

Planning in Coastal Rainforests

British Columbia, Canada

Some people are looking to the Central Coast agreement as a model for developing cooperative solutions in other areas of the world.

British Columbia's remote coastal rainforests (sometimes called the Great Bear Rainforest) first gained international renown for their pristine watersheds, old growth forests, and habitat for bears and salmon. Now, this region is receiving international recognition for its innovative and cooperative approach to balancing conservation and sustainable use, addressing the needs of local residents, aboriginal communities and international interests. In fact, some people are looking to the Central Coast agreement as a model for developing cooperative solutions in other areas of the world.



Photo: M. Wigle

Land use planning in B.C.'s coastal rainforests is receiving international attention for its innovative and cooperative approach to conservation and sustainable use.

Coastal Planning

On the Central Coast, forest companies, conservation groups, First Nations (aboriginal people), government and others have worked for years to develop a land use plan for government-owned lands. In April 2001, these groups reached a historic agreement on a preliminary land use plan that addresses conservation, sustainable management and community transition in this region of 12 million acres (4.8 million hectares). This agreement received international recognition, including the approval of wood product buyers, and cautious support from conservation groups. But the challenge remains for all groups to resolve complex issues and complete a land use plan that addresses all interests. The many representatives that make up the Central Coast planning table are working cooperatively under government leadership to reach final land use recommendations by spring 2003.

Planning is also getting underway in neighbouring regions – the North Coast and Queen Charlotte Islands (known to First Nations as Haida Gwaii) – which have similar ecological, social and economic values. Planning in all three of these regions will include new protection areas, ecosystem-based forest management, a strong role for First Nations, independent scientific advice, and support for community transition.



Decisions about land use and resource management must reflect and accommodate the interests of First Nations, who make up roughly half the population in these coastal areas.

Planning Update

New Protection Areas

Government has legally established 20 large protection areas based on cooperative planning on the Central Coast. These new designations, totalling 441,000 hectares (more than a million acres), conserve rainforests, habitat for the white kermode bear, and other ecological values. The designations are temporary, since boundaries may change as a result of ongoing planning and research.

Land use planning will also consider 40 small proposed protection areas and a number of option areas identified in the preliminary land use agreement.

Over the past year, forest companies have voluntarily

chosen not to harvest in any of the proposed protection areas or option areas. Government has now introduced regulations that will ensure that no harvesting takes place in these areas while land use planning is under way.

Harvesting deferrals are also in place on the North Coast and Queen Charlotte Islands to conserve key ecological areas until land use decisions are made.

Developing Ecosystem-based Forestry

Future forestry on the Central Coast, North Coast and Haida Gwaii/Queen Charlotte Islands will be based on

ecosystem-based management to sustain healthy ecosystems and support communities. The Coast Information Team will provide independent advice to develop this new management system. Robert Prescott-Allen, an internationally renowned expert on sustainable development, has been appointed to head the Information Team, which is being managed by government, First Nations, conservation groups and forest companies. Local First Nations, forest companies and conservation groups are now working cooperatively on two pilot projects to help define ecosystem-based management.

Supporting Community Transition

A \$35 million trust fund has been established to address the economic impacts of coastal land use planning. The independent trust fund, managed by a trustee and advisory board of local interests, will help workers, contractors, communities and companies.

Ensuring a Strong Role for First Nations

Decisions about land use and resource management must reflect and accommodate the interests of First Nations, who make up roughly half the population in these coastal areas. Agreements between the B.C. government and 23 coastal First Nations establish a partnership role for First Nations in land use planning and provide a basis for economic development. First Nations are well represented in coastal planning processes, and play an increasing role in resource management.

For more information, see www.growingtogether.ca/centralcoast/index.htm



Future forestry will be based on ecosystem management, which will be developed with consideration of ecological, economic and social issues.