



Coast Forest Conservation Initiative

New thinking about forest conservation

CUSTOMER ADVISORY

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Industry transitions to ecosystem-based management of BC's globally significant forests as development of unprecedented suite of new scientific tools nears completion

Over the past year, a team of independent scientists has been developing a suite of new management tools that will ensure the health of natural and human-based ecosystems in the forests of BC's North and Central Coasts and Haida Gwaii/Queen Charlotte Islands. The scope of the work is unprecedented globally, befitting the significance of these forests and the people who depend on them.

This month, the Coast Information Team (CIT) **delivered its first major product, a framework for ecosystem-based management of the area.** Additional tools are to be delivered to the government-sponsored, land-use planning tables this spring. They are anticipated by First Nations, communities, government, environmental groups and forest companies who helped establish and jointly support this science-based approach to forest management. The CIT's work is founded on \$3.2 million in joint funding.

Ecosystem-based management is a new approach to forestry and timber harvesting, essentially because it predicts impacts on a broad landscape, or even a regional scale, over many decades to ensure that natural systems critical to the integrity of the forest remain healthy. It's a scientific approach that provides the most complete information possible for making land-use decisions, taking into account both ecological and human well-being.

While the science-based work is underway, almost 10,000 square kilometers (30 per cent) of the land base has been set aside on the Central Coast – 441,000 hectares are protected and a further 534,000 hectares are designated "option areas". Government and First Nations will use the science-based information to determine final land-use decisions. A working group funded by conservation groups and the BC Government is examining opportunities for investment and incentives to support further conservation in the area.

In total, the long-term area available for harvesting currently represents less than 8 per cent of the entire Central Coast region. The allowable annual harvest in the region has been reduced by about half a million cubic metres per year to account for protection and option areas.



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Large clearcuts replaced by smaller openings

Of most significance, forest companies operating in the Central and North Coasts have made fundamental changes in how they operate. Large harvest areas have been replaced by smaller openings characterized by feathered, or irregular edges (*Figure 1*), designed to fit the landscape. They often contain various numbers of trees left standing either in patches, blocks or dispersed throughout the harvest area. The new approach, called “variable retention,” is designed to better mimic the natural regeneration processes of these forests.

Specifically, this method provides for wildlife corridors and habitat as well as maintaining ecosystem functions in part through retention of snags, standing timber and the availability of coarse woody debris on the ground. With the recently completed framework for ecosystem-based management and other tools soon to be delivered within the first half of this year, forest operators will be better able to further refine variable retention logging practices.

Helicopter logging used extensively to reduce impacts on the ground

Harvesting of timber by helicopter is often employed by companies operating in the Central Coast. “Heli-logging” is a more costly method than cables and heavy equipment, but provides a much “softer footprint” to soil and wildlife ecosystems (*See Figures 2 and 3*). It also protects significant cultural and scenic areas important to other interests in the area.

Monitoring

Forest companies are committed to monitoring the effectiveness of new forestry through adaptive management strategies where the results of purposeful monitoring efforts guide the planning of future operations. They are already carrying out research on variable retention logging with the University of British Columbia, as well as a separate project on its use in riparian areas. In addition, the forest companies are committed to independent auditing and have regular third party monitoring of their operations against certification standards.

Meeting everyone’s expectations remains challenging

Remarkable progress has been made on a number of fronts since the joint initiative got underway some three years ago. However, the solution process is extraordinarily complex and there are many different interests involved – First Nations, local communities, forest workers, environmental groups, tourism operators, the provincial government, forest companies – all with differing expectations and desires on the outcome.



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Despite these dynamics, all parties remain fundamentally committed to having traditional positions and opinions challenged by the new scientific protocols that are now beginning to emerge from the Coast Information Team. And the fundamental platform of the ecosystem-based management approach the CIT is developing is to balance ecological, cultural, social and economic factors.

What's ahead

The CIT is scheduled to finish its work by June 2003. Between now and then, a number of projects will be completed. All of this information will go to the public planning tables to develop final land-use recommendations for the area. Please see our latest January 2003 newsletter or visit our updated website at

www.coastforestconservationinitiative.com for more information. Or contact:

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Figure 1 Variable retention logging



UPPER DOC CREEK BLK. 8307 #02

This central coast harvest area is an example of the variable retention logging, that has replaced largescale clearcutting. It was logged by helicopter to leave a legacy of old forest attributes. About 47 per cent of the 29.3 ha-harvest area has been retained.

1. Retained to help anchor soils on a steep bluff.
2. A variety of openings maintains structural diversity of the forest over time.
3. Adjacent leave area and riparian protection reserve.
4. Wildlife tree patch anchored on a small creek. Streamside often contain biologically diverse ecosystems.
5. Small retention patches for wildlife and retention of variable stand structures.
6. Not currently economical to harvest by helicopter.
7. Irregular, natural edge is determined by local stand conditions.
8. Large riparian (streamside) protection zone.



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Figure 2 Low impact helicopter logging can be economical if timber volumes and values are sufficient.



WALBRAN ISLAND BLKS. W30 & 32 #02



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Figure 3 Well designed helicopter logging blocks blend into the landscape, reducing the visual impact.



WALBRAN ISLAND BLKS. W3, 7 & 10 – AERIALS #02