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Land and Resources Management Planning Issues Backgrounder

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Introduction

Broadly focused comprehensive land use planning is the traditional tool used to integrate and rationalize the needs of diverse and often conflicting economic sectors with the rights of First Nations and the needs of communities. All these parties need environmental as well as economic certainty. In British Columbia, this level of regional planning is achieved through Land and Resource Management Plans (LRMP). Approximately 85% of the province has already benefited from LRMP planning. These processes require a major commitment from all affected parties and extensive technical support from government if a successful and sustainable outcome is to be achieved.

Historical Notes about Land Use Planning in the Powell River-Sunshine Coast Region

Historically, the logging and fishing industries have driven the economy and development of the region. The logging industry, in particular, has had a dramatic impact on the condition of the region. The typical pattern was that logging started at the beach and proceeded to higher elevations. Species of the highest economic value were targeted first with little regard for longterm operability or other forest values. Over time, this historical pattern resulted in major losses of economic potential and degradation of various but important natural resources. For example; a once vibrant fishing industry that supported thousands of people and produced millions of dollars worth of product year after year, has all but disappeared.

The *Protected Areas Strategy* (PAS) of the 1990s succeeded in establishing some protected areas in this district, including the Tetrahedron and Spipyus provincial parks. The level of fully protected areas in the Sunshine Coast Forest District is now about 3% of the land base. The people of the Sunshine Coast were never directly consulted or represented in the PAS process. There have been other processes that have established partial protection for a few non-timber values. *Landscape Unit* (LU) planning is fairly advanced here compared to other forest districts. However, the potential for LU planning to protect biodiversity (and support a non-timber

¹ economy) is limited primarily to the protection of old growth resources. This level of planning was severely compromised by government direction to draw down old growth inventories to 1/3rd of the Biodiversity Guidebook target levels in all the *Low Biodiversity Emphasis Option* landscape units. Delay in LU planning also resulted in the loss of options to protect old growth resources.

Another process, the *Identified Wildlife Management Strategy* (IWMS) has had some small impact but to date has not yet resolved any species-at-risk issues. Approximately 50 Wildlife Habitat Areas have been established in the SCFD. These WHAs have largely exhausted the 1% impact budget allowed by government but do not remotely account for the biological needs of the identified species. These biological needs are described in the IWMS *Species Accounts* and were defined through scientific evaluation in the course of recovery planning. Again, delay in implementing the IWMS resulted in a loss of options to maintain biodiversity.

The last *Timber Supply Review* (TSR II) of this forest district was completed more than 7 years ago. TSR II recognized that major fish and wildlife habitat issues were left unresolved and committed to allocating lands sufficient for the needs of at-risk species in the next TSR. However, TSR III and its resulting Allowable Annual Cut (AAC) determination has now been postponed indefinitely.

Visual Quality Objectives (VQO) represent another layer of land use constraint. VQOs were

substantially devalued in the late 90s to alleviate timber supply short-falls. Consequently there is now an entrenched conflict between the traditional land use of forestry and the emerging economy of tourism.

Why the SCFD Needs Higher Level Land Use Planning

The fundamental purpose of an LRMP is to achieve sustainability. Protection of biological diversity is a fundamental aspect of sustainability. A commitment of land base will be necessary to insure protection of biological diversity and biological services. As well, a balance of land uses must be integrated if the needs of all the social and economic sectors in the region are to be maintained. It is important to note that land use planning to date has been of an *ad hoc* nature, reflecting temporary approaches to political and sometimes emergency situations.

Comprehensive regional planning has never before been attempted in this region. Judging from the many major resource conflicts and the large number of small but sharply disturbing local conflicts, higher level planning is long over due and desperately needed. As well, new challenges are emerging that will profoundly change our assumptions about land and resource management.

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New Challenges

The fact of **Global Climate Change** is now thoroughly established by currently available scientific information as an emerging reality and an urgent challenge. The new reality is that all aspects of natural resource management need to be reconsidered with a view toward future ecosystem conditions.

Over the last few decades **First Nations Rights and Privileges** have been extensively recognized by the judicial system and society in general. Exercise of these rights and privileges will profoundly affect all sectors of society and economic activity. Provincial government initiatives, (for example, the tenure take back program) have just begun to account for these changes. The impact of resolution of First Nations' issues on traditional stakeholders has never been comprehensively considered in the larger context of regional land use planning.

Independent Power Projects have the potential to provide much needed clean energy sources for future generations. However, they also have the potential to conflict with other resource priorities and, unless carefully sited and installed, may cause a great deal of unnecessary environmental damage. Penstocks, generation facilities, service roads and transmission lines can occupy large amounts of land. A thorough assessment of potential opportunities and conflicts is necessary to secure benefits while maintaining a sustainable future.

Transportation, Growth Management and land for future development needs are subjects that need to be considered in a regional context if a sustainable future is to become a reality.

Legacy Issues

Fisheries: In the past, commercial and sport fisheries were supported by aquatic habitat and spawning grounds of the Sunshine Coast region. These fisheries employed thousands of people and generated millions of dollars worth of product. This sector has diminished radically over time due to habitat destruction and over-fishing. Many small stream stocks have been entirely lost. However, many of the major river systems still have remnant populations of most of the original runs. A conservation plan for this region would key on the need for restoration of salmon populations as a cornerstone species of biological diversity and ecosystem function. The needs of other salmonoids also need to be considered; both Cutthroat and Steelhead populations have been in long term decline.

Forestry: As the traditional lead natural resource industry in our region, forestry management and practices involve many critical issues. Here is partial list of increasingly urgent forestry related concerns that need to be addressed in the context of a fully resourced LRMP;

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- **Forest Stewardship Plans (FSPs).** These plans feature the stewardship commitments of the new results based forest practices code. Under the Forest and Range Practices Act, FSPs contain the results and strategies of logging licenses to comply with the goals and objectives

of government as expressed in government orders and higher level plans. The SCFD has no higher level plans beyond those of Landscape Unit Plans, which have a single-issue focus (minimum old growth retention). Consequently, the FSPs being written now have an absurd quality about them, as they do not describe actual stewardship or address compliance with higher level plans. Clearly, the commitments being made now through FSPs are entirely inadequate to meet the needs of the region for stewardship and in many cases, are a roll -back of existing environmental protections.

- *Species-At-Risk*. The needs of plant communities and species at risk have not been comprehensively assessed in this forest district, neither is there any direction from government that currently available scientific information will be incorporated into forest development planning. Delay in implementing the IWMS has resulted in a significant loss of management options. At this stage, only the highest level of land use planning could hope to insure a future for these plant communities and species-at-risk. As time passes, the options to address these issues are becoming more difficult and expensive.

- *Conservation and the new Forester's Act*. Professional reliance, under the new Foresters Act, has been greatly enhanced to allow foresters sufficient latitude to be decision-makers while complying with the obligations of the profession. These obligations are expressed in law and in the professional association's bylaws, most notably, bylaws 14 (ethics) and 17 (professional practices). Among the commitments in these bylaws are those that address sustainability and the conservation of all forest resources. These commitments exist regardless of current government policies related to any particular issue. In the absence of higher-level land use planning and comprehensive measures to maintain all forest resources, the obligations of the profession of forestry to the environment and the public, can not be met.

- *Forestry and Settlement Areas*. There is a long list of localized but intense conflicts over forestry in the "interface" areas between the working forest and Sunshine Coast communities. Sunshine Coast economies are becoming tourism and life-style oriented. A commitment to provide a land base for this new economy is necessary. As well, forestry practices in the interface areas need to be substantially reconsidered, if a fair and sustainable future is to be secured.

- *Forestry and Visual Quality Objectives*. The evolving economy of the region depends, to a large extent, on the visual quality from the marine environment everywhere in the forest district. VQOs were substantially devalued in the late 90s. Reconsideration of these unilaterally re-determined standards is urgently needed.

- 4• *Forestry and Silvicultural Systems*. In the past, only one silvicultural system was used in this region; clearcutting. Although today this system is used in a slightly modified way, clearcutting is still the commonest harvesting method. The choice of silvicultural system has social and ecological impacts that reverberate spatially and over time. Do current management assumptions meet the needs of our region for a competitive and productive forest industry? Are the log grades produced by short rotation forestry fully supportive of the region's need to add value to the harvested product? Are current management assumptions compatible with the needs of other resource stakeholders? These issues represent a few of the basic considerations in the quest for a sustainable future.

Protected Areas: The issue of new protected areas needs to be considered during the LRMP process. The current level of approximately 3% Provincial Park is clearly inadequate and is one of causes of conflict in the region, particularly in the industrial/settlement interface. All forest values need some certainty of land base to continue to exist. In addition to the land base required to maintain wildlife populations, what commitments of land base do the strongly emerging economies associated with community life-style, recreation and tourism require? Rationalizing the land base needs of the many economic sectors of the region is a key task of the LRMP process.

Water: In the past, community water sources have been severely degraded by logging activities. Securing an adequate and safe domestic water supply is traditionally addressed by land use planning and is urgently necessary. The default measures for management of Community Watersheds found in the Forest Practices and Planning Regulations (of FRPA) is that licensees

must not impact public water treatment plants, unless this unduly restricts the flow of timber. This is not an acceptable standard and will not serve the public interest. In the course of land use planning it should be a priority to secure the public interest in domestic water supply.

Mining: Aggregate and limestone mining activity in the SCFD has become intensely controversial and may have severe implications for various community assets such as domestic water supply, visual conditions, community quality of life, etc. There is no doubt that the mining industry will be part of our future. Broad land use objectives based on balancing the needs of other sectors with updated inventory information could preempt conflict and insure a measure of sustainable activity that would benefit all concerned.

Aquaculture: Both fin and shellfish aquaculture activity is growing in the Powell River region. Conflict related to residential properties, tourism and marine conservation priorities are also growing. Remedies for these conflicts are approachable in the course of an LRMP process.

5 Conclusion

A fully resourced and supported Land and Resource Management Plan process is warranted for the Sunshine Coast Forest District. This investment in a sustainable future would likely provide substantial benefits to government and communities throughout the region. Greater land use certainty, natural areas protection, more resource sector jobs and increased opportunities for tourism and recreation are among these benefits.

In the absence of comprehensive land use planning, the ad-hoc nature of current policies will continue, fostering a legacy of conflict and environmental degradation. The diverse communities of Powell River and the Sunshine Coast fully support initiation of an LRMP process.

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