

# LIVING IN A FORESTED COMMUNITY

The second in a series of background articles prepared by OPSRRA in conjunction with a review of the Otter Point and Shirley/Jordan River Official Community Plans (OCPs). The OCP reviews give us an opportunity to consider the future of our forests in the context of our community plan.

This article considers the best uses for our local forest land, the economic benefits we gain by retaining our forests, threats to our forests, and suggestions for ways to keep our forest and our community healthy.

## Background

According to statistics provided by the Capital Regional District, there are 85 parcels of Private Managed Forest Land (PMFL), comprising approximately 3161 hectares, within the boundaries of the Otter Point and the Shirley/Jordan River Official Community Plan (OCP) areas. Sixty-four of these parcels (2330 hectares) are located in Shirley and Jordan River, and 21 (831 hectares) are located in Otter Point. PMFLs currently represent about 24.5% of the Otter Point OCP area and 61% of the Shirley/Jordan River OCP area. There are also some forested Crown lands within the OCP areas.

## Looking at our forest as more than a source for raw logs

Historically, the forests west of Sooke have provided employment for five generations of loggers and their families. Towns like Sooke and Jordan River grew because of a large and prosperous local logging industry. Annual celebrations, such as All Sooke Day, showcased the skills and equipment needed to survive in the woods. Displays at the Sooke Region Museum feature the logging industry and lifestyle that it created.

It is nearly all gone now: the local forestry and sawmill jobs; the Jordan River town site; All Sooke Days and the region's reputation as being a logging community where the "Forest Meets the Sea". We are in transition. Our forests are diminishing and we see the purpose of our remaining forests differently from our parents and grandparents. The community's relationship to the forests is also changing. How we understand and manage that change will have a tremendous impact on our community.

## Future competing uses for our forests

Harvesting timber for lumber, pulp and telephone poles was once the primary use of our forests; we now consider other uses, many of which are incompatible or competitive with current logging practice, bringing uncertainty and disagreement into the debate.

Alternate uses championed for our forests:

- Leave natural as parks and conservation areas for wildlife and sensitive ecosystems.
- Develop as recreational areas to help promote eco-tourism.

- Use to store carbon for carbon credits that can then be used for carbon trading.
- Log for lower-valued fibre to use for biomass energy such as wood pellets.
- Explore green technologies that use wood waste to create heat and electricity.
- Use Crown lands to settle First Nation land claims and provide local bands with employment.
- Use for food and low impact commercial purposes such as gathering salal, mushrooms and plants.
- Use for medicinal purposes by gathering plants and trees with medicinal properties.
- Log less productive portions and then change these lands to non-forestry use.
- Create value added businesses that would use the logged timber locally instead of exporting raw logs.
- Create public forests such as Forest Trusts or Community Forests.

## **Economic benefits of forests**

Tree harvest levels in B.C.'s forests fell by an astounding 35% in 2009. This is in addition to similar drops in previous years. Some logging companies and their suppliers have gone bankrupt and many others operate at a deficit.

Because the province derives tax revenue (stumpage) calculated on the harvest, there has been a corresponding drop in government income from a high of one billion dollars a year when the forest economy was strong to an estimated \$345 million this past fiscal year.

Clear-cut tree harvesting is declining as a traditional source of economic benefit. Can it be replaced with other ways to derive economic benefits from our forests?

Suggested alternatives to tree harvesting:

- Use our forests to attract tourism.
- Use our forests to attract new styles of rural residential development (such as the proposed development for the Elkington family property at Shawnigan Lake that intends to restrict development to 10-15 % of the 1,000 acre property and place the remainder in a forest covenant with The Land Conservancy of Canada, the Trust for Sustainable Forestry and the Cowichan Regional District).
- Retain our forests as a regional health asset for carbon storage, cleaning our air, food harvesting, and retaining and filtering water.
- Create opportunities for selective tree retention and other forms of sustainable forestry management to replace clear-cut logging.
- Create opportunities for small scale and hobby farm forestry operations.
- Use our forests as living laboratories to research ways to improve silviculture, disease control, biodiversity, wildlife habitat and the production of non-timber resources.

More information about economic benefits in our forests:

Sustainability:	<a href="http://www.sustainableforestry.com/wildwood.php">www.sustainableforestry.com/wildwood.php</a>
Conservation Covenants:	<a href="http://blog.conservancy.bc.ca/">http://blog.conservancy.bc.ca/</a>
Carbon Offsets:	<a href="http://www.globe.ca/">www.globe.ca/</a>
Carbon Offsets:	<a href="http://www.pacificcarbontrust.co">www.pacificcarbontrust.co</a>
Alternate Uses:	<a href="http://www.cofi.org/">www.cofi.org/</a>
Forestry Innovation:	<a href="http://coastforest.org/">http://coastforest.org/</a>
Forestry Innovation:	<a href="http://www.fpinnovations.ca/">www.fpinnovations.ca/</a>
Non-timber Uses:	<a href="http://cntr.royalroads.ca/">http://cntr.royalroads.ca/</a>
Forestry Research:	<a href="http://www.forestry.ubc.ca/resfor/afrf/index.htm">www.forestry.ubc.ca/resfor/afrf/index.htm</a>

## Threats to our forests

Owning forest lands means accepting risks and being prepared to assume the responsibility for preventing or managing threats to the health, productivity and wealth of the forest. In the past, this has been the task of the province and the larger forest companies. Times have changed—neither the province nor the timber companies have the money or the interest to provide the stewardship our forests require. As a result, changes are happening with how forests are managed.

Examples of threats to our forests:

- Fire, especially as a result of reduced rainfall in recent years, fewer controlled burns in the woods to reduce flammable litter and increasing residential development in the forest/urban interface.
- Insect infestation as a consequence of drier and milder winters and provincial fire fighting strategies that controlled forest fires to save timber and communities.
- Forest conversion from mixed growth by replanting harvested areas to single-species to increase the volume and value of timber.
- Logging timberlands until they are no longer sustainable instead of using a sustainable method such as forest retention logging.
- Inadequate replanting of logged, burned and infested areas.
- Converting forest lands to non-forestry use such as residential, commercial and industrial development.

## Forest protection

If, as a community, we value our forests and want to protect them for the future, we can promote certain actions and policies:

- Healthy harvesting standards such as green certification forest management, which promotes small patch cuts, strip shelterwood and group retention.
- Replanting as soon as possible after harvesting.
- Mixed growth to promote diversification.
- Green covenants on non-forestry development to encourage tree retention and protection.
- Plans to manage wildfire risk when “building into the bush”.

- Community forestry stewardship councils to monitor and promote healthy forests.
- Community forests that are owned and operated by local residents.

## Conclusion

Official Community Plan (OCP) reviews are an exercise in imagining what our community should look like in the future. Imagine Jordan River, Shirley and Otter Point without its remaining forests. If the present owners of forested lands can't afford to keep them, are there alternatives such as new owners or new ways to make them more economical? Although an OCP can't require a property owner to retain their property as a forest, it can guide zoning and land use changes in a manner that would either discourage or encourage the retention of forest lands in the community. The first step in the process is to participate in the OCP review.

## Definitions

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Even-aged:	A forest stand or forest type in which relatively small (10-20 year) age differences exist between individual trees. Even-aged stands are often the result of a single regeneration event such as clear cutting.
Forest Retention logging:	A method of sustainable logging that uses selective cutting to continuously harvest trees individually or in small groups.
Shelterwood:	Any harvest cutting of a more or less regular mature crop, designed to establish a new crop under the protection of the old.
Silviculture:	The art and science of growing and tending a forest.

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