

The Community Forest: A Different Perspective of the Management Model

By Adrienne Tanner

Photo courtesy of Matt Weidick

On the afternoon of July 14, Cascade Lower Canyon Community Forest Corporation shareholders gathered for a landmark annual general meeting at the Hope District Council chambers.

The meeting opened as usual with a First Nation acknowledgement, a fitting show of respect for the Yale First Nation, one of three partners that control timber harvesting in the CLCCF. Representatives from the other two partners,

the Fraser Valley Regional District and District of Hope were also in attendance. Any regrets at sacrificing part of a sunny summer weekend vanished when discussion turned to 2017/18 highlights.







At the top of the list was disbursement to the CLCCF partners. For the first time since 2013, when logging in the community forest began, there was money to share. And lots of it. Each partner received \$100,000, its share of profits realized from logging efforts in the community forest, which spans an area of 26,000 hectares around Hope.

The meeting was “pretty upbeat,” says Matt Wealick, general manager of the CLCCF. “The board felt we had a good year and that we’re going in the right direction.”

John Fortoloczky, chief administrative officer for the District of Hope, says there are many ways the district’s share of the money could be used to benefit the community. “We could dole it out... to groups or individuals, to projects for maybe seniors or a big regional project or recreational items.”

The money was not the end of the good news. The year’s highlights revealed logging efforts by the corporation had employed 11 Hope residents and

that corporation directed 1 per cent of all gross revenue be used for recreational infrastructure development, such as trail building.

These were big wins for the partners which only assumed direct management of the forest tenure in the spring of 2016. The success was due largely to the relationships cultivated by the community

ration contracted management services, logging and log purchases to a large operator, Tolko Industries, because without money in the bank and experience working in the industry it would have been difficult for the partners to go it alone, Wealick said.

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forest partners and contractors hired to do the work. Well-managed community forests go beyond dollars and cents; worth is also accorded to a community’s cultural values, recreational aspirations and ecological concerns. It takes partners and contractors who can listen and work together across cultural lines.

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ration contracted management services, logging and log purchases to a large operator, Tolko Industries, because without money in the bank and experience working in the industry it would have been difficult for the partners to go it alone, Wealick said.

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local companies like Probyn. "I've been working in that area for 20 years. We've been around long enough that we know who the First Nations are, we know the people and we know what they like and don't like." While some larger companies make a deal, take the wood and run, Probyn has roots in the area and plans to stay for the long haul, he says.

What sets the CLCCF community forest partnership apart from others is that it has three partners, a First Nation and two other levels of government. There is no industry member. The CLCCF is managed with deference to First Nations' livelihood and cultural values as a starting point, says Wealick, whose father was from the nearby Tzeachten First Nation in Chilliwack. "We're looking at things from a different perspective," he said. "It's not all about economics. Yes, there is an economic component, but it's also about what the community wants to see." Just as passengers on a cruise ship don't want to look at clear cuts, there are areas, hills and mountainsides that might be of cultural significance to a First Nation, areas they would not want logged, Wealick said.

Fishing is key to the Yale First Nation's livelihood and culture, says Steven Patterson, who chairs the CLCCF and represents Yale First Nation. So, the Yale members will sometimes request a hydrological report, to ensure crucial fisheries are protected. "We have to be very careful when we are doing work in any particular watershed," he added.

With First Nations values as a starting point for harvesting decisions, CLCCF must also account for community wishes of the smaller Union Bar First Nation, town of Yale and residents living in Hope, Sunshine Valley, Skagit River area, who are keen to develop the area's recreational potential that often runs counter to logging. And of course, there are a myriad of environmental regulations and best forest practices to follow as well. So far, the CLCCF has balanced the competing interests of its partners and now has even cut them a cheque, exemplifying BC's community forest model.

From Hope, the CLCCF stretches north along both sides of the Fraser River, to Yale. South of Hope, where the river bends westward, another chunk of the forest lies to the south of the river. The trees are a mix of Douglas fir, hemlock, balsam and most valuable of all,

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cedar. It is mountainous terrain and logging is made difficult by steep canyons. Of the total area, less than 1 per cent, or 8,000 hectares will be harvested, to ensure long-term sustainability.

Before the CLCCF was granted its tenure, the Hope region was part of the vast Fraser Timber Supply Area. Numerous companies, including Interfor, were licensed to log in the area, many operating under volume-based tenures. To avoid encroaching on each others' turf, the companies formed "gentleman's agreements" to divvy up the land, Wealick says.

BC's old model did not sit well with many BC First Nations, said Patterson. "A lot of licensees, they'll come by once a year and tell you where they plan to harvest and then they go away," he said. As First Nations began to assert more control over their traditional lands and companies were given a duty to consult, many large forestry corporations deemed the negotiations too time-consuming and simply pulled out.

Interfor left the Hope area in the early 2000's after the Bill 28 takeback, which removed logging rights from companies and reallocated them to First Nations.

It was a dramatic change to the district which lost revenue and jobs previously provided by the company. The current 25-year tenure is area-based and gives the CLCCF sole timber harvesting rights within its boundaries. Having clear access to available timber makes sustainable harvest practices more feasible. And working with small, local contractors who know and understand the areas' values and concerns makes it easier to implement plans arising from the delicate three-way negotiations between partners.

Wealick who has worked in forestry his entire life, believes the future of logging lies in the community forest model. "There are lots of examples where...major licensees are working, and you don't see a lot of benefits from the major licensee coming back into the local community," he said. Community forests in partnership with smaller contractors can avoid disagreements between contract loggers and major licensees over rates and realize more direct community benefits, he said. "Those sort of examples could happen all over BC."▲



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