

Conflict-of-Interest Guidelines for the Forest Genetics Council of BC and Affiliated Committees

Background and Purpose:

The Forest Genetics Council of BC (FGC) is entrusted by the Provincial Chief Forester, and ultimately by the people of British Columbia, to provide business planning and promote the interests of forest genetic resource management (GRM) in BC.

The purpose of these conflict-of-interest (COI) guidelines is to provide guidance to members¹ of the FGC and affiliated subcommittees to ensure fair and objective decision making and to protect all members from accusations of undue influence over decisions that might further their personal or corporate interests. Inasmuch as the principles and professional obligations of individuals on Council and affiliated committees recognize the need to foster values described as balanced, ethical, collaborative, transparent, and open, it is important that members be seen to always place the interests of advancing the vision and objectives of the FGC, as stated in the current FGC Strategic Plan, above their own when engaged in FGC business.

Definition

COI may arise in circumstances where a member is advocating for a position or project that impacts a current or future budget decision, policy position, or guideline that has the potential to benefit the member, the member's employer, or others affiliated with the member's employer (an Issue).

Conflicts of interest include situations:

- where member's corporate or private financial interests are in conflict with their duties and responsibilities;
- where a member's actions compromise or undermine the trust placed in them; and;
- where a member's ability to act in the interest of the vision and objectives of the FGC is impaired.

COI can include the financial, and/or material interests of both the member and the member's employer. A COI occurs when the answer to the following question is "yes":

Would a reasonably informed person perceive that the performance of the member's duties and responsibilities could be materially influenced by the financial or professional interest of the member or their employer?

¹ Members refers to all members of the FGC and to voting members of all committees and subcommittees, standing or temporary, reporting to or under the guidance of the FGC, unless otherwise stated.

Materiality

For the purposes of these guidelines, a material COI is an interest which, in view of the circumstances, could reasonably be expected to affect the independence or impartiality of the member with the interest, and the member's influence could potentially affect a decision made by the committee on which the member is participating or with which the member is communicating beyond normal provision of information relevant to the decision. Determination of materiality is contextual and, to some degree, subjective. Increases in the magnitude of factors such as the following will exacerbate the risk that a conflict of interest is material:

- Potential for employer benefit.
- Potential for professional or personal benefit.
- Level of leadership or authority.
- Professional or personal proximity to the position, project, budget, person, or policy being reviewed.
- Potential for a decision to be influenced by opinion or conjecture, as opposed to facts and known scientific theory.

Guidelines

1. It is the responsibility of each member to disclose verbally or in writing, to the chair² of the FGC or FGC committee on which they participate, the existence of any material COI.
2. It is the duty of the Chair of the FGC or FGC committee to decide whether an individual in potential COI may participate in any discussions or vote on the issue that has given rise to the COI.
3. Where there is disagreement over COI, or the materiality of COI, the chair of the FGC or FGC committee responsible for the discussion or decision will have the authority to determine how the COI will be managed.
4. Managing COI on a specific issue before the FGC or a FGC committee will include, but not be restricted to, some or all of the following:
 - a. A member will abstain from voting on resolutions,
 - b. A member will not participate in discussions,
 - c. A member will leave the room where discussions are being held,
 - d. A member will not be party to discussions or other communications related to the issue under consideration,
 - e. A member will be removed from the committee temporarily or permanently.

² Also refers to Co-chairs for the FGC.

Appeal

Where disagreement arises over COI or a decision made by the chair of a committee affiliated with the FGC, this disagreement will be referred to the FGC for decision. Where a disagreement arises within the FGC or between the FGC co-chairs that cannot be resolved through discussion, this disagreement will be referred to the Provincial Chief Forester.

References used in developing these guidelines:

Association of BC Professional Foresters Code of ethics.

Columbia Mountains Institute of Applied Ecology Conflict of Interest Guidelines

BC Legislature Conflict of Interest Guidelines

National Science and Engineering Research Council Guidelines on Conflicts of Interest

University of BC. Conflict of Interest Guidelines

Canadian Institute of Health Research Guidelines on Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality