



Opposition Mounts to Pan Pacific Aggregate's Mine Proposals

by Daniel Bouman

The SCCA has been working closely with the Friends of Sechelt Peninsula (FOSP) and other citizens' groups to organize public opposition to a new major mining proposal on the Sechelt Peninsula. This project could displace an entire complex of wetlands and fish-bearing lakes and streams with an open-pit mine, and dramatically impact the quality of life in nearby communities.

The saga began over a year ago when the province's new on-line staking system became operational. Virtually overnight, a new mining consortium, Pan Pacific Aggregates (PPA), staked the entire Sechelt Peninsula. Almost immediately, bulldozers, back-

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Land and Resource Management Plan Essential for Sustainability

by Brad Benson and Daniel Bouman

Land-use planning is the traditional tool used to balance the often-conflicting needs of the economic sector, First Nations and communities. Land and Resource Management Plans (LRMPs) have either been completed or are still in the planning process for approximately 85 percent of BC. LRMPs require major commitments from participants and extensive technical support from government if they are to be successful.

Land-use planning on the Sunshine Coast to date has been of an ad hoc nature; a comprehensive LRMP has never been attempted here. Judging from the many resource conflicts in the region, higher-level planning is long overdue and desperately needed.

The fundamental purpose of an LRMP is to achieve sustainability, and a basic aspect of sustainability is the protection of biological diversity. However, emerging challenges are changing assumptions about land and resource management. Global climate change, for instance, is a vital new factor. First Nations rights, extensively recognized by the judicial system and by society, have not been seriously considered yet in the context of regional land-use planning. Independent power projects, which may provide clean energy but can also cause environmental damage, are another factor. In addition, a sustainable future means looking at future population, transportation and development needs from a regional perspective.

In the past, commercial and sport fisheries employed hundreds of people on the Sunshine Coast and made a major economic contribution. This sector has diminished radically due to habitat destruction and overfishing, yet many rivers still have remnant salmonoid populations. Their restoration could be a key aspect of a conservation plan for this region. Aquaculture activities are expanding in the Powell River area, as are related conflicts over property,

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This view back towards the town of Gibsons from Gospel Rock was made with infrared-sensitive film. Daniel Bouman photo

Gospel Rock: Hanging in the Balance

by Daniel Bouman

Sixteen years of uncertainty over development of one of the Sunshine Coast's most spectacular neighborhoods are now drawing to a conclusion. The Gospel Rock Neighborhood Plan is in the final stages of development. This plan will resolve the issues of how much land will be retained in a natural state, how much be made available for development and what kind of development will be considered appropriate. The planning process was initiated last winter with a series of public consultations and visioning exercises. These were followed by a design charrette that illustrated potential options, and more consultations—one

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Land & Resource Management Plan

marine conservation and tourism, all of which need to be remedied through an LRMP process.

As the main traditional natural-resource industry in our region, forestry raises a host of critical issues that need to be addressed by a Land and Resource Management Plan:

- *Forest Stewardship Plans (FSPs)*. Based on the directives of the new *Forest and Range Practices Act*, these plans do not describe actual stewardship activities or comply with regional land-use planning. In many cases, they represent a rollback of environmental protections.

- *Species at Risk*. The needs of species at risk have not been assessed in the Sunshine Coast Forest District (SCFD), nor is available scientific information being adequately incorporated in forest planning.

- *The new Forester's Act*. Foresters are legally obliged to address sustainability and conservation issues affecting forest resources, something they can't do without effective regional land-use plans.

- *Forestry and Settlement Areas*. A long list of intense local conflicts in the "interface" areas between the working forest and Sunshine Coast communities suggest that forestry practices there need to be improved and a land base made available to support the area's new tourism, retirement and service-oriented economies.

- *Forestry and Visual Quality Objectives*. These emerging economies depend on preserving the visual quality of the landscape. Devalued VQOs need to be reconsidered.

- *Forestry and Silviculture*. Clearcutting, with some very minor modifications, is still the only harvesting system used in this region. Short-rotation forestry does not add value to our wood products or provide a competitive range of products.

The issue of new protected areas needs to be considered in an Land and Resource Management Plan. The current protection level of about three percent in the SCFD is clearly inadequate and one of the major causes of conflict in the region, particularly in interface areas. The land base must maintain wildlife populations and support the Sunshine Coast's new emerging service economy

A Brief History of Land-Use Planning on the Sunshine Coast

The *Protected Areas Strategy (PAS)* of the 1990s succeeded in establishing some provincial parks in this district, including Spipyus and Tetrahedron. The people of the Sunshine Coast were never directly consulted or represented in the process.

Landscape Unit (LU) planning is fairly advanced on the Sunshine Coast compared to in other forest districts. However, the potential for LU planning to protect biodiversity (and support a non-timber economy) is limited primarily to old-growth resources. Even this has been compromised, unfortunately, by government's recent directive to reduce old-growth inventories to one-third of Biodiversity Guidebook target levels.

The *Identified Wildlife Management Strategy (IWMS)* has had a

as well as its old industrial one.

Community water sources have been degraded by logging activity and road building in the past. Securing a safe domestic water supply is an urgent public requirement that can be addressed through land-use planning. The stipulations of the new *Forest and Range Practices Act*, which demand that drinking water conservation not unduly restrict the flow of timber, are reprehensible and against the public interest.



What's your vision for the Sechelt Peninsula? Here's ours: an intact, unspoiled high-altitude lake in all its pristine beauty.
Daniel Bouman photo

Aggregate and limestone mining activities in the SCFD have become hugely controversial and may have severe implications for domestic water supplies, recreation and tourism, and community quality of life. Broad land-use objectives must balance economic needs with those of communities and the environment.

A government-supported LRMP for the SCFD would be an investment in a sustainable future. Its benefits could include greater land-use certainty and natural-areas protection, more resource-sector jobs and increased opportunities for tourism. In the absence of such planning, the *ad hoc* nature of current policies can only continue to foster conflict and environmental degradation.

small impact but has not resolved any species-at-risk issues. About 50 Wildlife Habitat Areas have been established in the SCFD, largely exhausting the one percent land-base budget allowed by government but not remotely accounting for the biological needs of the identified species.

The last *Timber Supply Review (TSR II)* in this forest district was completed more than seven years ago. The review recognized that major fish and wildlife habitat issues were left unresolved, and it committed to allocating sufficient lands for at-risk species in the next TSR, which has now been postponed indefinitely.

Visual Quality Objectives (VQOs) represent another layer of land-use constraint. VQOs were substantially devalued in the late 1990s to alleviate timber supply shortfalls. Consequently there is now a conflict between the forest industry and the emerging economy of tourism.

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Pan Pacific Opposition Mounts

hoes and drilling rigs began excavating and blasting in the Carlson Creek headwaters area and also on slopes adjacent to residential areas in the West Porpoise Bay area of Sechelt. Just as quickly, residents flooded the local conservation officer with complaints about damage to fish-bearing lakes and creeks. Provincial authorities levied a temporary stop-work order (we're still waiting to hear if charges will be laid). In June 2005 PPA announced that a major deposit of limestone had been discovered and that it would be seeking an environmental certificate from the BC Environmental Assessment Office before applying for a permit to excavate 6 million tonnes of mineral annually for 25 years.

Residents and naturalists have a number of major environmental concerns. The north mine site is the source area for several salmon streams and is also important to South Pender Waterworks, which serves many homes in the Pender Harbour district. Mine activity may increase or spread the arsenic contamination that already affects many deep wells in this region. A concentration of blue-listed red legged frogs is present in the area, as is scarce nesting habitat for the red-listed marbled murrelet. Mine product transport is a major issue, as well. The options are: a conveyor belt through a seaside residential neighborhood or eight barges a day through world-famous Skookumchuck Narrows, a marvel of nature, major tourist attraction and focus of biological diversity. PPA's south mine site, meanwhile, is in full view of thousands of Sechelt residents and would bring noise and dust to their peaceful neighborhoods.

An upside to the situation is that a quantum leap in environmental consciousness has occurred among residents. Neighborhood after neighborhood has realized that environmental assets (fish, forests, wildlife, water, etc) contribute to lifestyle and property values, and that these values must be defended. A united voice is now emerging. Federal and provincial environmental assessment processes are being studied. Legal assistance has been secured (thanks to West Coast Environmental Law). Most of our local elected officials are well briefed and on side, and every possible effort is being made to bring everyone into the picture.

Following are some of the latest developments. Also, please

see FOSP's excellent website (www.fospfriends.com) for breaking news and more background information:

- A referendum held in August by the Sechelt First Nation resulted in 130 votes against PPA's mining project, 30 votes for.
- Joni Mitchell was one of 2,248 people to sign a petition asking the federal government for a comprehensive environmental assessment of PPA's project. MP Blair Wilson has promised to present the petition to government this fall.



Here is Pan Pacific's vision, supported by the province and by some local governments. Which will serve us best for the future? Ryan Logtenberg photo

- BC Environmental Assessment Director Derek Griffin and Environmental Assessment Officer Autumn Cousins inspected the north mine site in July with FOSP members. MLA Nicholas Simons has also toured the area.

How will this issue be resolved? We are confident that if all the potential impacts are assessed, this project will not go forward. Unfortunately, many Canadians have not had very positive experiences with environmental assessment processes. It is apparent, however, that the glare of sustained public scrutiny can be effective in forcing regulators to address the relevant issues. We hope that people around the province will pay attention to this situation. We'll keep you posted as the process unfolds.

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Gospel Rock Hangs in the Balance

of the most thorough public processes ever seen on the Sunshine Coast. We commend the town of Gibsons and property owner Glen Bryson for making this process possible. However, the question remains: will it be successful in protecting valued natural assets while allowing sustainable development to proceed?

Local residents have long held that the seashore, forests and viewscapes of the Gospel Rock area are extraordinarily unusual. Ecosystem identification and inventory information from BC's Conservation Data Centre confirm that the forest and bluff areas above and below Gower Point Road are, in fact, rare and endangered plant communities. This type of ecosystem is severely

under-represented in the province's system of protected areas. As well, the ecosystem's site type is also naturally rare. One of the special features of the Gospel Rock site is that the plant communities are in excellent, mature condition. There are very few opportunities to protect lands of this type that haven't already been degraded by development and forestry. In other words, the land at Gospel Rock is highly significant for the maintenance of biological diversity—something that all citizens have a stake in.

At the end of the day, Gibsons council will be responsible for deciding these issues. We note that the town has moved to require an environmental impact study of the neighbourhood's ecologically sensitive areas. A wise move! In the meanwhile, we encourage citizens to pay careful attention to the planning process; the fate of Gospel Rock hangs in the balance.

Powell River's Stillwater Project Stripped of Community Values

by Eagle Walz and Andrew Scott

In 2000 a forestry plan known as the Stillwater Pilot Project was developed in the Powell River region by Weyerhaeuser. As a result of contributions by an independent 16-member Community Advisory Group (CAG), many non-timber values were incorporated into the project and respected by the company.



A scene from the Sunshine Coast Trail, which will not be protected by 30-metre buffer zones under Western Forest Products' new FSP. Eagle Walz photo

These values included the protection of much old-growth and vital wildlife habitat, and the preservation of recreation and tour-

ism zones. Important trail systems, including the Sunshine Coast Trail, alpine trails and the Powell River Canoe Route, were buffered from logging. Lakeshores were protected. Variable retention logging was practised (smaller cutblocks with substantial islands of trees). Local value-added businesses were assured a supply of timber. A readable forest stewardship plan (FSP) was prepared.

In June 2005 Weyerhaeuser sold its coastal holdings to Brascan, which formed two new companies: Cascadia, to control the Crown land timber assets, and Island Timberlands, for its private lands. In February 2006, Cascadia abandoned the Stillwater Pilot Project and wrote a new FSP that did not uphold the community values embedded in the plan with the help of the CAG. In May 2006 Cascadia was acquired by Western Forest Products.

Despite a campaign to retain the Stillwater project spearheaded by the Powell River Parks and Wilderness Society (a SCCA member group), the new FSP looks as if it will be approved by the province. This FSP is very difficult for lay people to read and comprehend. It provides minimal preservation for any forest values other than timber harvesting. Old growth and tourism zones are no longer protected, and only a few small trails are buffered. Clearcut logging is the norm for harvesting, and value-added businesses will lose their assured fibre supply.

PRPAWS and the Sierra Club of Canada, Malaspina Group, continue to call for the withdrawal of the Cascadia FSP and for the preparation of a genuine stewardship plan, one that protects valuable old growth, habitat, and tourism and recreation resources—and includes real input from the region's residents.

District of Sechelt Forest Stewardship Plan Needs Improvement

by Daniel Bouman

The District of Sechelt's vision for environmental stewardship within the "community forest" is now available for public review and comment. This document, called a Forest Stewardship Plan (FSP), describes the district's legally binding commitments to environmental protection (see "ED Report" opposite). Readers will recall that, during the application process, the district frequently assured the public that its community forest application was for the purpose of achieving environmental protection. Mayor Cam Reid also asserted that if the district didn't accept the drinking watersheds as part of its operating area, other licensees, such as BC Timber Sales, would log in the watersheds. With the publication of this FSP, we can now see if the District has lived up to its commitments.

The first review is not very promising. To begin with, the district's FSP is virtually identical to that of BC Timber Sales and adheres to the absolute minimum standards of environmental protection permissible under the *Forest and Range Practices Act*. For example, in the realm of drinking water protection, the FSP commits to not having an adverse impact on the Sunshine

Coast Regional District's water treatment plant unless this "unduly restricts the flow of timber." The strategy for achieving this goal is to govern logging through a Coastal Watershed Assessment Procedure. This amounts to less protection than even that proposed in the 1998 Chapman/Gray Integrated Watershed Management Plan, which was soundly defeated by an 87% margin in an SCRDR referendum.

As far as wildlife is concerned, this FSP does not specify a strategy for frogs, marbled murrelets or other at-risk species, on the grounds that the required minimum amounts of land needed for protection have already been set aside in the operating areas of other licensees. Overall, the "community" forest commits to no legal obligations for species or plant communities recognized as at-risk by BC's Conservation Data Centre or by the federal Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada.

An FSP must meet certain minimum requirements but is not limited to those minimums. With this FSP the "community" forest management team has finally gone on record about the kind of forestry that they intend to practice. Their choice has been to ignore the "community" and institute the lowest possible levels of environmental protection.

Considering what had been previously promised, the District of Sechelt needs to drastically improve its "stewardship" plan before submitting it for approval.

Exploring the FSP Quagmire: The Executive Director's Report

by Daniel Bouman

Readers may be wondering about a recent series of ads in local newspapers featuring the "forest stewardship plans" of various logging companies. I've been examining these FSPs in detail over the past few months, and also reviewing the provincial legislation that concerns them, and I'd like to report my findings to you.

Under the old *Forest Practices Code Act*, logging companies were required to put logging plans up for public review every year and demonstrate that all forest values were being adequately managed and conserved. The current government brought in a package of "reforms" for the purpose of streamlining the approval process while (supposedly) maintaining the province's environmental standards. The new act is called the *Forest and Range Practices Act (FRPA)*; everyone pronounces it "fir-pa"). This act allows companies to replace their old forest *development* plans with new forest *stewardship* plans, which only need to be reviewed every five years and allow the companies to operate largely free of public and government agency oversight.

So what measures of stewardship are logging companies actually committing to in these FSPs? Before answering that question I'll just point out that there's a phrase in *FRPA* that says: "if the minimum requirements of the Act have been met, the FSP must be approved." All the FSPs that I've seen to date adopt the most minimal standards permissible under the act. The touted "results-based code" doesn't really require much actual stewardship. What is required in the FSP is a statement that the logging company will comply with government orders, such as Wildlife Notices and Non-Spatial Old-Growth Orders, that are already mandatory minimums. FSP holders must also declare their compliance with established Landscape Unit Plans, which they must do legally anyway. There are "default" results and strategies in the regulations of the act that logging companies can adopt in lieu of their own. And all these minimum standards are qualified by another infamous phrase: "without unduly restricting the flow of timber from Crown lands." Essentially this means that timber supply considerations trump any measures of environmental stewardship in an FSP.

The situation for the critically imperilled marbled murrelet is particularly disturbing. There is a Wildlife Notice for this species

that requires suitable nesting habitat to be protected if it occurs on land that is not harvestable or is within an Old Growth Management Area. The notice also permits a tiny portion of loggable land to be protected: 495 hectares in our 2 million-hectare forest district. (Yes, you read that right: 495 hectares for the entire 2 million-hectare forest district). Basically, the notice protects only a fraction of the land needed to maintain this species. And to be approvable, an FSP need only comply with the minimum standards of the notice. There has not been one single FSP filed in this forest



Biologist Andrew Simons, Sunshine Coast MLA Nicholas Simons and the SCCA's Daniel Bouman at PPA's north mine site. John Dafoe photo

district that commits to exceeding these minimums.

Conservationists should be very concerned about this situation. Why is it, for instance, that the federal *Species-at-Risk Act* says it's an offence to kill a marbled murrelet, destroy its nest or disturb it in any way, while the provincial government can authorize (through FSP approvals) large-scale logging of the birds' nesting habitat? It seems to me that this issue belongs in a court of law. Perhaps this will happen. Meanwhile, the SCCA has asked the Forest Practices Board to appeal the approval of Interfor's Sunshine Coast FSP on grounds related to those described above. If the FPB agrees, it will ask the Forest Appeals Commission to overturn the FSP. I'll be posting news of this action to the SCCA website so keep checkin' in!

Noteworthy News and Events

The SCCA is delighted to announce receipt of a grant from the Vancouver Foundation to help us prepare to participate in a potential Land and Resource Management Plan and publish a history of the Sunshine Coast's drinking watersheds. ☺ To receive our grant we must provide matching funding, so **now is a vital time for supporters to donate to the SCCA**. Every dollar you donate is, in effect, worth two dollars. ☺ In the Powell River area, a fantastic community effort has raised \$75,000 to help secure 34 hectares of green space in Westview for Millennium Park. The area encompasses the Willingdon Beach Trail and McFall Creek corridor. Over 2,000 donations from individuals, businesses and community organizations were received.

Celebration of Conservation

The SCCA invites you to our 3rd Celebration of Conservation, to be held at the Sechelt Seaside Centre, Sat, Nov 25. This event will combine educational presentations, food, music, fundraising and good times. Coordinator Marianne Larsen would like some help with the planning, though. We also need plenty of volunteers to assist with the food, bar, entertainment and various activities. If you'd like to get involved, please call Marianne at 885-6431 before 6 pm. There will be a special planning meeting this fall, so keep checking the SCCA website (www.thescca.ca) for the date of the meeting and for details about the celebration as it evolves. Mark your calendars now and start the holiday season by having fun and supporting the vital work of the SCCA!

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Gambier Island Conservancy
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Powell River Forest Coalition
Powell River Parks and Wilderness Society
Roberts Creek Co-Housing Project
Ruby Lake Lagoon Nature Reserve Society
Sandy Hook Community Association

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"The purpose of the Sunshine Coast Conservation Association is to preserve the natural biodiversity of the Sunshine Coast region for the present and future benefit of humanity and all life, specifically to:

1. Conduct research to inventory and describe our remaining natural areas with the goal of identifying land and waters important for the preservation of biodiversity. All information collected will be freely available to the public.
2. Work to retain such lands and waters in a natural state and make them available for the public enjoyment where possible.
3. Raise public environmental and conservation awareness by sponsoring educational programs and workshops and by building access infrastructure for low-impact recreation."

(Our constitution requires that membership in the SCCA is conditional upon acceptance of the purpose of the SCCA stated above.)

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