



DEFENDING THE WORKING FOREST - LEARNING FROM OTHERS

By Brenda Martin

Years ago, Dr. John Innes, who is now dean, faculty of forestry for the University of British Columbia, told his students to develop several business scenarios for the cedar-laden rain forests of Kingcome Inlet, off Broughton Island.

As expected, they visited the region, talked to locals, crunched numbers, and returned with a scenario on how the inlet could be logged. But to Innes' surprise, they also presented a scenario whereby a high-end lodge could be constructed near the water—and that this establishment could result in a far greater revenue flow over the long-term.

Innes recalls, "I hadn't suggested the idea, and my students weren't anti-logging by any means. Then as now, they were looking for jobs in the industry. But obviously their definition of the working forest went far beyond the standard notion of its sole function being to provide jobs to loggers. The numbers might not have been correct, but it was the idea of a possible alternative that was interesting."

Concern for the future of BC's working forests is of course perpetual, case in point: the United Steelworkers (USW) two years ago launched an in-

formation campaign to ensure decision makers and British Columbians under-

stand the importance of maintaining these forests as renewable resources.

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USW Wood Council Chair Bob Matters noted that "not only do thousands of British Columbians earn their living and support their families by working in the forest industry, the industry also generates almost \$2.5 billion a year to federal, provincial and local governments to pay for important public services that we all depend on."

Such sentiments remain valid and undiminished; however, they're increasingly being augmented by a broader view of the forests providing a multitude of benefits along with ideas on how to sustain the land base over the long haul.

And as far as Innes is concerned, taking a broader view is essential to the future prosperity of BC. "I'm firmly convinced we can grow trees a lot quicker, rejuvenate our forestry industry, and develop

new types of business opportunities—but only if we change things," he says.

He goes on to say, "The whole forest estate should be considered as a working forest, not just the timber harvesting land base (THLB). All forests in BC are working for us—whether it is sequestering carbon, preserving wildlife habitat, supplying clean water or performing other functions. Looking at forests in this way means fewer trade-offs: the growth intensification that I think we should be investing in would most likely be on sites that lost their primary forest a long time ago, and now have second- or even third-growth forests."

The UBC dean cites several examples of how ingenuity can result in a more comprehensive utilization of our resources. "After Conifex purchased an idle pulp and paper mill in the Mackenzie area in 2010, it converted the facility into a co-gen plant that provided power to the grid and diversified the company's revenue sources," he says. "Overseas, the Finnish forestry group Metsa has determined that



be so. “My students have a different way of viewing our resource, and many professionals in the industry are starting to draw the conclusion that standard policies and practices are unsustainable. It’s not inconceivable that the stage could be set for fundamental change.”

As far as Robert Dennis, Chief Councillor at the Huu-ay-aht First Nations, is concerned, one new way to look at the working forest is to consider the prospect of business opportunities on treaty land. “The message from the Huu-ay-aht to the rest of BC and beyond is that we’re open for business,” he says. “We’re eager to work with anyone who expresses an interest in our resource and has sound business ideas—provided they respect our core values.”

utilizing its wood-based production side streams for fertilizer, in landscaping, and earthworks engineering could be more valuable than the standard revenue the company generates.”

But Innes adds that ingenuity requires unfettered reign, “and currently the main element holding us back is our tenure system. Just imagine what could be accomplished if we had the

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If that sounds like a pie in the sky wish, Innes explains why it might not

The Huu-ay-aht’s lands are located in the Barclay Sound region of Vancouver Island, and the values Dennis mentions include restoring logged regions to a

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degree “exceeding normal standards,” he says. “Basically, we determine exactly how much cedar we need for our economic and cultural purposes, and plan our harvesting and replanting accordingly.” For the record, the self-governing treaty First Nation holds a woodlands licence and two community forest licences, maintains a 150,000 cubic metre annual harvesting plan, and sends about 65 per cent of its cut to local mills.

Dennis also alludes to the familiar argument of the need to enhance the value of our wood when he casually points out that three-foot long cedar carvings and full-sized canoes created by Huu-ay-aht members have an individual value of \$1,500 and \$100,000 respectively: “I’m not suggesting we all go into the canoe business, I’m only using these examples to illustrate that it’s possible to get way more value out of our logs than forestry firms are currently achieving.”

While some may dismiss Dennis’ ideas as not applicable on a larger scale, Innes points out that it’s in everyone’s best interest to consider the First Nations’ view of the working forest: “Inevitably, Crown



land will be under their control. In the past I’ve predicted it may happen in 20 years, but it could well be sooner.”

Bruce Blackwell, founder of the forestry consultancy company B.A. Blackwell & Associates Ltd., is especially concerned about the ongoing health of the working forest, but not from an economic or cultural perspective per se. His worry is that huge swaths of land are ripe for further

devastation from fire, and that policy makers are providing nothing more than band-aid solutions.

He says, “Our prevention mindset is all about keeping people and homes safe from fire, when in fact forests should be included. What we need to do is ramp up the construction of landscape scale fuel breaks that alter fire behaviour and help to improve our suppression



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Carolyn Smith talks about Greenhouse Gas Mitigation Options.

capability—with a focus on protecting the remaining green wood that has not been impacted by insect attack like mountain pine beetle.”

It’s not an easy task: Blackwell has estimated that more than 600,000 hectares around various communities are at high risk for fire, but only approximately 70,000 hectares have been treated over the past 14 years—at a cost of between \$3,000 and \$20,000 per hectare. “It’s important to note that these figures are only for those areas within two kilometres of communities and aren’t focused on the working forest,” he says. “If we include that, then we’re talking about several million hectares. So we need to prioritize areas for treatment, and quickly.”

One priority might be the gulf islands and southern Vancouver Island. “Within the next couple of decades there is a high probability of a catastrophic huge fire within these regions, akin to the Sayward Fire in Campbell River in 1938, due to their high fuel loading and the increasing numbers of people and human ignitions,” says Blackwell.

Once more, the tenure system is singled out as an impediment towards progress. “The government doesn’t want to touch it, and yet alternative

and this just doesn’t cut it given the scale and impacts of the problem.”

Finally, for those concerned with climate change mitigation, the working

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forestry policy, practices and valuation would go a long way in properly protecting our resource from devastation,” says Blackwell. “For example, think of the benefits that could be had if stewardship contracts that rolled in 5,000 hectares at a time were awarded to contractors who could extract the green wood imbedded in burned or insect and diseased impacted wood, with a focus on capturing the highest value in alternative or new markets.”

Unsurprisingly, Blackwell is reluctant to say whether he’s optimistic or pessimistic about the future: “All I know is we’re seeing small, incremental change,

forest is a potentially enormous tool given that 50 per cent of all wood by weight is carbon.

Carolyn Smyth, research scientist at Natural Resources Canada has, along with her colleagues, undertaken studies, crunched numbers, and concluded via the Mitigation Options for BC’s Forest Sector that different types of mitigation could contribute over one third to the province’s 2050 Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emission reduction target affordable—and create a significant amount of new jobs.

Smyth notes that by combining strategies such as biomass consumption for



energy purposes, using more wood in construction, restricting wood harvesting in some areas, and focusing on increasing harvest utilization overall would be more effective than individual strategies.

In fact, she has determined that restricting logging alone would only help BC achieve 6-7 per cent of the GHG emission reduction target and leave the forests vulnerable to natural disturbances (wildfires that release carbon into the atmosphere). A singular focus on bioenergy from harvest residues—an energy source that is limited in its application—would result in an 11 per cent achievement. Increasing harvest utilization would achieve 16 per cent.

Smyth also notes that the design of a climate change mitigation portfolio should account for carbon in forest ecosystems, carbon in harvested wood products, and substitution benefits, relative to a baseline.

As in the cases of Bruce Blackwell and Robert Dennis, Smyth's vision of how the working forest can be utilized is grandiose and dependent on

a multitude of factors. “But based on the increasing interest displayed by government and the private sector in mitigating climate change compared to when we began our research nearly 10 years ago, I’m optimistic about the future,” she says.

The working forest is far more than just job creation and traditional economic activity. Innes, Blackwell, and Smyth—all speakers in the panel session, “Defending the Working Forest—Learning From Others” at the TLA convention in January—clearly demonstrated that we need active forest management in our province’s working forest for many reasons that all benefit us. The inevitability of change, will hopefully affect BC’s working forest for the better.▲

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