

GROUPING SCHEME OVERLAYS

In addition to grouping material by the subjects, you may have to consider the type of information conveyed.

For example, you may see recurring themes in the type of information you want to convey. They could include any or all of the following:

- summary;
- definition of the issues;
- objective
- background
- fact-finding
- analysis;
- conclusions;
- options;
- arguments;
- pros and cons; and
- recommendations.

How you apply this overlay can be vital to the success of the document you are writing.

Sometimes the type of information will take precedence of the subject of the information. That's to say that you might start with a grouping scheme based on the type of information conveyed. Then you would subdivide that information by subjects.

Structure

The structure of briefing material often follows this pattern (similar to what I've used in the section on [Format Guidelines for Memos](#)):

1. opening paragraphs;
2. body; and
3. closing paragraphs.

Opening Paragraphs

The opening paragraphs can comprise any or all of the following:

- a statement of the issue that gave rise to the briefing note;
- an introduction to the briefing note; and
- a summary.

Body

The body of the briefing note can comprise:

- background — information that the reader needs to understand the issue (this information should not be in dispute in any way); and
- considerations — fact-finding, analysis, arguments, opinions, options, and pros and cons.,

Closing Paragraphs

The closing paragraphs can comprise:

- conclusions — which should help the reader to see the forest through the trees and understand your position; and/or
- recommendations for action to be taken or decisions to be made.

A Key Challenge in Organizing the Content

A key challenge will arise in deciding at which organizational level(s) to apply the structure of opening-body-closing. This becomes a type of overlay on top of your organization of subjects in the briefing note.

To explain, I'll use the sample organization structure from [Figure 11](#) above.

You'll see that the organization structure has four levels:

1. the briefing note as a whole;
2. region (New Brunswick, Quebec, Ontario, Northeastern U.S., Alberta, B.C., Northwestern U.S.);
3. species of tree (white spruce, red spruce, maple, white pine, white birch, lodgepole pine, balsam fir, black spruce)
4. type of threat (over-harvesting, weather, disease, fire, insects, erosion, land conversion).

Another Facet of the Challenge

Please bear with me for a moment while I explain another facet of this challenge.

The opening-body-closing structure could be applied at any of those levels. In some cases, you may find that you need to apply it at more than one level or all levels, going into progressively more detail at the lower levels. This will be a judgement call that only you can make.

In some cases, you may find that you apply only one or two elements of the opening-body-closing structure at one level and other elements at another. On the next page, [Figure 19](#) shows how things might work out for the example I used.

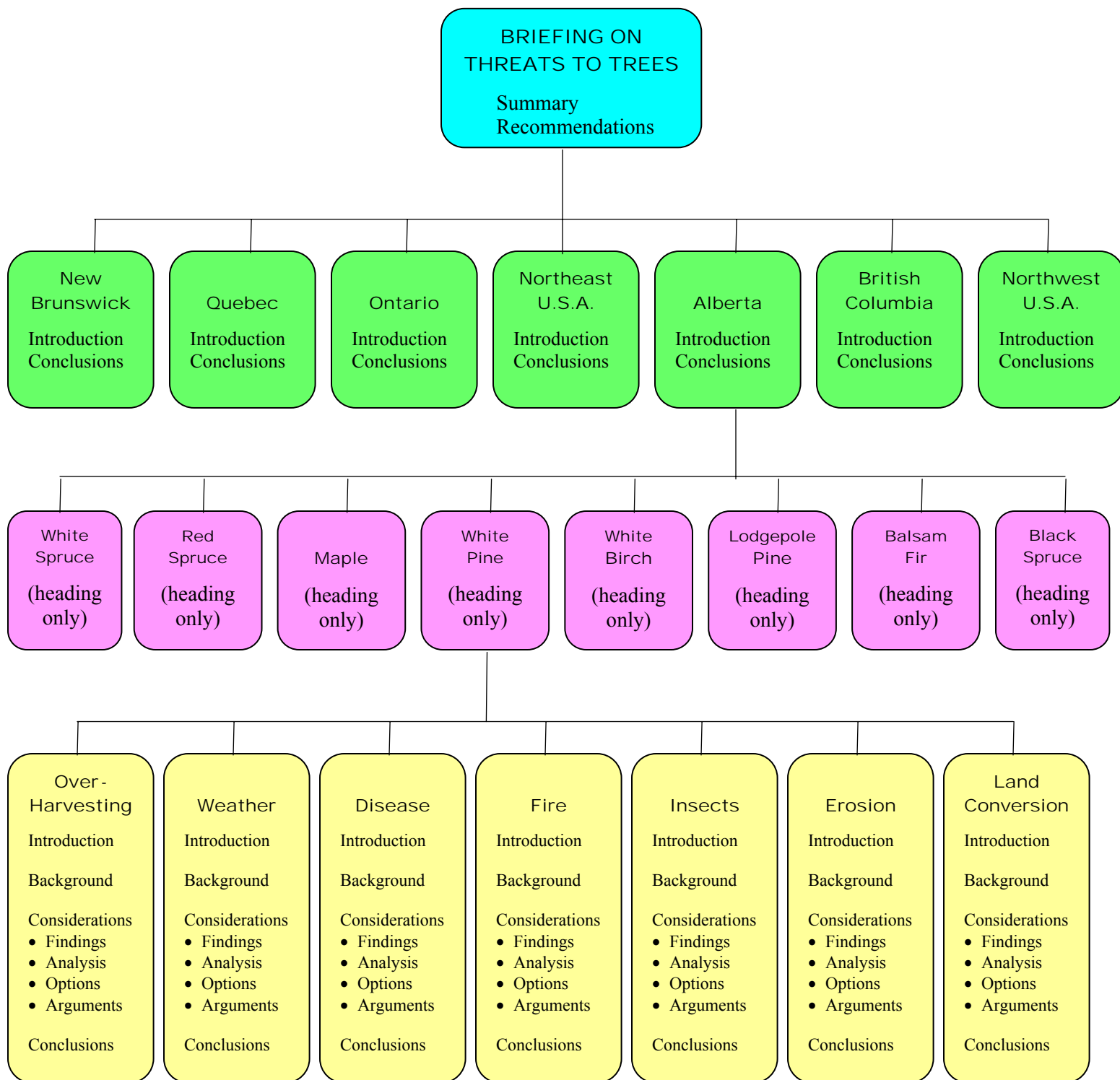


Figure 19