<u>PRINCE GEORGE COMMUNITY DIALOGUE SESSION</u>

UNBC, Prince George
November 2, 2011
(7:00 pm – 9:00 pm)

REPORT

The Dialogue Session included:

1. Introduction to HFHC Initiative.

2. Review of themes common among other dialogue sessions across the province, which primarily focused on more community input on local resource decisions:
    o   Communities want more influence in forest lands decisions,
    o   Communities need to be more informed of the state of local forest lands,
    o   Communities are concerned regarding the future of local forest lands, and
    o   Communities want a viable and sustained local forest industry that meets their current and future needs.

3. Review of some key features of the forests and forest industry in the Prince George area:
    o   Diverse forest ecosystems, including inland temperate rainforest, high elevation subalpine, sub-boreal, and dry interior plateau.
    o   Influence of fire and bark beetles is extensive in most forest types.
    o   Forest resources are close to communities which enables a strong connection to forests and easy access for wide range of uses (industry through to recreation).
    o   Several First Nation's traditional territories occupy the area.
    o   The community is large enough to support tertiary industries.
    o   There are multiple users of the forest resource.
    o   The industry is heavily weighted to large companies that produce dimension lumber and/or pulp. A few are locally-owned, but several have head offices outside the Prince George area or region.
    o   There are a few small specialty mills or other users of forest resources.

4. Review of what we wanted the participants to discuss and the basis for the two questions that they were tasked with addressing.

5. Participants worked in one of 4 groups, and each group had a facilitator and a student recorder.

6.   Question 1:

> Given that the demands on forested land and forest resources will most likely be different in the future, and that local influence on resource management may bring a more long-term view of sustainable use:
> - Do the current industrial, economic and regulatory structures enable sufficient local influence?
> - Are there specific options for how to grow community or local input within the existing framework of policies and regulations?

7.   Question 2:

> If we were to recommend changes to industrial, economic and regulatory structures, what approach should be used?
> - Should we use the "focused fixer" approach which would include actions within the existing industrial and economic model?
> - Or should we take the approach of a "paradigm shifter" which would require a change in the industrial and economic models?

8.   Closing and reporting

INTRODUCTION

The Prince George Dialogue Session of the Healthy Forests – Healthy Communities Initiative was an open invitation event. Notices and invitations went out via a wide range of email lists, media, and websites. To be as inclusive as possible, numbers of groups and associations were asked to forward notice of the event to their contacts. The event drew 32 people.

The structure of the Dialogue Session split attendees into four breakout tables. Each table had a volunteer facilitator and all but one had a student note taker (substituted in the fourth case by a UNBC faculty member note taker). Following a review of the introductory materials, the breakout tables discussed each of the two Dialogue questions in turn. Each table reported to the group on their comments regarding the questions at the end of each set of discussions.

The format allowed attendees to put forward ideas, concerns, and opinions in an open and non confrontational forum. There was lively discussion at each table with a range of views being expressed and range of issues being raised. Due to limits in timing, there was no discussion at a group level and no attempt to reach a consensus position was made on any given issue. Our goal was open and inclusive dialogue that would get critical matters 'onto the table', and the attendees fulfilled this goal wonderfully. The session coordinators attempted to synthesize the discussions from each table into the following report rather than provide minutes that just listed the various points and opinions raised, although we also attempted to include the range of comments, suggestions, ideas, questions, and concerns raised under each of the two Dialogue questions.

As a foundation for next steps in the Healthy Forests – Healthy Communities Initiative process, it was clear that wider participation and involvement, and time to debate and develop consensus positions, should get attention.

QUESTION 1:

Given that the demands on forested land and forest resources will most likely be different in the future, and that local influence on resource management may bring a more long-term view of sustainable use:

1A. Do the current industrial, economic and regulatory structures enable sufficient local influence?

1B. Are there specific options for how to grow community or local input within the existing framework of policies and regulations?

Part 1A.

In the past, there have been some effective processes for local influence on resource management, in particular the process and outputs of Land and Resource Management Plans (LRMPs), but it was noted that these are not being maintained or kept current. At least one dialogue table noted that it was also possible to have input into Forest Development Plans, Cutting Permits, Road Permits, Silviculture Plans and others, and that has also been lost. All groups supported a process such as LRMP for local influence, but pointed out that in addition to the lack of ongoing commitment to, and maintenance of, the LRMP, there are other issues that need to be addressed in order for the process to be effective.

- LRMPs and other land use plans need to include new voices (e.g., young people) and new issues (i.e. climate change). Participants who had been involved in different land use plans indicated that the door has always been open to new people, but that it is often difficult to find people willing to commit the necessary time.
- Plans are not being adapted from their focus on forestry to other resource uses on the land base (i.e. mining / oil and gas), although Mines staff have been part of LRMPs and other planning processes in the past.
- LRMPs worked well in the past because the process involved local input, debate, decisions, development of a product, and implementation. This gave participants a sense of ownership and confidence that their work had a positive impact. This seems to have been lost over the past years.
- Individual members of the public often have a single issue in mind that they are concerned about. LRMPs worked well because knowledgeable people, with a variety of applicable skill sets, worked collaboratively on agreements that would be too complex for issues to be considered in isolation.

Several dialogue tables discussed the problem of connecting policy and regulation with what is happening on the ground and that this can be a significant challenge for resource managers, particularly when trying to engage the public in resource decisions. The process that is necessary to change existing regulations and policies is often too slow to respond to rapid changes in environmental, economic or social conditions, particularly when often disparate views from community members are to be sought and considered in any policy or regulatory change. One dialogue table was of the opinion that this inability to respond quickly is exacerbated by the lack of people "on the land" to observe and evaluate these changes first hand.

For local input to be effective, there first has to be the opportunity for effective input, and then information-gathering and local input processes need to link with practices on the land, and positive change must be reported back to community members. Past dialogues have worn out public involvement, especially if these dialogues are perceived by the participants to go nowhere

While most participants in the session agreed that local input into resource use was important, several points about this were raised:

- Some participants felt that there is a lack of access or meaningful opportunities for community members to be heard.
- Others noted that there are opportunities (e.g. PAGs), but when these are made available, there is a lack of participation, that the issues to be addressed are limited to practices within the scope of FRPA and do not address the larger issues of resource management.
- We have demonstrated (e.g., through LRMPs) that we know how to engage the local community in resource decision-making. However we have let these processes lapse.
- Greater land use for non-forestry operations such as mining / development pressures is not being accounted for.
- There are some longstanding challenges to opening up the community involvement process. These include: 1) debates about how informed the public is and therefore how well-equipped they may be to provide useful and effective input; 2) how to maintain involvement over the long run as these processes are time and energy-consuming; and 3) how to deal with inequities such as government and forest industry participants being involved as part of their paid work, compared to volunteer participants, although it was noted that travel expenses for non-government participants were covered for some PAGs and LRMPs.
- A caution raised at one dialogue table was that community influence over resources, if not done in a large-scale and strategic context, could lead to unintended negative effects for neighbouring communities, and can have unintended cumulative impacts.
- On the other hand, other participants suggested that without more local control, the status quo would continue, and they described this as government and industry partnerships having significant influence over resource management decisions and objectives, which they did not feel was always in the public's interest.

Knowledgeable community members who are passionate enough about resource use to attend and participate in engagement opportunities can be in high demand and become worn out, especially when engagement opportunities are not coordinated. In addition, many members of the public are not connected to the land, especially with fewer people working in the forest industry or other outdoor rural occupations. People are losing the innate connection between wealth, health, and the environment, because we are so removed from the direct source of our food, houses, heating, and other necessities. Without this connection, the general public can become complacent about local resources. Furthermore, the knowledge base of some members is limited outside of their one area of interest. The complexity of issues surrounding resource use and management can be challenging or intimidating, and may scare away those with valuable knowledge.

The basic premise underlying the desire for community involvement in resource decision making is sustainability of the resource and the economy. Sustainability may be perceived by the public as well taken care of now by the various certification systems and the high rate of certification of BC licensees. Not all participants agreed that certification is a good trend with regard to sustainable land management (some felt it does not address the bigger picture of land and forest management), and several participants questioned whether it should absolve / remove the public from the process of ensuring sustainability.

Part 1B:

Community forests were discussed by all groups as a definite option to enhance local influence over resources. Community forests were seen as having good potential for the following reasons:
- Local voices that should be heard with regard to resource use decisions that are closer to the ground, more familiar with the resources at stake, and more committed to long-term sustainability.
- Benefits from the community forest are realized locally, including jobs that result from administration of the forest (e.g. accountants) that are often done by large firms in large urban centres in the case of major licensees. However, several dialogue tables noted that in some cases few jobs may actually result from community forests, and some may actually cost the community above and beyond the revenue generated.
- Community forests also encourage debates and clarification over who benefits from which resources, and therefore when resource use policies/actions are modified or new ones come into play, there is clarity around who the policy is for and what the goals of the policy are.
- Sufficiently large or numerous community forest agreements can offset perceived power by major licensees over resource use decisions.

However community forests are not without their challenges, and these include the following:

- Scale – small land bases provide less flexibility and fewer resource use options. Small landbases can also result in piecemeal decisions over resources that can negatively affect neighbouring communities or the region as a whole.
- Participation – small communities have fewer people who have the education or interest necessary for meaningful input into decision-making.
- Structure – existing forests operate under numerous different structures, which is good in that not all communities are the same, but can be challenging when the structure does not work well or does not provide for adequate local input.

Community Resource Boards was an idea that was shared from one of the dialogue tables as another option for enhancing local input into decision-making. While little information on how these work or benefits and downfalls was provided in the short period of time we had for reporting, the one table believed that these boards provide opportunities for local voices to be heard in the resource management debate, and enables coordination across multiple land use and resource types. As with the Community Forests above, there are issues of scale that apply to Community Resource Boards, which include communication among the different interests, and defining the scope of community.

Scale was an important component of the discussion at all of the tables. There was general agreement that larger land bases for planning resource use are more flexible to changes in markets, the economy, and the environment. Therefore, opportunities to enhance local influence in resource use decisions must take into account the scale that the decision will affect, and the scope of influence that the community members may have.

Improving communication and information flow was another option that was discussed to enhance local influence on resource use. Ensuring that accurate and correct information was used in local decision-making was seen as very important. This information can sometimes be provided to decision-makers by knowledgeable community members. Information flowing to the community from government decision makers was also seen as critical to enhance local influence. Accessible and understandable regional reports on the status of the region's resources were suggested as one way to do this. Local community members can also play a role in the assessment of information with the goal of ensuring that decision-makers have the best information available.

Related to the above, another means of enhancing local influence is to include local experts outside of government and industry in information analyses, testing of government policies, and decision-making. Opening up government-based decision making to outside experts would have several functions and benefits:
- Includes critique of data and logic going into a particular decision
- Includes forward-looking research.
- Provides access to research forests and historical studies.
- Enables testing of decisions/policies with traditional knowledge holders.
- Helps make a decision more robust before policy commitments are made.

- Improves government transparency and credibility.
- Provides a better opportunity to be resilient or respond to the unexpected.

Building on the idea of better linking government decision-making with local experts, the development of partnerships in resource management was seen as a positive step towards enhancing local influence over resources. Some of the ideas that were discussed are as follows:

- Provides opportunities for local leadership.
- Provides a significant role for professional bodies to support information flow between the general public and government decision-makers. Professionals and professional organizations could take a lead role in providing information translation and advice upward and downward. This would also enable the best professional opinions to be applied to resource problems.
- The knowledge base necessary and the complexity of resource use decisions may intimidate some with valuable or practitioner knowledge. Formation of partnerships could provide the support necessary to overcome this intimidation.
- Building upon a bottom up genesis of ideas and opportunities.
- Drawing upon top down public policy support.
- Enabling debate over who is the policy or action for.
- Testing possibilities and ideas in trials, development of/ choices and trade-offs, and a partnership approach.

QUESTION 2:

If we were to recommend changes to industrial, economic and regulatory structures, what approach should be used?

- Should we use the "Focused Fixer" approach which would include actions within the existing industrial and economic model?
- Or should we take the approach of a "Paradigm Shifter" which would require a change in the industrial and economic models?

Discussion around Question 2 opened with identification of longstanding challenges and contexts underlying the current relationship between healthy forests and healthy communities. Among the noted challenges were maintaining and diversifying local and regional economies, including the need to support current industries and develop a wider range of value-added products that would increase employment per volume of wood harvested. Additional discussion added the potential to expand the range of other forest-derived products by diversifying within existing sectors, working to diversify across sectors, as well as adding whole new sectors into the local and regional economic mix. Discussion also touched on the need to manage the forest and land base in a sustainable manner that considers climatic and other change issues.

As part of the background discussion, recognition was also made of the influence which our current approach to forestry and forest products has on the context for change. Current

management models are focused on softwood commodity products that are linked to the large export markets that have developed over time for these products. The legacy of any industrial history will have implications for moving into the future with existing as well as other opportunities.

Tying these first two points together, attempts to encourage the use of other forest resources are also impacted by current management models. One impact noted several times is that which links manufacturers with management responsibilities on the land base – something many small and innovative firms may not be prepared or equipped to do. An example was used of a value-added manufacturer that wants to make birch wood products (i.e. cabinets, flooring, panels). To create their products, they need access to a volume of birch logs – while they want some logs, they don't necessarily want to have to log it, truck it, and then replant it (carrying through on their silviculture responsibilities), and they are not trained to handle the responsibilities of cruising / operational planning, obtaining timber allocations, managing access plans including roads and bridges, etc. Dialogue table observations around this topic included the need to be attentive to:

- Access to timber.
  - Including different types, and in different volumes.
- The full market costs of timber.
- The ability of different industries, users, and activities to be competitive for the timber they may need in the BC timber market.

Implementation of current management models and approaches also affects a range of issues, including:

- That the focus of forest planning and replanting is on softwood.
- Species like birch are often considered competition or "weeds" rather than as a forest resource unto itself that can support new industries. A number of tables recalled earlier forestry practices in northern BC where pine had been considered an undesired weed species.
- When we have problems with markets for our softwood commodity products, our approach has been to find new markets for those same products. While this approach has promise if it is one part of a broader diversification plan, it can be limiting if it is the only plan.
- As further support for diversification, other sectors/producers could be assisted by efforts at assisting with both industrial development and market development.

The table work and discussion then moved to consideration of the approach we should use in recommending changes to industrial, economic, and regulatory structures. Question 2 posited the "Focus Fixer" and the "Paradigm Shift" approaches. There was lots of debate about the best way forward, with a range of views and arguments being made on each side. Set against the earlier reviews of the challenges, context, and implications of current approaches, two points were clear:

- That both the Focused Fixer and the Paradigm Shifter approaches would likely be needed at different times and in different ways to effect desired changes.

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- That before we can decide how to fix it, we need to decide where we want to go with the forest resource and the forest economy.

The following describes a number of the topic areas raised in the Dialogue table discussions. Each also lists ideas raised under Focused Fixer and Paradigm Shifter approaches to change.

One of the first ideas raised involved moving each log to the right manufacturer or consumer so as to get the best price and highest value use. The goal would be to support both commodity and value-added production and assist with opening opportunities for industrial diversification.

- Dialogue table suggestions for a Focused Fixer approach included:
    - The use of an existing mechanism such as community forests to sell different logs into different manufacturers' markets.
        - The caution offered on this was that not all potential log users may be able to pay the full competitive costs of the log supply.
    - Expansion and improvement of log sort operations.
    - Links with the activities of BC Timber Sales in terms of a role selling/auctioning off of different types of logs.
- In contrast, Dialogue table suggestions for a Paradigm Shifter approach included:
    - Radically changing the current tenure system.
    - Divorcing manufacturing from forest management responsibilities.

The rapid pace of change that defines the contemporary global economy demands that all resource commodity industries, and the community/regional economies that depend upon them, be both flexible and adaptable. While this can be linked to the size of operations – where larger land bases / companies have greater resources to develop markets and a potential to be more resilient to short term market or price fluctuations, larger land bases / companies also have a significant inertia in existing industrial and market systems that affects their flexibility and adaptability.

- Dialogue table suggestions for a Focused Fixer approach to flexibility included:
    - Extending the diversity of existing tenure types (including woodlots, First Nation timber and range allocations, community forests, etc.) to create more flexibility across the system to respond to market signals.
    - Extending management options for other types of ecosystem services that are deemed to have economic or social benefits.
    - Extending provincial marketing initiatives to grow markets for both traditional and non-traditional forest products.
    - Building our capacity and expertise to price and to conduct cost-benefit analyses for non-timber forest products and a host of other non-traditional forest products.
- Dialogue table suggestions around a Paradigm Shifter approach included:
    - Separating manufacturers from the land base.
    - Allowing only community forest / woodlot type tenures (with the approach emphasizing area-based tenures instead of volume-based tenures to encourage stewardship) and managing the rest of the timber resource through BC Timber Sales.

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Achieving healthy and sustainable forests and communities will depend in large part on our ability to take long-term view on forest use and economic development. BC has gained considerable experience in taking this type of long-term view through its various strategic land use planning processes.

- Some of the options and suggestions raised from a Focused Fixer perspective on strategic land use planning included:
    - Renewing the LRMP process but with a wider resource mandate.
    - Developing a provincial strategic silviculture plan that starts with climate change implications and then proceeds to support both forest and economic resilience.
    - Supporting the creation of community resource boards at regional scales with technical support and advice being made available from professional associations and the provincial government.
    - Enhancing the funding available for development of innovative products and also for the marketing initiatives that would move those products into the global marketplace.
    - Requiring area-based tenures to be developed within the framework of strategic long-term land use plans.
    - Coordinating dialogue and work on strategic land use plans by major licensees to prevent negative cumulative impacts and enhance 'complementarity' in actions on the land base and in support of getting the 'right log to the right manufacturer'.
- Dialogue table suggestions for a Paradigm Shifter approach included:
    - Having a single land manager responsible for all resources, and who would then sell resource products from the land to the manufacturer by seeking the best price for all products within provincial economic and conservation goals.
        - The proposed Natural Resource Road Act was noted as well in this context as all resource roads would be overseen/managed by one agency.

In their desire for viable and sustainable local forest industries that support resilient local and regional economies, the Healthy Forest – Healthy Communities Initiative has noted that communities want to be more informed about and to have more influence in forest lands decisions. To do this will require attention to "democratizing" land based management.

- A Focused Fixer approach in this regard would involve enhanced access to information, enhanced resources for community participation in terms of training and fiscal supports, and enhanced responsibility for direct action to processes like LRMPs. Dialogue table suggestions for this included:
    - Developing a greater diversity of ways to engage the public, and including both formal and informal opportunities as well as both routine and special event opportunities.
    - Reaching out to different audiences, including those with experience on the land, and also to our future decision makers by engaging schools and school children.
    - Creating and disseminating more routine information about the forest, forest health, and forest resources that is understandable by a wide cross-section of the public through "state of the forest" or "forest report card" type publications.

- o Ensuring that resource management decision making is open to a wide range of groups and interests, and is not biased in either process or procedure to particular interests.
- Suggestions from the Dialogue tables around a Paradigm Shifter approach included:
  - o Community resource boards with the power to effect / implement change, monitor the progress towards change, and adjust plans accordingly over time
    - It was noted that this would require the public to become more knowledgeable and engaged in resource management).
    - It was also noted that such Boards could be elected or appointed.