



BCCFA 2026 Conference – Session #4 Notes

Keynote – Strengthening Public Understanding of Forestry, 10 Insights from the UBC Malcom Knapp Research Forest

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Session Description

This session shares key insights to support new approaches to community engagement and to help reshape how forestry is understood by the public.

Session Summary

This session focused on practical approaches to public outreach and engagement in forestry, emphasizing the importance of building understanding, trust, and meaningful connections with diverse audiences. Drawing on lessons from the UBC Malcolm Knapp Research Forest, the presentation highlighted strategies for communicating forestry in ways that are relevant, accessible, and memorable.

A key message was that outreach is often reactive, requiring forestry professionals to engage respectfully with people who may hold concerns or misconceptions about forest management. Successful engagement starts with understanding an audience's values, interests, and learning needs rather than focusing solely on delivering technical information.

The session emphasized the value of experiential learning. Bringing people into the forest, creating opportunities for hands-on experiences, and fostering personal connections can help shape perceptions and build support. Storytelling was identified as a particularly powerful tool, with authentic stories helping audiences connect emotionally with forestry issues and understand both successes and challenges.

The presenter also explored the importance of tailoring communication to different audiences, recognizing that people learn in different ways and have varying levels of knowledge about forestry. Creative partnerships and unique experiences—from museum



exhibits and educational programs to food-based events and cultural activities—can help broaden engagement and reach new audiences.

Key Takeaways

- Public outreach is most effective when it begins with listening and understanding audience perspectives.
- Forest tours and direct experiences can be powerful tools for building awareness and support.
- Communication should be tailored to the interests, knowledge, and learning styles of different audiences.
- Storytelling helps make forestry relatable, memorable, and meaningful.
- Creating “aha” moments can have a lasting impact on public understanding.
- Outreach should focus on relationships and connections, not just information sharing.
- Innovative and experiential approaches can engage audiences who might not otherwise participate in forestry discussions.

Notable Insights

- Outreach can be challenging because forestry is often discussed in controversial contexts, but respectful dialogue remains essential.
- People are more likely to connect with forestry when they can experience it firsthand.
- Stories that include both successes and challenges are often the most compelling and credible.
- Partnerships with community organizations, educational institutions, and cultural groups can expand the reach and impact of forestry outreach.

Notetaker’s Overall Reflection

The session reinforced that effective public engagement is not about delivering more facts—it is about creating meaningful experiences, fostering relationships, and helping people develop their own connection to forests and forestry. Successful outreach combines education, storytelling, and authentic engagement to build long-term understanding and trust.



Public outreach in forestry: 10 insights from the UBC Malcom Knapp Research Forest located on the Katzie First Nation est. in 1949

Lesson 1.) proactive community outreach vs reactive. Speaking to the public controversy; some people do have a point. Cutting down trees is messy. You can still approach educating in a respectful way when you see or try to understand where the other person is coming from.

Lesson 2.) Bring shareholders along a tour of the forest. You can help shape their minds. You must engage with people one on one; it is better than social media. This fosters personable relationships and connections.

Lesson 3.) know your audience to learn how to accommodate their learning needs. (Expert brain vs new learner), can have gaps or false knowledge. So many acronyms can add to this confusion.

Lesson 4.) leverage the art of storytelling. Good tool for getting info to people. Tell the good and the bad, the wins and losses. Stories connect us.

Lesson 5.) create partnerships. Involve a diverse demographic. They've done one with the maple ridge museum, RCMP tactical unit, SD42 etc.

Lesson 6.) foster a-ah moments. Something clicks in their brain. Think about ways to make people have breakthrough moments, help them understand strategically through creative ways.

Example -a tool they use: "not so clear cut: re thinking how we harvest forests."

Lesson 7.) cultivate joy with food and unique experiences, pair it with subtle forest education

Lesson 8.) the earlier the better. New programs to help push this. 3000 kids a year in their forest schools.

Lesson 9.) get to know audience with interaction. Find their level, where they are in their knowledge. Let people try and fail, learning is not linear!

Lesson 10.) if all else fails talk about babies and poop.