

## **NEW APPROACHES TO ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES IN BRITISH COLUMBIA'S COASTAL FORESTS**

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### **Abstract**

By the late 1990s nearly two decades of conflict and controversy resulted in a stalemate between parties with competing interests in temperate old growth rainforests in British Columbia, Canada. In the years since, collaboration between groups traditionally at odds with each other have created a period during which all parties are focusing on the innovation of new conservation-based approaches to forest management. This paper discusses an initial framework agreement reached in 2001 regarding rainforests in seven million hectares on BC's Central and North Mainland Coasts – an area also known as “The Great Bear Rainforest”. The agreement involved a number of different elements and will take several years to implement.

Parties to the *2001 BC Coastal Framework Agreement* included local indigenous peoples (First Nations), forest companies, environmental non-government organizations (ENGOS), the BC government, local communities and logging contractors and forest workers. The pathway to this interim resolution led all of the different groups involved to the realization that though they were each capable of wielding significant power, none was in a position to achieve what they wanted on a unilateral basis. By 1999, parties with competing interests on coastal forest issues concluded that, despite ongoing disagreements, they needed to work together to develop new approaches to reconciling tensions between conservation and development in coastal BC rainforests. This paper looks at how collaboration between dissimilar and sometimes even adversarial interests can be a catalyst for change. The BC coastal experience may be helpful to others involved in conflicts over forest conservation and use.

## **Introduction**

The last several decades have seen a rise in concern over the deforestation and degradation of forest ecosystems. This has resulted in calls for more forest conservation and improved forest management worldwide. British Columbia, Canada, has been one of the areas where controversy over forests has occurred. The following paper examines how, in 2001, groups with different and sometimes opposing interests in forests on the BC coast reached an innovative framework agreement aimed at conserving coastal rainforests and defining how resource development would take place a region of the province that had for much of the 1990s been a focus of contention from both a local and global perspective in the media and the marketplace.

## **British Columbia's Temperate Rainforest**

Forests cover two-thirds of the province's 95 million hectares and fourteen distinct biogeoclimatic zones. The temperate rainforests of British Columbia occupy 10 million hectares (11%) of the province, comprising one quarter of the world's total (Kellog, 1992). Considered rare at the global level (WRI, 1997) coastal BC rainforests occur largely in the Coastal Western Hemlock biogeoclimatic zone, a mild, wet, mountainous coastal climate. They contain mostly coniferous trees of various sizes and species, forming a complex multi-layered canopy, including standing dead trees and large fallen trees and are home to important populations of grizzly bears and salmon.

## **Forest and Land Management in BC**

British Columbia is Canada's western-most province. Over 95% of the land in BC is owned and administered by the government of BC. In this context, it is important to note that First Nations in BC have unresolved land claims potentially affecting most of the province, including the coastal forests discussed in this paper. A number of recent court decisions are redefining the legal relationship between British Columbia and Aboriginal peoples and increasing the need to consult and accommodate First Nations interests on forest management and conservation issues.

Historically, the BC provincial government has retained ownership and responsibility of forest lands, while licensing harvesting rights to private companies under long-term tenure agreements, in exchange for stumpage payments based on volume of cut. Licensing agreements include private responsibilities for operating processing facilities, reforestation, building and decommissioning roads, and managing licensed lands for recreation, wildlife habitat, and biodiversity.

These policies have created a historical social contract based on an exchange of timber for jobs, investment and economic development. Forest companies in BC have built an industry based on exporting large volumes of commodity forest products, primarily to the United States and -- since the mid-1980s -- Asia. In return, the province of BC has received employment revenues, stumpage fees and other benefits. This social contract has come under increasing stress in the past two decades as employment in the forest sector declined, public attitudes in BC towards industrial forestry began to change, environmental groups and some First Nations began to

challenge the allocation of most of the province's productive forest land to industrial use, and new global perspectives on forest values and science began to emerge.

### **The Rise of Environmental Consciousness in the Forest Sector**

In the late 1970s new forces arose to challenge assumptions surrounding industrial forest management. In 1987 the World Commission on Environment and Development recommended a tripling of protected areas worldwide to ensure a representative sample of the earth's ecosystems. As a result of a number of internationally based research and forest policy initiatives, conservation groups began to focus on identifying and protecting intact, rare and endangered natural forests globally. In 1997 the World Resources Institute's report *The Last Frontier Forests: Ecosystems and Economics on the Edge* introduced a new dimension to BC coastal forest issues by identifying the coastal temperate old forests as rare at a global level.

These shifts together with changing public views locally in BC regarding what constituted responsible forest management and growing concern about the environmental impact of the widespread use of clearcut logging in coastal rainforests triggered a series of confrontations between environmental activists, loggers, forest companies, First Nations, forest-dependent communities and government. Most notable were protests in 1993 over logging in Clayoquot Sound, Vancouver Island. The Clayoquot protests led to the arrest of over eight hundred people -- the largest incident of civil disobedience in Canadian history. The confrontation over Clayoquot also marked the introduction of a new strategy by conservation groups opposed to logging in old growth forests: market-based campaigns targeting international customers of industrial forest companies (Stanbury 2000, Wilson 1998).

Growing pressure and controversy at home and abroad over environmental issues led to reform of British Columbia's forest policy during the 1990s. A Forest Practices Code was established, as well as a Protected Areas Strategy, aimed at setting aside 12 per cent of British Columbia's lands. Multi-stakeholder Land and Resource Management Planning tables (LRMPs) were created to make recommendations on land management and conservation issues. These processes led to a doubling of protected areas to approximately 12.5 million hectares (BC Ministry of Forests).

In 1997, the Sierra Club of BC released a GIS forest cover map in support of their claim that more than half of the low elevation old growth temperate rainforest was gone, and that indicated that the largest remaining areas of pristine forest on the BC coast (over 100 valleys) were on the North and Central mainland coast. ENGOs called the area the "*Great Bear Rainforest*" for its population of grizzlies as well as the presence of the unique white bear (Kermode), also known as the "Spirit Bear". They argued that the province's approach to conservation was resulting in disproportionate protection for alpine areas and low productivity forests and warned that if that trend continued on the North and Central mainland coasts, the last large areas of intact or undeveloped rainforest in BC would be lost. Conversely, the forest industry argued that the conservation agenda was extreme and did not consider social and economic factors. Meanwhile the BC government set out to resolve controversy over the area through a consensus based land use planning process.

The forest policy reforms of the 1990s in British Columbia marked the beginning of a new era in forest policy in BC based on the province's desire to introduce new approaches to resource management that would be seen as more credible and sustainable, both locally and globally. For some, the policy changes of the 1990s went too far; for others, they did not go far enough. Regardless, changes in forest policy on the BC coast in the 1990s went largely unnoticed outside of BC.

### **Coastal Land Use Planning**

In the mid-1990s the British Columbia government initiated a consensus-based Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) for the Central Coast, an area of some 4.8 million hectares including many pristine rainforest watersheds identified by ENGOs. Dissatisfied with the constraints the process imposed on the amount of area that could be protected, the environmental groups launched "The Great Bear Rainforest Campaign" to promote conservation of key ecological areas. In particular, ForestEthics and Greenpeace targeted customers of coastal forest companies with harvesting rights on the Central and North coast. Over the next few years, the Great Bear Rainforest became the focus of a bitter dispute in the international marketplace between BC coastal forest companies and ENGOs. As the conflict between the companies and ENGOs intensified at the international level the locally-based land use planning process in BC stalled.

### **Stalemate**

Eventually, the situation reached the point where the BC government, forest companies and communities dependent on commercial forestry no longer had enough credibility outside the province to define a conservation plan for the area due to their perceived bias towards timber production. Environmental groups and supporters, both inside and outside of BC, were in a position to successfully challenge any plan not supported by the environmental movement. Similarly and conversely, the environmental movement did not have sufficient credibility within the region to define a management plan for the area due to their perceived bias towards conservation. First Nations and local communities were also in a position to successfully challenge any plan that did not address social, cultural and economic needs.

### **The Emergence of "Change Agents"**

By the late 1990s both the industry and environmental camps in BC concluded though each had enough power to impose significant damage on the other, neither was in a position to achieve a victory and accomplish its goals alone. As the conflict between BC's coastal forest industry and environmental groups reached a stalemate in spring of 2000, it became apparent that any resolution must involve innovation, and that traditional regulatory mechanisms could not be the only vehicle for conservation. This led to the emergence of the *Joint Solutions Project* and the *Turning Point Initiative*.

The Turning Point Initiative was an alliance between eight coastal First Nations arising from the failure of treaty negotiations. The Turning Point First Nations, supported by the David Suzuki Foundation, began to develop a set of principles for Ecosystem Based Management of forests.

The Joint Solutions Project was an alliance between a group of forest companies and ENGOS interested in exploring ways to end the market-based conflict between them over the Great Bear Rainforest. The forest companies involved are Western Forest Products, Canadian Forest Products, NorskeCanada, Weyerhaeuser and International Forest Products. The ENGOS involved are ForestEthics, Greenpeace, Sierra Club of BC, and Rainforest Action Network. The joint table where the company and ENGO caucuses met became known as the Joint Solutions Project (JSP).

Although the JSP caucuses had different objectives and motivations, important points of overlap between them created alliances that were made all the more powerful by the fact that they involved dissimilar interests. In 2000 both sides agreed to two critical steps in moving toward a solution. First, to ensure a period in which to develop new approaches, the companies agreed to defer logging in remaining pristine watersheds in the Great Bear Rainforest, and the environmental groups agreed to stop conducting market campaigns against their forest products. This gave the industry and the ENGOS time, in a conflict free period, to put their energies into developing creative, innovative solutions to the problems rather than just fighting.

Second, they agreed to collaborate on ecosystem-based model for conservation and management of coastal forests in ways that fully integrate social, economic and ecological needs. They also developed and agreed to a set of principles around Ecosystem Based Management (EBM). To assist with further defining EBM, they proposed bringing together a team of independent scientists combined with local and traditional knowledge to do analysis of British Columbia's Central and North coast ecosystems that would be credible locally and globally. This information could then be used to help inform land use decisions with First Nations and the LRMP.

News of an interim agreement between coastal forest companies and environmental groups was well received in the international marketplace and in urban communities in BC but aroused suspicion among forest-dependent communities, some First Nations and the BC government, who felt that the companies and environmental groups were overstepping their roles and not respecting the role of other parties in reaching consensus recommendations on resource management issues. Local backlash to the agreement caused internal disagreements in both industry and environmental caucuses and some individual members withdrew for a period of time.

Despite this upheaval, there was firm agreement by all parties that 'the status quo was not an option'. Three ideas were now being discussed more broadly by the Joint Solutions Process, Turning Point First Nations, and the government led LRMP.

1. Independent science to inform decision making;
2. A new model of forestry based on ecosystem principles that considered ecological, cultural, social and economic factors;
3. Costs of transition would be shared and not rest on one or a few parties.

With First Nations determined to take a lead role, all parties returned to the negotiating table. Twelve months later, on April 4, 2001, an Interim Land Use Plan for the BC Central Coast was announced, as was an historic Protocol Agreement between the BC government and several First Nations on Interim Economic Measures and Land Use Planning.

Parties to the 2001 agreements included First Nations, the BC government, ENGOs, forest companies, local communities and local logging contractors and forest workers. The agreements established a framework for moving forward based on the following commitments by everyone involved:

1. Designation of an additional 6,300 square kilometres of *Protection Areas* on the BC Central Coast.
2. Completion of *First Nation and locally-based multi-stakeholder (LRMP) land use planning processes* for the BC mainland Central Coast, North Coast and Haida Gwaii/ Queen Charlottes. (Timelines: June/03 for Central Coast; March/04 for North Coast and Haida Gwaii/ Queen Charlottes.)
3. Final approval of land use plans for all three areas will be a product of *Government-to-Government discussions* (i.e. between the BC government and local First Nations).
4. Harvesting deferrals in 5,500 square kilometers of *Option Areas* on the Central Coast until development of an *Ecosystem-Based Management (EBM) Framework* and completion of land use plans. (Note: additional areas on the North Coast and Haida Gwaii/ Queen Charlottes (“Haida Interest Areas”) were also identified for harvesting deferral until land use planning processes in these areas are completed.)
5. Development of an *Ecosystem-Based Management Framework (EBM)* to help inform land use decision-making processes. The EBM framework will be developed by an independent scientific team, the *Coast Information Team (CIT)*, and will include local and traditional knowledge in its analyses of social, cultural, economic and ecological factors at a regional scale.
6. Development and implementation of *Pilot Projects* on EBM and conservation investment or other economic incentives for low impact management.
7. Support for *Interim (Treaty) Measures* for First Nations involving the allocation of forest tenure to coastal aboriginal communities and the creation of new economic opportunities for First Nations.
8. Commitment to *orderly transition* and *equitable management of the impact of change* on forest-dependent communities, workers, contractors and companies.

Additional voluntary commitments made by forest companies and environmental groups participating in the Joint Solutions Project:

9. Provide \$1 million each to support a coastal resolution (through work being done by the CIT & the JSP).
10. ENGOs suspend market campaigns against BC coastal companies agreements while proper planning commitments hold.
11. Companies will not harvest in Option Areas on the Central Coast or deferral areas on the North Coast and HG/ QCI (“Haida Interest Areas”) until land use planning processes in each of these areas have been completed.

Shortly after the framework agreement was announced, a new provincial government was voted into office in BC. In November 2001 the new BC government announced that it would implement the agreement under a streamlined process for LRMP planning managed by the newly-established BC Ministry for Sustainable Resource Management.

## **Conclusion**

The solution process now underway on the BC coast is extraordinarily complex and will take several more years to be fully implemented. Events key to the creation of the 2001 Coastal Framework Agreement included:

- Adoption by the German paper and publishing industry and large North American retailers such as Home Depot of procurement policies that linked forest products and practices to environmental considerations;
- Willingness of BC coastal forest companies to engage in voluntary harvesting moratoria;
- Willingness of environmental groups to channel money earmarked for the markets campaign to a locally-based solutions process;
- Agreement to create a conflict-free period of time in which all parties could focus on innovation;
- Willingness of First Nations to adopt Ecosystem Based Management and independent science;
- Willingness of First Nations to develop land use plans;
- Willingness of First Nations to take a leadership role in bringing parties together;
- Willingness of BC government and companies to apply conservation biology and ecosystem-based management to forest planning;
- Willingness of First Nations and the BC government to pursue new decision making processes based on government-to-government negotiations;
- Promise and eventual provision of funding and assistance for community transitions.

Forest and environmental issues on the BC coast may be unique in terms of the solution envisioned, but the underlying problem – tension between conservation and economic development – is far from unique. The pathway to the 2001 Coastal Framework Agreement demonstrates how the complex issues around forest management and conservation require commitments by adversarial interests to conflict free periods in which all parties focus on innovation. Through ongoing dialogue and collaboration, solutions can emerge that are greater than any one party could have envisioned or implemented. The results are a model from coastal BC that may have application in other forest regions.

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