforestry .



The oil and gas industry

Numerous oil and gas companies operate on the industrial portion of the FtMF landbase, which is primarily made up of the Hinton Wood Products Forest Management Area. Many of these companies are partners in the FtMF and conduct varying levels of public participation activities, which are outlined in Table 5.

Table 5 – Opportunities for public participation provided by the oil and gas industry, 2001 – 2006

Company	Mechanism for public participation	Summary of opportunities for public participation
Petro-Canada	Open House	An open house was held in Robb in 2004 to discuss construction of the Robb Playground – 40 people attended.
Petro-Canada	Open House	Two open houses were held in Robb in 2005 to discuss the Robb Fire Protection plan – 25 people attended.
Devon	Open House	Open houses were held annually in Hinton from 2003 to 2006, giving the public an opportunity to provide feedback to Devon staff.
Canadian Natural Resources Ltd. (CNRL)	Open House	Open houses were held annually in Marlboro in 2003, 2004 and 2006, giving the public an opportunity to provide feedback to CNRL staff. Approximately 70 people attended each open house.
CNRL and Talisman	Open House	Hinton area operators held a “discover energy” open house in Hinton in 2006 – approximately 100 people attended.
CNRL and Talisman	Yellowhead Synergy Group	This group, which is made up of members of the public with varying viewpoints and interests, meets about every six weeks and provides feedback and advice to CNRL. The group has been meeting regularly since 2001.
Talisman	Local trappers’ association meetings	Talisman meets four times annually (since 2000) with the local trappers’ association – approximately 15-20 people attend each meeting.

All oil and gas companies also place advertisements in local papers regarding gas plant expansions, renewals, and upgrades, asking interested parties to provide comments

The coal industry

A number of coal mines operate within the industrial portion of the FtMF landbase. Activities such as coal mine expansion can have a significant effect on landbase values that are important to the public. Table 6, below, highlights some of the efforts made by the coal industry to involve the public in decision-making processes and provide input into proposed plans.

Table 6 – Opportunities for public participation provided by the coal industry, 2001 – 2006

Company	Mechanism for public participation	Summary of opportunities for public participation
Tech Coal Limited	Public meetings	An open house was held annually from 2001 to 2005 in Hinton, and in 2006 in Cadomin, giving the public an opportunity to provide feedback to Elk Valley staff. On average, about 30 people have attended each year.
Tech Coal Limited	Focus group meetings	There have been four focus group meetings (one in 2004, two in 2005, and one in 2006) in Hinton, Edson, and Cadomin to discuss issues such as the Mountain Park staging area and fishery enhancement projects in the Cadomin area.
Tech Coal Limited	Cadomin Environment Protection Association	From 2001 to 2006 there were 17 meetings between the Cadomin Environment Protection Association and Tech Coal Limited, with an average of 12 people attending each meeting.

[7] Interpretation

Clearly, even though the data presented in the sections above doesn’t reflect all of the public participation activities conducted, there are still significant opportunities for the public to be involved with the decision-making processes of various agencies and organizations operating within the FtMF landbase. Each agency or organization provides some level of opportunity for public participation; however, it must be noted that

the public’s actual participation in the public participation activities varies considerably. Due to the amount of activity within the FtMF landbase and the busy lives people lead, people often simply don’t have time to take advantage of the numerous opportunities provided for public input. In other words, the number of people who attend open houses or provide input through some other mechanism for public participation isn’t always a reflection of how interested or important a particular issue is to the public. There is little that can be done to address this issue, except to continue to provide a wide variety of methods and opportunities for the public to become involved, and be able to adapt appropriately when the public need for more involvement arises.

Aboriginal consultation is treated separately from public consultation. Aboriginal communities are consulted in a separate process that varies by organization, but the commonality is that organizations consult with Aboriginal communities on a one-on-one basis, rather than treating them as part of their public consultation process.

[8] Rationale for allowable variance (threshold)

There is no allowable variance for this indicator.

[9] Analytical considerations

a. Calculation of indicator

There was no specific calculation of this indicator. A written notice was sent to all FtMF partners that conduct public participation activities asking that they provide data on public participation from 2001 to 2006, including (where possible) the number of meetings held and the number of people attending.

b. Special considerations

Not all partners provided the requested information. In addition, for those partners that did supply data, not all of it was provided in a consistent format; therefore, a simple overview outlining what sort of public participation activities were carried out by each agency or organization was all that could be documented above.

Town councillors from Hinton, Alberta take part in a tour of the Cardinal River coal operations which is located about 42 kilometres south of Hinton

[10] Responsibility

Either data (actual statistics) or information (a written summary) regarding public participation activities was provided by the following agencies or organizations:

- Alberta Energy and Utilities Board
- Alberta Environment
- Alberta Sustainable Resource Development
- Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation
- Canadian Natural Resources Ltd.
- Devon
- Tech Coal Limited
- Hinton Wood Products
- Jasper National Park
- Petro-Canada
- Talisman

[11] Monitoring

Monitoring public participation activities and opportunities will continue to be the responsibility of the individual agencies and organizations conducting these types of activities on the FtMF landbase.

[12] General discussion

There has been no measurable difference in public participation activities since the Local Level Indicators of Sustainable Forest Management for the Foothills Model Forest - Initial Status Report published in 2003. This is due to the lack of consistency in data collection and reporting. Because of the wide variation between agencies and organizations in how public participation activities are conducted and documented, this indicator will continue to be a simple summary of what has occurred since the last report.

