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Community forestry in British Columbia: Policy progression and public participation☆

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ABSTRACT

It is 17 years since the British Columbia Ministry of Forests instituted the Jobs and Timber Accord of 1997, which established British Columbia's (BC) Community Forest Pilot Program and formally introduced Community Forest Agreements into the provincial forest policy framework. For this special issue we present the results of a census of all active members of the BC Community Forest Association, evaluating the program using the method demonstrated by Maryudi et al. (2012) where evaluation is guided by the original aims of the policy; in this case the Community Forestry Initiative of BC. We sought the Community Forest Organisations' views on the strengths and limitations of the initiative, whether they were equipped to achieve the aims expected of the policy, and the degree to which the policy aims were their priorities. We found that community forests in BC assess themselves as having been broadly successful in terms of policy aims of public participation and environmental stewardship of forests, but that the policy has not enabled economic diversification. Corroborating other studies we report that community forests found that encouraging participation requires sustained effort, that diversifying from conventional forestry is desired but not usually achievable and that motivations for involvement in community forests are diverse.

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1. Introduction

Globally there has been a move away from top-down management of government owned forests towards various models of community control (Agrawal et al., 2008). This move has had differing levels of success which have been analysed in a variety of ways (see Conroy et al., 2002; Sikor, 2006). Indeed, globally the challenges of community forestry have been two-fold: the development of community forest tenures that are adapted to existing management frameworks; and the introduction and implementation of those models. The experience in British Columbia reflects this: certainly, there had been periodic calls to allow a more formalized role of communities in forest management. However, it was not until 1998, when the Provincial Legislature passed Bill 34: *Forest Statutes Amendment Act* (Legislative Assembly of the Province of British Columbia, 1998), that both of these challenges were formally introduced to British Columbia. A new form of forest tenure – the Community Forest Agreement – was introduced, and subsequently policy commitments were made to enhance and expand the program. The development of this new tenure, the pilot projects that followed, and the anticipated refinement of the structure of the tenure and its general applicability are collectively referred to as the Community Forestry Initiative (CFI).

A review of community forestry definitions reveals that benefits to communities and local participation in the management of forested lands are common principles. By these criteria, Brendler and Carey (1998) define community forestry as "… managing forests with the express intent of benefiting neighbouring communities" (p. 21), similar to that proposed by Duinker et al. (1994) in the Canadian context as "a tree dominated ecosystem managed for multiple community values and benefits by the community" (p. 712). Three principles commonly associated with community forestry are that (1) local residents have access to forested lands; (2) opportunities for the participation of local residents in management decisions relating to forested lands exist; and (3) an effort is made by communities to protect and maintain the forest they have the responsibility of managing (Brendler and Carey, 1998). In the broader context of forest management, the corollary is that community values will carry significant weight in the development of management objectives, and that communities' involvement in the process of arriving at those objectives will be achieved. In the development of the BC CFI, the Ministry of Forests[2] (MoF) clarified their interpretation of community forestry, offering some explanation of what constituted desirable outcomes from community forestry in BC:

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[2] The BC Ministry of Forests has been known under various names since the 1940s, including the current title *Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations* and its previous name *Ministry of Forests and Range*. In order to minimise confusion, Ministry of Forests (MoF) is used throughout the text of the article in reference to the evolving section of the BC government responsible for forests.

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> "… community forestry can be loosely defined as community involvement in local forest lands for community benefits. It is a means of maintaining forest-related community lifestyles and values, while providing jobs and revenue that contribute to community stability."
>
> [(1997)]

Beyond these definitions community forests in BC have been charged with many additional responsibilities, among them conflict mitigation over valuable environmental resources and homelands, community empowerment, the implementation of ecologically-based forestry, and the restoration of community links with the environment (Berkes, 2010; Bullock et al., 2009).

Community forests are expected to provide for many different and competing needs, including those of government, industry, community and First Nations stakeholders (Bullock et al., 2009). This wide range of expectations has been criticized as unrealistic and undeliverable (Bradshaw, 2003). Given these expectations, what has been the experience and what have the outcomes been, now more than a decade and a half later? This paper begins with explaining the background of community forest tenure in BC. This is followed by the development of criteria to assess community involvement and benefits and challenges in forest management and an assessment of the outcomes according to the method used by Maryudi et al. (2012).

This study presents results that are representative of the 38 active Community Forest organisations (CFOs) in British Columbia (BC) who are members of the BC Community Forest Association (BCCFA). Although the census results presented here reflect the experience of the members of the BC Community Forest Association, the characteristics and circumstances of the eight BC CFOs which are not members of the BCCFA may differ. However, this research does lend credence to other studies of CFOs in BC (i.e., Ambus and Hoberg, 2011; Bullock et al., 2009), by supporting their findings and suggesting some common themes that may challenge similar organisations involved in community based natural resource management elsewhere, including lack of economic security, differing values and objectives in contrast to conventional forestry (where cutting and selling logs is the only source of income from the forest), and difficulty in diversifying away from this conventional forestry model. It also confirms that the motivations for pursuing community forestry are diverse and varied, making it difficult to identify common performance measures or indicators of success. Nevertheless, our results do indicate that CFOs are responsive to local needs and interests, an important consideration in BC where public consultation by other forest rights holders can be lacking (BC Forest Practices Board, 2013).

2. The development and formalization of community forestry in British Columbia

This section reviews the background conditions that prompted the development and formalization of community forestry in BC, and the characteristics of the BC community forestry tenure.

2.1. Background conditions

2.1.1. The development of community forest policy in BC

The majority of land in BC (95%) is managed by the Provincial government, and forestry is administered within the BC Ministry of Forests under a system of forestry licenses that allow access to forested land, collectively called forest tenure. The forest tenure system defines the rights and obligations associated with managing provincially owned timber, including the obligation to prepare forest management plans, pay timber fees (also known as 'stumpage' or taxes) when timber is harvested, to meet provincial forestry regulations governing forestry practices, and to manage non-timber forest products.

The BC forest tenures system is notable for its size and complexity, with some tenures rooted in the development of the forest industry in the Province dating back to the 19th century. The system was based on the promotion of regional development through the granting of access to Crown (i.e., public) timber and encouraging private capital to develop a manufacturing sector and associated economic benefits including improved timber values, timber fees, and employment. Absent in this system was any formal local community control of forests. The idea of community-controlled forests has been suggested by a number of communities and individuals, including provincially-led inquiries into how forests should be managed in the Province, and the Royal Commissions on Forest Resources of 1945 and 1956 (Sloan, 1945; 1956). The issue was raised again in another 1976 Royal Commission on Forest Resources, which recognized the significant increase in demand for small-scale forestry in BC. Two factors that contributed to this demand were "anxieties over new, large scale forms of industrial logging operations; and a reaction against the centralization and consolidation of control over resource rights and forestry operations" (Pearse, 1976, p. 190). To address these concerns, Commissioner Pearse suggested that the practice of small-scale forestry and timber management could enhance the productivity of fragmented public and private lands. Pearse concluded that small-scale forestry may be more efficient in some areas than commercial-scale forestry in the utilization of forested lands, meeting community needs, and providing for stable employment. However, Pearse also recognized that economies of scale could be a factor that would make it difficult for small forestry operations to compete in the timber market.

In addition to these formal calls, there were also local initiatives that drew on two pioneering community forests established in the province during the late 1940s: the North Cowichan Forest Reserve (created on municipal lands) and the Mission Municipal Forest Reserve (initially established on municipal lands and augmented by the award of a tree farm license) (Allan and Frank, 1994). In 1974, the Slocan Valley Community Forest Management Project proposed that communities should have control over local forest resources; the concept was opposed by the BC Forest Service, and rejected in 1976 by the provincial government (Wilson, 1998). In 1993, the city of Revelstoke obtained a community forest, managed by the Revelstoke Community Forest Corporation under an existing form of tenure, a Tree Farm License (Revelstoke Community Forest Corporation, 2014). In some cases, the forest industry sought out community involvement; in 1997, MacMillan Bloedel entered into a joint forest management venture with the Nuu-chah-nulth First Nations of Clayoquot Sound (Hoberg and Morawski, 1997).

In the 1980s and 1990s, there was an increasing perception that BC's forests were not being managed in an ecologically sustainable way. During this period, forestry operations and methods in BC had come under increasing pressure from a variety of actors, including environmentalists and international consumer markets (Ambus and Hoberg, 2011; Bernstein and Cashore, 2000; Tanz and Howard, 1991). Environmentalists' arguments and campaigns had captured the attention of politicians and resource managers, and had resulted in a political climate in which leaders were prepared to consider conservation ideals, and whether or not the current system was adequately meeting community needs.

2.1.2. Initiation of the pilot program

By the 1990s two factors had converged to make room for community forestry in the Province's forest tenure system. First, a change in government occurred, and a more socially oriented party assumed power that promised to address environmental and social issues in forestry as part of a broader election platform; the second factor was a change in the Province's economic conditions. After enjoying a brief period of prosperity in the mid-part of the 1990s, during which newly elected government introduced far-reaching environmental regulations, the latter half of the 1990s saw declining profitability and employment within the timber industry, drawing attention to the social objectives around forestry. In response, the government initiated the Jobs and Timber Accord (JTA), which sought to create 21,000 new direct jobs in the timber industry by 2001 (Haley and Luckert, 1998). The development of new jobs was to create stability in the forest sector, timber

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