



BC Community Forest Association Old Growth Management in Community Forests

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British Columbia
**Community
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Association**
local people, local forests, local decisions

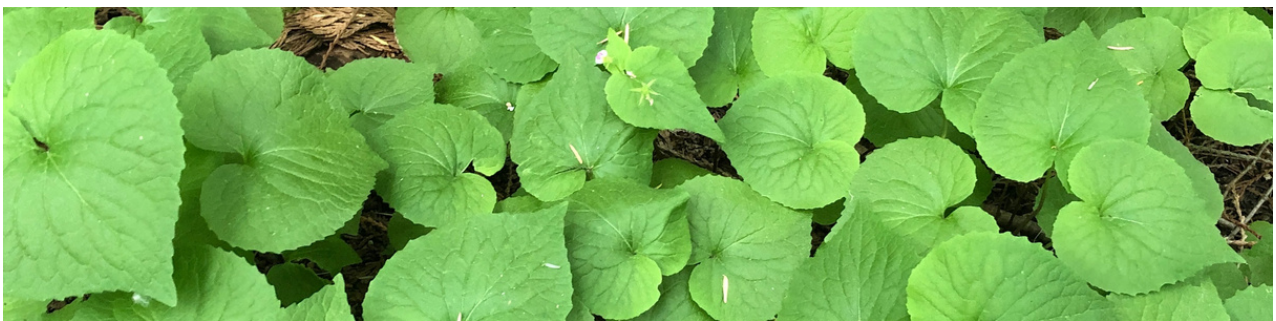
Community forests bring a unique perspective to the forest sector, a perspective informed by long-term stewardship of the land around their communities. Community forestry in BC grew out of a call from communities to do something different in the provincial forest close to their homes. In the late 90's, rural and Indigenous communities wanted to have more local say in management of local forests. They asserted that the local forests were more than just a source of timber and they wanted to be empowered to determine how their values were managed on the land. The Community Forest Agreement (CFA) is the tenure developed to give local communities the opportunity to manage local forests for the benefit of those communities, in a manner consistent with the objectives and values defined by the community.

Community forests work hard to create multiple benefits for their communities. Community forests are managing for community values in contentious and important areas, like community watersheds, for the long term. They prioritize important cultural values, climate change adaptation and wildfire risk reduction. Many community forests are demonstrating innovation and leadership in managing old growth, biodiversity and ecosystem resilience. Community forests are also providing local jobs, making contributions to local groups and leveraging outside donations to address community needs.

Community forests have enabled opportunities for Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities to work together with a shared focus. Half of the operating CFAs are held by First Nations or are partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. In addition to community forests where First Nations are owners or partners, many community forest organizations include First Nations representation on their boards. In many cases, First Nations are engaged in cooperative planning, share profits, have MOUs and employment contracts, and work with community forest organizations in capacity building activities like training and education.

The Community Forest Agreement (CFA) is an area-based licence that provides the exclusive right to harvest timber within the CFA area, and the right to manage botanical forest products. Licences are long-term, 25 years, replaceable every 10. Since the development of the CFA tenure in 1998, BC has issued 60 CFAs across BC with another 4 formally in the application process. CFAs are governed by the Forest Act and the Forest and Range Practices Act, and all other applicable statutes and regulations.

These licences are held by a variety of community-based legal entities, including Limited Partnerships, Societies, Co-Ops, First Nations and local governments. Collectively, over 100 Indigenous and rural communities are involved in community forestry in BC.





The concept of social licence in community forestry originates with the tenure itself. CFA licences are managed by the community, for the community. An essential principle driving community forestry is that those directly affected by a decision should be the ones making it. Community forests involve a collective effort from the very beginning. In order to obtain a community forest tenure, the community must mount a comprehensive application process that includes the requirement to demonstrate local community engagement and support. Community forest managers and boards are tasked with keeping the community informed and engaged and must learn to manage conflicting perspectives.

Profits from a community forest do not leave the community to benefit distant shareholders. The community forest can't be sold to an individual or company outside of the community, so it won't ever be used for a quick cash trade in. This contributes to the motivation and capacity of community forests to manage sustainably and to invest in activities to enhance the future ecological and economic value of the forest. A community forest tenure provides a strong incentive to create benefits for the long term in their management approaches. A commitment to manage the land and resources for future generations and to create economic opportunities for their children's children informs many decisions on community forests. A community with their own tenure must live with the consequences of their decisions.

The BCCFA is a non-profit society with a mandate to serve as the voice and advocate for community forestry in BC. We provide input on forest policy to facilitate the success of community forest initiatives and work with government to expand community forestry in BC. Our educational resources and extension services support communities striving to obtain and successfully implement community forest initiatives. We work towards a vision for a network of diverse community forest initiatives, where local people practice ecologically responsible forest management in perpetuity, fostering and supporting healthy and vibrant rural communities and economies.

Community forest managers have adopted a stewardship approach to management of their tenures and recognize that forests are dynamic. They have learned that forests must be cared for and that if we want old forests, then the forest must be tended for those values. Community forests are actively managing for old growth, biodiversity and working to create more resilient ecosystems in the face of climate change. They are incorporating wildfire risk and community safety, forest health, watershed protection and cultural values as they make their plans for management of their tenures. They are putting an emphasis on active management of a suite of values, including jobs, to achieve balance on the land.

Informed by enhanced inventory information gained from the use of LiDAR technology, and many days spent field checking the data, community forests are actively planning for the long term on their tenures. In a recent survey conducted by the BCCFA, 44% of respondents report already having a plan in place for the specified types of old growth stands identified in the Old Growth Strategic Review Technical Advisory Panel, and 31% are currently in the process of making a plan. After the proposed deferrals were announced, an additional 6% of respondents have started making a plan.

Community forests assert that the recommendations of the Old Growth Strategic Review are best accomplished through an approach that considers the values of the local Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities and respects the plans, processes, and relationships already in place to manage for old growth, biodiversity, and ecosystem resilience.

Within the community forest network are exciting examples of how community forests are going above and beyond legal requirements to manage for old forests and biodiversity. They are leaders in how Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities can come together to steward the land, incorporating cultural knowledge.



Westbank First Nation Community Forest

The Westbank First Nation (WFN) Community Forest is a powerful example of what is possible when taking on the challenge to make a paradigm shift in the way forests are managed, including old growth. They have developed their own approach to long term, landscape level planning that is informed by their Indigenous community and the values they hold.

The WFN Community Forest is managed by Ntityix Resources LP, a wholly owned subsidiary of Westbank First Nation. Their community forest covers over 46,000 hectares in two parcels, one directly west of the communities of West Kelowna and Peachland and the other just northwest of Big White, with an annual harvest of 50,000 m³. Their Seven Generation Stewardship Plan for their community forest strives to balance forest management with traditional use by the Westbank First Nation people for hunting, trapping, food gathering and spiritual use.

In managing for old growth, they are thinking not just about age of trees, but how old forests function and where those forests will have the best success to thrive. They are using science and Indigenous knowledge to understand the variety of values that old forests provide and where on the landscape it is important to have them. They recognize that human activities have and will continue to impact old forests, activities that include climate change and the suppression of fire over the past 100 years.

Historically, Indigenous land stewardship coexisted with old forests. The cultural use of fire was used to tend the forest, enhancing wildfire resiliency and forest health. The Westbank people know that to have old growth forests, they must manage fire. And they are doing so in their Seven Generation Stewardship Plan. The plan challenges them to think ahead 120-150 years and consider management options and consequences through this lens. Their spatialized plan has two management zones: The Forest Operations Zone that is stewarded for multiple values, including timber production and the Old Forest Stewardship Zone that is managed primarily for old forest values. The objective with this zone is to manage it for the values that old growth forests provide.

The Westbank Community Forest knows that their plan will evolve over time, yet their goal will always be to work towards a balance between healthy ecosystems and the need for jobs for their people and the community needs for water, medicines, recreation and wildfire protection. They trust that these values can coexist by achieving their vision.





Sunshine Coast Community Forest

The Sunshine Coast Community Forest is bringing a new approach to their management. Located just outside the lower mainland, this tenure has been the focus of vocal opposition to harvesting, particularly in consumptive watersheds since their inception in 2006. Many strategies were used through the years to gain the social licence needed to confidently operate the community forest with community support. Over time, new leadership came to the organization along with a new vision for the community forest.

The new vision includes adoption of Ecosystem Based Management (EBM). EBM is based in science as well as traditional, local knowledge with a goal to ensure the coexistence of healthy, fully functioning ecosystems and human communities. It is an adaptive approach to managing human activities that include jobs, recreation and other non-timber values. EBM is used to guide the management of the Great Bear Rainforest on the central and northern coast of BC. "...EBM provides a big picture view of how people interact with their environment, how people's needs are met while co-existing with plants, animals, seasonal changes and climate."¹ The EBM forest management system for the Sunshine Coast Community Forest will reflect the unique needs and values of their forest, community and the local Shishalh First Nation.

The community forest recently conducted a project to learn about the quality and comprehensiveness of their ecosystem mapping to support the identification of mature and old forests and to inform their EBM planning. The report "Old Forest and At-Risk-Ecological - Communities: Interpretations and TEM (Terrestrial Ecosystem Mapping) Analysis for the Sunshine Coast Community Forest" will guide them in the maintenance of the current old forest conditions on the landscape while a reserve system and a recruitment strategy are developed. The report is a first step in a larger planning exercise that will include community engagement and ground truthing of the data, yet it is an important first step and a solid demonstration of the organization's commitment to old growth on their tenure.

¹ <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/natural-resource-stewardship/great-bear-rainforest>.

Harrop Procter Community Forest

Climate change projections and risks have been widely discussed for many years, but climate adaptation considerations are rarely integrated into applied forest management decision-making. In 2011, the Harrop-Procter Community Co-operative recognized that to achieve their long-term sustainability goals they needed to understand the real risks of climate change on their own tenure. They are now integrating climate science and risk assessment into their forest management planning and bringing the community along with them. The high level of social licence for their innovations on the land around the community and in the consumptive use watersheds, translates directly to support for the adaptive approaches they are using.

The community forest has an AAC of 10,000 m³ on 11,300 hectares with elevations of 600 m to 2300 m. Nestled on the west arm of Kootenay Lake, the area is accessed by a small ferry and includes whole watersheds and 110-year old mixed coniferous stands. A community forest since 1999, their not-for-profit co-op, with 200+ members have held tightly to their objectives since the beginning: Ecosystem-based forestry, water protection and local employment.

When a lightning strike threatened the watershed and the community in 2003, wildfire protection was added to that list of priorities. By 2010, climate change adaptation became a leading concern for how it will impact the community forest and a pilot project was launched.

Their journey to learn more about adaptation and the actions required were encouraged by the premise that there is sufficient science to inform a way forward. A vast collection of climate science reports agree that these changes can be expected over the next 30 to 60 years:

- Fall/ winter/ spring 2 - 5 degrees warmer and 10 - 25% wetter
- Summer 3 - 7 degrees warmer and up to 30% drier
- ~5 to 15+ times more average annual area burned
- Increased frequency and magnitude of extreme precipitation events

Today, their operations strategy incorporates the probability of climate change bringing fire, drought and altered stream flow and the likely consequences on homes, water, biodiversity and timber. For old forests to continue to exist on this landscape, they must be managed as part of plan for ecosystem resilience. The Harrop-Procter Community Cooperative has put a focus on priority actions for the next 20-40 years which include to protect old forests and riparian zones, caribou habitat, connectivity, and fuel mitigation treatments. They are taking a new look at stand composition & structure, stocking standards and assisted migration of species that may have a better chance for long term health in a changing climate.

Community forests in BC are dedicated to understanding and managing for ecosystem health on their tenures. These community-based enterprises empower local people to have a hand in determining their own futures which include the health of the land around them. With supportive provincial forest policy in place, along with Indigenous leadership and involvement, community forests can pilot ways to approach forest management in the new paradigm. The network of community forest shareholders, boards and managers is dedicated to sharing their experiences, successes and challenges, ensuring continuous improvement and long-term benefits for the forest, their communities and the province.



Barkley Community Forest

The Barkley Community Forest is a partnership of the town of Ucluelet and the Toquaht First Nation. They have a current AAC of 27,000 m³ on 6,757 ha. When the community forest was established in 2015, they set out to “undertake progressive forest management practices that protect ecosystems, promote forest regeneration, and which ensure a sustainable base that allows long-term benefits to be realized.”

Prior to the establishment of the Technical Advisory Panel (TAP) and its subsequent reporting on deferral areas, the Board of Directors and General Manager of the Barkley Community Forest were working on a strategy for old growth, biodiversity conservation and riparian zone protection on their tenure area. They completed a field/aerial review of all old growth stands in the community forest in 2021.

The Board of Directors fully anticipates a significant reduction in the short and long term available harvest as a result of including old growth, as well as second growth recruitment stands, in a comprehensive reserve network. Their old growth and biodiversity management strategy is expected to result in a 25%+ reduction in the AAC for the Barkley Community Forest in the next 3-10 years and 10%+ in the mid to long term. But taking a stewardship approach to the community forest is important for them all.

Both the Toquaht First Nation and the town of Ucluelet agree that any strategy going forward regarding old growth and biodiversity conservation must be based on the best local inventory data available and not on broad provincial mapping. They plan to consider and, where appropriate, incorporate the data, maps, and recommendations of the TAP into their planning process. They have committed to basing the designated conservation areas on the best current local information to allow the Barkley Community Forest to continue to meet its goals and to ensure it meets the tests over time.

*The **BC Community Forest Association** represents over 90 rural and Indigenous communities across our province. We share a vision of a network of diverse community forest initiatives, where local people practice ecologically responsible forest management in perpetuity, fostering and supporting healthy and vibrant rural communities and economies.*

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