

## **Alberta seen as a hotbed of university-based forest research**

By **MARVIN ABUGOV, SFM Network**

"There is nothing else in Canada quite like the SFM Network," says Dr. Jim Fyles, the SFM Network's new Scientific Director. "The Network is a partnership that works across the country to bring the research and teaching capacity of universities together with the knowledge, expertise, and research needs of forestry companies, provincial and federal government departments, First Nations groups, and non-governmental organizations." The Network's objective is to have those partners with a 'stake' in the Canadian forest around the table to contribute to the creation of the knowledge needed to manage forests sustainably. While there are many other forest research organizations in Canada, the Network's partnership approach, along with its goal of integrating the ecological, social, and economic dimensions of the country's forest sector, is unique.

The Sustainable Forest Management Network, hosted by the University of Alberta, is one of Canada's 21 Networks

of Centres of Excellence (NCE). The goal of this federally sponsored program is to connect otherwise unconnected university based researchers with private and public sector partners in key areas of Canada's economy. The view is to engage these interested parties to address unresolved research issues that would allow advancement of the country toward sustainable long-term development.

"Albertans may not know that many Alberta based researchers in universities, government, and forest industries are national and probably global leaders in sustainable forest management research. Their province is a hot-bed of innovative thinking and development of new approaches to forest management," says Fyles. Since its inception in 1995, the SFM Network has funded 132 projects in Alberta worth approximately \$13.5 million. In total, the Network has completed in excess of 300 projects nationwide. Its budget averages \$7 million per year, sixty percent of which is funded by the federal Networks of Centres

of Excellence Program.

Now in the 10th year of a 14 year NCE mandate, the research work done by the SFM Network to advance understanding of the impacts of natural disturbance has contributed to a paradigm shift in the forest sector. As an example, forest management is increasingly emulating natural disturbance in pattern and structure across the landscape. Three provincial governments including British Columbia, Alberta, and Ontario have now incorporated information on natural disturbance into provincial forestry management policies. "Alberta's proposed new forest management planning manual is a good example of how new knowledge has been used to address the challenges of planning and forest resource management," says Dr. Bob Fessenden, SFM Network Board Member, Strategic Planning Committee Member and Deputy Minister, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development.

To further the opportunities provided by working in partnership, the Alberta Forest Partner Working Group was established to more formally discuss the implications of other SFM Network research findings and their application to Alberta's forest practices. The working group also provides a means by which gaps in our collective knowledge can be defined and presented to scientists for further consideration for research. Working together is essential for success in applying new knowledge. When the SFM Network partnership grows, as it recently did with the rejoining of Millar Western Forest Products Ltd., opportunities expand for new ideas and application. The Alberta Government is a founding member of the SFM Network and has been making a \$1 million contribution each year to support its research work. Most recently these funds have been provided through the Alberta Forestry Research Institute (AFRI).

In order to address many of the complex problems associated with achieving sustainable forest management, and to use the current research capacity in Canada, the Network encourages the formation of research groups that cut across disciplines and sectors so that necessary research talents from across the country can be brought to bear on perplexing research issues. In many cases, multi-disciplinary groups have been formed, providing a better chance to create unique solutions to very complex problems.

An excellent example is a new national multidisciplinary research team that will assess the effectiveness of current forest tenure institutions across the whole country.

### **Team make-up illustrates national scope of work**

**Challenge of Institutional Redesign: Tenure, Competitiveness and Sustainability** Research Team Members (\*Management team) include:

**Dr. Luc Bouthillier** (Université Laval, QC; forest policy, environmental valuation, public participation)

**George Bruemmer\*** (Manager, Forestry Research and Development, Tembec Inc., Partner Representative)

**Dr. Gary Bull** (University of British Columbia; tenures for non-timber forest products and environmental services, and reform of tenure arrangements for First Nations)

**Dr. Peter Duinker\*** (Dalhousie University; alternative tenure systems in promoting SFM and advisor on forest policy issues to a wide range of clients)

**Dr. George Hoberg\*** (University of British Columbia; policy development and accommodation of Aboriginal and non-timber values in forest management)

**Dr. James Lawson** (Memorial University of Newfoundland; forest tenure and multi-stakeholder forest use focusing on forest politics in the Canadian Maritimes and Northeastern United States)

**Dr. Marty Luckert\*** (University of Alberta; investigation of how property rights to natural resources influence incentives of natural resource managers and the pursuit of policy objectives in Canada and abroad)

**Dr. Harry Nelson\*** (University of British Columbia; research associate; trade and competitiveness issues in the forest sector)

**Peggy Smith** (Lakehead University; PhD candidate; resource management agreements with Aboriginal communities across Canada)

**Dr. Cornelius vanKooten** (University of Victoria; climate change and forest economics)

**Dr. Ilan Vertinsky\*** (Director, FEPA Research Unit, University of British Columbia; numerous large, nationwide interdisciplinary research projects, forest sector policy and economics)

**Dr. Marian Webber** (University of Alberta; multiple use and integrated resource management)