



Formalizing the Fossil Management Framework

BC's fossils

Fossils are the preserved remains and traces of animals and plants from the geological past. They are part of the land's natural heritage and are both irreplaceable and non-renewable. British Columbia has a rich and diverse fossil resource resulting from the complex geological processes that formed the province. Known concentrations are found on Vancouver Island, Haida Gwaii, in the Princeton-Merritt-Kamloops area, in southeastern and northeastern British Columbia and the Central Interior Plateau.

The need for a management framework

Until 2005 fossils were considered to be, and regulated as, a mineral leading to commercial exploitation. In response to concerns about the impacts of development on significant fossil sites, government acknowledged the scientific and cultural heritage value of fossils, and the need for management of this finite resource. The Mineral Definition Modification Regulation was passed in 2005 and the *Land Act* was amended in 2011 to enable the management of fossils under the *Land Act*. This was an important foundation for fossil management, but many elements are necessary to form a comprehensive management framework that will:

- Manage the protection and use of fossils in BC to address the loss of significant fossils through unregulated collection, damage, sale or export;
- Provide for a better understanding of the cultural significance of fossils and the stewardship of significant sites;
- Manage impacts on fossils from other activities;
- Build knowledge of the nature and extent of the resource in BC;
- Provide business certainty; and
- Enable the development of tourism opportunities at protected fossil sites.

Government gave direction in 2017 to apply the framework across natural resource ministries to provide clarity and consistent process and requirements for industry and enhance the protection of BC fossil resources to acknowledge their significance, support scientific advancement, public education and tourism opportunities.

Protecting BC's fossil resource preserves the natural heritage of the land, allows for the promotion of its scientific, cultural and educational values and has the potential to strengthen the rural economy through tourism opportunities.

The main elements of the Fossil Management Framework are illustrated in Figure 1.

What will change?

Industries operating on Crown land will need to consider the impact of their development on fossils. Reporting requirements have been put place for chance finds of significant fossils, for industry and the public. Government also has processes in place to assess the value and need for protection of significant fossils and fossil sites. Paleontological researchers must request access to the land to conduct research activities, and must report their findings to government. Knowledge generated by industry, researchers, and amateur collectors will be gathered and used to improve our understanding of the resource.

How will this happen?

Most of the changes needed can be affected through clear policy direction, communication and altering business processes. No legislative or regulatory change is contemplated at present. The legal authority for the changes needed is found primarily in the *Land Act* and the *Heritage Conservation Act*. The Fossil Management Policy will establish an overarching policy direction that will guide operational policy and business activities.

What are the benefits?

British Columbia will no longer lose the scientific, natural heritage, and educational value from fossils, through unauthorized collection and transport to other jurisdictions, or unknowing destruction as a result of resource development. Knowledge of where important and interesting fossil are will support institutions in planning their research and will enable communities to consider economic or recreational opportunities associated with local fossil sites.

Requirements and standards for deposit of fossil specimens in approved repositories will ensure that they are properly documented, accessible and maintained in proper conditions, thereby preserving the investment made in collecting them.

How will First Nations be involved in Fossil Management?

First Nations are consulted on research permit applications that fall within their traditional territory, in a manner similar to consultation on other resource development applications. Where there is a proposal to protect a fossil site, affected First Nations will be consulted on that decision as well.

Currently, the Fossil Management Office is reaching out to First Nations to understand how the fossil management framework and policy might affect or potentially support their interests and values.

General Authority to Manage Fossils <i>Land Act, Heritage Conservation Act, Mineral Tenure Act</i>		
Tools and Procedures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fossil management policy 		
Site and Specimen Protection	Managing Impacts on Fossils	Managing Access to fossils
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guidelines for assessing significance of fossil sites. Criteria for what constitutes a significant fossil or fossil site. Legislative tools for site protection: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Land Act, Heritage Conservation Act, Park Act, Mineral Tenure Act, Mines Act.</i> Public education and recognition activities. Site management through partnerships with non-government organizations, First Nations and Local Governments. Custodian guidelines. Provincial export process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fossil impact assessment process and guidelines. Reporting fossil finds. Fossil handbook – information about fossil ownership and rights; rules around reporting and collecting fossils in BC; how to recognize fossils, and who to contact to report fossil discoveries. Data sharing agreement for consultants requesting fossil sites data. Pool of Qualified Persons to conduct fossil impact assessments. Chance-find protocol for industry and developers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy and tenures to provide access to collect fossils for research, tourism and commercial use. Amateur/recreational fossil collection guidelines for permission policy.
Data management: Important fossil area map, fossil site database, web mapping and query tools		
Compliance and enforcement of natural resource laws, designations and tenure terms & conditions		

Figure 1. Fossil Management Framework