

BCCFA Conference May 27, 2025

Plenary Session - Vancouver Island Community Forest Showcase

Session Description: This session will explore how the mission, goals and guiding principles laid out in the community forest management plan translate into the governance and operations of 5 community forests on Vancouver Island.

Speakers:

North Island Community Forest, Ione Brown, Manager and RTF

Alberni Valley Community Forest, Chris Law, Manager and RTF

Barkley Community Forest, Erik Holbeck, Manager and RPF

Huu-ay-aht Community Forest, Patrick Schmidt CEO Huu-ay-aht Group of Businesses;

Qala:yit Community Forest, Steve Lorimer, Manager and RPF

Moderator – Molly Hudson

Notes compiled by – Gillian Chow Fraser

Main Topics Discussed:

North Island Community Forest, Ione Brown, Board Chair

- Governance and Operations approach included a diverse roundtable (elected officials, lawyers, accountants, shareholders, directors) to establish its structure and formation. Final governance structure is composed of 3 representatives from each community and 4 directors at large (which will grow to 5 representatives as the shareholders grow and two First Nations are added with offers of full equity partnerships).
- Their tenure consisted of take-back volume from two separate TFLs and two separate timber supply analyses. They were originally proposed to harvest 15,900 m³/year - but they changed to 10,400 m³/year at a 60-80 year harvest age.
- NICF focused on providing local regions and communities a stronger voice in management. They believe that with more tenure, there should be more input in the planning process to support community values.
- They are open to evolving goals and objectives, for example, they've moved away from BCTS style disposition agreements and towards managing their sales themselves; and their Strategic Plan was revisited to bring in a focus on reconciliation and path forward with First Nations, bolstering recreational opportunities and enabling collaborative planning.

- Some challenges include: Limited support for one cutting permit has limited options for innovation on their tenure and reduced responsiveness to market demands; long approval timelines for FSPs, CPs and RPs. Small tenures mean high cost per meter - the smaller the tenure, the harder it is to operate and be profitable.
- Their key successes have been gaining social license, collaborative planning with First Nations (including working together on an integrated resource management plan), new partnerships with Indigenous communities, huge volunteer support, and economic gains (6.6M back to the community over the years).

Alberni Valley Community Forest - Chris Law, Manager

- Port Alberni is the sole shareholder with a 7-member board of directors.
- Some of the pressures in this region include high recreational activities, including the fact that Sproat Lake was nominated as Best Lake in BC.
- The CF was promised future expansion on the condition that they met management goals. They harvested their the AAC while managing to higher standards. However, a limited land base means there is now no option for expansion.
- They were initially provided an AAC of 18,156 m3 but they reduced their AAC within the next five years.
- The AVCF surveyed the public to determine community values - of which preservation of water quality and fish habitat protection were the highest ranked, followed by old growth preservation and other values. These surveys are recurring so they can track and monitor how values are shifting. They have also added values, including fire hazard risk reduction to the list of public values.
- Following recreational activity increases since 2019, they've also maintained wider riparian reserve areas to incorporate recreational uses within those buffers.
- Second five year cut control period harvested 70% of AAC - reducing AAC to 12,000 m3, concentrating on 65-70 year old stands.
- They've developed better utilization of fiber to maximize merchantable timber, now down to 3-inch tops.
- They are revisiting their management plan now (the previous one served them for 15 years). They are anticipating a further drop in AAC for this plan but, looking ahead, they anticipate further increases as second growth stands grow.
- A long-term vision for the timber supply means the AVCF is making decisions to benefit the forest and communities into the future (i.e.: harvesting the whole AAC now would be shooting themselves in the foot).

Barkley Community Fores, Erik Holbeck, Manager

- History of the Community Forest is important context: Logging began in the 1890s and increased significantly from the 1940s onwards. They were harvesting over 400,000m³ in this area. Then in 1993/1994, the War in the Woods happened. In 1998, the M&B Kennedy Lake Division closed and over 200 jobs were lost. In 2000, the Ucluelet Economic Development Corporation was formed to revitalize the local economy. In 2011, the Maa-Nulth Treaty was signed by 5 First Nations. In 2015, the Community Forest was formed. It was initially offered to Ucluelet, but the tenure area was in Toquaht land. And so, they were also offered 50/50 ownership.
- The CF is operated by a 6-person board (3 from each partner).
- The CF has 4 guiding principles (originally 10 that were distilled into 4): Sustained ecosystem function, diversity, complexity; local indigenous knowledge, cultures and traditional practices; all persons with an interest are treated with respect; long-term economic viability of the forest business. These guiding principles inform the objectives.
- The CF is currently experiencing a transition to second growth harvesting and exploring opportunities to develop other non-timber resource values.
- A new management plan was just submitted, which includes: updated road and stream inventory, zonations (reserves, biodiversity management and timber harvesting). The biodiversity management zones are made up of habitat inventory, important cultural areas, physically inoperable areas, and including analyses of connectivity, ecosystem representation. The zone is not going to be treated as fixed areas, they will continue to learn and maintain flexibility to manage biodiversity.
- The CF saw a 50% reduction in AAC to 12,600 m³/year. They did not expect the process to reduce the AAC by that much, but further analyses suggests it is viable. The CF believes it can be managed successfully and grow other resource values. After 35 years, the AAC will likely grow back and could be back up to 20,000 m³/year.

Huu-ay-aht Group of Businesses, Patrick Schmidt, CEO

- The Community Forest exists within an ecosystem of Huu-ay-aht First Nation licenses (e.g. First Nation Woodland License). The Community Forest is easier to manage than the other licenses, stumpage allows you to ride through ebbs and flows of industry. The Community Forest is the backbone of the forestry “ecosystem”. The Community Forestry works really well, but they want *all* forestry to work for them, too.
- Other eco-resources that are managed by the Business Group include fishing and hospitality.
- The Business Group is looking more deeply into value-added products and looking at where Community Forestry fits into that. They’d like to be fully integrated, as flexibility in economics is key.

- TimberTiles (generously supplied as centerpieces for the BCCFA banquet) are an example of product that are producing. The first step is taking the product and seeing what can be done to advance the value as much as possible. While the facility operates sporadically right now, they are hoping to get into full operation and create 15-20 jobs full time.
- Part of the impetus to look into value-added products came from UBC evaluations that looked at forest products supply chain management.
- The overall goal for forestry is that the Business Group is involved in the harvest, mills, and final product. All focused on bringing the economics back into the home community.

Qala:yit Community Forest, Steve Lorimer, Manager

- Qala:yit means “a special place by the sea”
- It is a joint venture partnership between Pacheedaht First Nation and Lake Cowichan CF Cooperative.
- About 8,000 hectares of forest land is managed with an AAC of 24,200 m3.
- A unique feature is that it also has a reduced volume cut, which is an allocation given to BCTS from within the CF. They developed an MOU with BCTS about how they would work together. They do a 5-year cut in one year so they can do a more viable sale, rather than doing a small annual cut.
- The Community Forest is operated by a 4-member board of directors.
- Priority community values have been bird and fish habitat.
- A critical approach has been engaging with the Chief and Hereditary Chief frequently and having a good relationship.
- The CF also prioritizes the cultural aspects of the forests. For example, one of the first blocks they ever cut was old growth with some cultural features. So, they carried out a blessing ceremony for the cedars, including the selection of one cedar to carve into a canoe.
- Community forestry can be viewed as a tool for reconciliation with Indigenous communities and a form of “land back”.

Key Takeaways:

- **Community Forest success:** Success isn’t about checking the boxes on a form, it is about clarity of vision, depth of relationships, and connection to community.
- **Advice for young Community Forests:** Have lots of patience; set up a group of regional representatives, include as many people as possible in the initial conversations; join the Community Forest Association; establish good relationships with First Nations

partnerships; work with other tenures for data collection (like LIDAR) to take operations to scale; have a good connection with the local forestry office.

- **Indigenous leadership or representation:** Highly functioning boards with equitable representation, joint ownership of the CF is a helpful model. Many of the CFs reflected on close relationship with Indigenous communities (community members and elected officials) through high engagement with council meetings, community meetings, field tours with Guardians and incorporating values from their land use planning.
- **Forest Management:** As a Community Forest, we are empowered to make the decision to reduce harvest levels if it is needed to meet community values and sometimes needed to continue in the long run. Many CFs may be initially proposed to have higher AAC because they are inherited from previous licensees, but doing your own analysis and having an intimate understanding of your own timber supply is critical. Integrated resource management plans make sure plans are completely aligned with shareholders.
- **Community engagement:** There are many ways to identify and understand community-level values and carry out successful community engagements (such as annual surveys, user group meetings, open houses, online and in-person feedback on management plans). Maintaining a positive relationship with the community is very important.

Important Details/Quotes:

- “We are stalwart forestry communities—we need to think about how we are going to support jobs and local economies in these communities forever.”
- “Despite high costs, we have been successful with volunteer efforts. Community forests don’t come together without volunteer support.”
- “We anticipate a further drop in AAC but can probably increase as second growth stands grow. We could probably achieve it now but we’d be shooting
- [Reflecting on lowered AAC] “Initial dismay turned to optimism: we are leaving more value and more options for the next generation. At the end of the day, they were difficult decisions but we feel better about them now and we’re proud of this plan and looking forward to the future. “
- “Community Forest is easier to manage than the other licenses (FNWL,TFL), stumpage allows you to ride through ebbs and flows of industry.”