

A YOUNG TIMBERLESS SOCIETY INITIATIVE

- In consultation with Professional Foresters -

Public Forests are a Trust

The trust has been broken and it's time to renew the trust

Why does BC have public forests? BC has public forests to ensure that they would have independent professional forest management. Sound forest management was intended to ensure a strong forest economy and sustainable communities. Timber from public forests was intended to be available to small and large enterprises.

BC Governments did not fulfill this trust. A Forest Service was established almost 100 years ago to provide independent professional forest management. But government administrations gradually and increasingly compromised the trust by sharing forest management with forest companies.

Instead of providing independent forest management, we let a few select customers manage public forests for their own benefit. To encourage short term economic development, we gave rights to harvest public timber to forest companies willing to build saw or pulp mills. Restricted markets for public timber reduced competition and the development of value added wood manufacture and made exports vulnerable to discriminatory taxes.

Value stripping

Although government controlled the volume of timber that could be harvested, forest companies stripped the timber of highest economic opportunity from public forests. Even before the present economic crisis, the coastal forest industry was having difficulty in dealing with timber of lesser economic opportunity. In the interior, a species of lesser value was left to get old and susceptible to insect attack. The 13 million hectare mountain pine beetle epidemic is larger than a natural event (think of an area the size of Denmark, Holland and Switzerland together). It will result in the loss of tens of billions of dollars worth of timber and economic activity.

How does government and forest industry intend to solve the problem? They intend to solve the problem by continuing on the path that caused the problems in the first place. Giving forest companies more control by turning public forests into commercial timber growing zones under long term leases is not a solution. It would mean that BC's public forests would be public in name only.

Every resident of British Columbia is a shareholder in our public forests. We should have representation in the business of our forests. We should have independent

management and an expectation of a fair economic return and sustainability. Also we should be able to see that the social and recreational qualities of our forests are maintained.

New forest institutions will renew the forest trust for the 21st century. The new institutions are:

- Local Forest Trusts
- BC Forest Trust Assembly

Local Forest Trusts are the building block and business units:

- Geographic or landscape units of sufficient size for economic operations
- Elected board on ward system from local communities and rural areas
- Independent professional forest management staff
- Written trust agreement requiring sustainable management to international standards (Montreal process)
- Full management for timber, non-timber and nature based economic activities
- Timber sold on open market
- Licences for woodlots, non timber and nature based small enterprises

BC Forest Trust Assembly

- Democratic body governed by elected and professional delegates from local forest trusts
- New policies require ratification by a majority of local forest trust boards
- Audits local forest trusts and sustainable management
- Appeal body for public, board members and professional staff
- Reporting authority for local forest trusts with no associated community and board
- Provider of collective supports: insurance, fire suppression, training and extension services, data standards and software

Many benefits of the new institutions

The new institutions provide democratic boards and local accountable professional forest management. The business of the public forest is clarified by having local trusts operating as business units and reinvesting in the forest. Open markets for timber will enable existing forest companies to continue manufacturing and encourage a competitive environment where value added manufacturers can flourish. Open markets for timber will reduce the vulnerability of BC's wood exports to discriminatory taxes and tariffs.

Full management of forest landscapes will diversify local forest economies by adding non-timber and nature based economic activities. While these may not exceed the values derived from timber they will be a necessary supplement to forest communities facing timber downturns.

Urban dwellers will benefit because there will be active management and stewardship of the social and recreational values of forests.

First Nations will have Local Forest trusts within the same system. All communities will have self governance and revenue sharing. First Nations communities are likely to fare much better under the proposed institutions than under the existing land claims process. Local forest trusts with professional forest management could revitalize the economies of under privileged First Nations Communities and provide renewed hope.

Full details of this initiative can be found under the heading “Community Trust”