



An Examination of the Application of Professional Reliance To Management of Karst Resources In British Columbia (Canada)

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British Columbia (BC), Canada's most ecologically diverse province, is home to some of the nation's finest karst resources. Many of these are in forested settings, and are often associated with special/unique natural attributes ranging from geomorphology to hydrology, biology and ecology. Karst management in BC forests was shaped initially by concerns for caves and their recreation management, but as of 1997 there was a significant shift to an ecosystem approach to management of karst and cave resources. This new management approach was supported in due course by standards and guidelines for karst assessment and management. The approach also recognized the inherently multidisciplinary nature of this type of work and the frequent need to engage professionals with specialized knowledge of karst, and its natural and cultural resource values.

In 2004, the BC Government introduced the Forest and Range Practices Act, a new results-based regulatory framework for forest practices. Government orders made pursuant to regulations under the Act identify categories of karst terrain and associated resource features that must be protected from the potentially damaging effects of roadbuilding and road maintenance, timber harvesting, and silviculture activities. In support of a general shift toward more results-based regulation and "freedom to manage" forest resources, it was argued that the forestry sector and its professionals are qualified, and competent enough, to formulate strategies for protecting and managing forest resources (including karst) without as much government oversight. As a result, forest tenure holders and their professionals are now responsible for assessing protected categories of karst resource features and developing and applying appropriate forest practices for them. Where knowledge beyond the area of forest professionals' expertise is required, the knowledge gaps are to be addressed by hiring suitably qualified professional consultants for advice and judgment – a concept termed "professional reliance". Forest tenure holders are responsible for determining when specialized expertise or judgment of qualified resource professionals is required and for assessing the professional qualifications of any consultants they hire. However, there is mounting cause for concern about the quality of karst resource work being conducted in BC. Sidestepping or disregarding the principles of professional reliance has led to substandard karst field assessments and poor "results" for karst resource features.

In this paper, we examine some of the professional reliance failures and conclude that persons engaged to conduct karst resource work in BC have seldom met the minimum qualifications suggested by government. Published standards and guidelines for conducting karst assessments, as well as the published best practices for managing karst landscapes and features in BC exist but these are often overlooked, misapplied or ignored. We offer a more precise definition of the title "Qualified Karst Resource Professional" as well as an expanded checklist of criteria that can be used to evaluate professional qualifications and competency.