

A message to the BV Research Centre upon my receiving the 2020 *Irving Fox Award*

From Allen Banner RPF (Ret.) RPBio.

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I was honoured to receive the 2020 *Irving Fox Award* at the Bulkley Valley Research Centre AGM (on Zoom – April 20th, 2021). This award got me thinking about the important ripple effects of opportunities and the role of organizations and individuals in providing them. It prompted me to share my career experience and some thoughts on the continued importance of the BV Research Centre in providing valuable opportunities.

Back in 1970s and early 80s when I was getting started in ecology, opportunities knocked in various ways. I ended up at UBC, not initially to study ecology – in fact, my only science course in high school was physics! I wanted to be a physiotherapist which grew out of a long recovery from a teenage car accident. I guess that was one of my earlier pivotal “opportunities” as it got me off to University.

Once I got to UBC, it was a first-year biology class that started to turn my direction toward biological pursuits, largely due to our lab instructor, Don Cameron (not sure what ever became of Don but he played an important role). Then, attendance at some inspiring lectures by Vladimir Krajina, undergraduate botany courses with the likes of Wilf Schofield (bryophytes, plant geography) and Kay Beamish (vascular plants), and a forest ecology course with Hamish Kimmins. I was hooked – studying the inter-relationships between organisms and their environment – Ecology – this was what I wanted to “do”. Many opportunities, provided by institutions and inspiring individuals created a passion! Most of those individuals have now passed away – most recently, Hamish Kimmins, whom I credit for setting the spark and igniting my ecology career.

After I completed my Botany degree, Hamish became my graduate professor for my MSc. in forest ecology, which in turn led to a field project near Prince Rupert and ultimately an actual job in ecology in Smithers. Yet another opportunity, this time supported by Jim Pojar, Dave Wilford and others at the Research Branch of the BC Forest Service. At that time, the BC Forest Service was embarking on a mammoth program to establish biogeoclimatic ecosystem classification (BEC) as the foundation for forest management in B.C. When it comes to opportunities, this was huge - initially inspired and promoted by Krajina and his students, including Karel Klinka. The government of the day bought fully into the concept and from this came opportunities that sparked many successful careers throughout the province. Employment in field ecology with healthy budgets to support air, boat (ah, those Forest Service boats!), and ground transportation provided so many opportunities for students and graduates to explore the province in detail and document its ecology.

Many of us involved in the early years went on to become career researchers (ecologists, pedologists, hydrologists, silviculturists, wildlife biologists, etc.) and we in turn encouraged and mentored others – the ripple effect. Over the next few decades, a flood of maps, field guides, field training courses, and scientific papers resulted from these opportunities; a legacy that rivals that of most other jurisdictions in the world.

Forty years later, I happen to be chosen as the recipient of the *Irving Fox Award*, but there are numerous others equally deserving of this honour. I was one of many who chose to make the best of these valuable opportunities provided largely through the institution and individuals of the Research Branch

(and Regional Research Sections throughout the province) of the BC Forest Service – this year celebrating its 100th year!

In 2010, I decided to retire from my Regional Ecologist position, but even now, eleven years later, full retirement remains elusive – the ecology flame is still alight! My story is not unique. Many of my colleagues are still active in the field. Around the same time that I retired from the BC Forest Service, government priorities were rapidly changing and a fully funded Research Branch was becoming a thing of the past. Staff layoffs were many and sadly there are now just a fraction of the opportunities for students and graduates to get that critical field/work experience that my cohort benefited so much from. The resulting loss of government expertise played a significant role in slowing my, and many of my colleagues', transition to full retirement. The demand for ecological knowledge is now higher than ever but the government's role as the nucleus for the gathering, housing, and dissemination of that knowledge is in jeopardy. There are some positive philosophical signs from our current government that this situation might improve, but budgets will be tight for the next several "post-COVID" years.

The Bulkley Valley Research Centre was created almost 20 years ago, partly in response to the trends in government downsizing in the late 1990s/early 2000s. Jim Pojar, Irving Fox, Brian Edmison and others had a vision to maintain the Bulkley Valley as a research and knowledge hub for the natural and cultural sciences—more opportunities created! When I recently Zoomed into the BV Centre's 20th AGM, it was very encouraging to see the mix of many younger faces with the older "veterans". It looks to me that the younger folks now outnumber the "silverbacks"! The accomplishments of the Centre in doing and extending science is impressive. The role of the Centre is more important now than ever; you are providing the critical opportunities, and the mentors, that can set the sparks for a lifetime of exploration and career contributions for many in the natural sciences. Keep it going!

Cheers,
Allen