

Response to the Review of the Port Alberni Forest Industry
submitted by
Save Our Valley Alliance (SOVA)
and other organizations and local government bodies

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- the human resource is the wealth resource

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1. Summary statement

We recommend a collaborative approach to extensive implementation of the recommendations. Through an engagement process with the various parties involved we will support a process of continuous improvement where a review and adjustment process will follow the implementation stage.

A precondition for proceeding is a clear indication from all the parties involved that they will commit sufficient resources and effort to this process.

2. Background

On 17 May 2006, a community delegation from Port Alberni met with the Hon Rich Coleman, Minister of Forests and Range, and the Hon Pat Bell, Minister of Agriculture and Lands, and other government officials. The delegation asked for policy changes, assistance, and relief from the damage the community is experiencing to its environment and economy from the recent changes in forestry operations.

In the meeting, Minister Coleman committed to a provincial review of log exports and to a separate review of the situation in the Alberni Valley. His comment on Alberni was that he was looking for solutions and that he would work with the community to find them.

After the meeting, the community began the long task of following up with the Ministry and building its capacity to interact with the government on the issues. Although it was the community's desire to deal directly with government, the Ministry chose to outsource the Review using independent consultants. Part of the rationale from government was that an objective analysis was required to clearly portray the situation and that the biases of the community and the government could impede that understanding.

A Terms of Reference (TOR) for the project was developed by Ministry of Forests and Range staff and presented to the community. Peter Wyatt, with MOFR, and Keith Wyton, with Save Our Valley Alliance (SOVA) served to communicate with their respective parties during this phase.

The Review has vindicated the Alberni region's reaction to the challenges it is dealing with and it has a realistic expectation of significant support from the provincial government based on the statement in the Executive Summary of the Review, pg 3.

“The Forest Revitalization policy changes were designed to permit further adjustments with the view of ensuring a more economically viable forest sector. We believe that these policy changes, together with the private land deletions, while in part necessary to deal with the economic challenges of the coast forest sector, have, on balance not been of benefit to Port Alberni and have in some cases been detrimental.”

The community wants to deal with these problems, but the provincial government is the primary agent of change on many of the issues. With a better understanding of the issues at hand, which the Review has outlined, and a collaborative approach, the provincial government and the Alberni region can work together to find solutions.

3. SOVA's founding principles

SOVA was formed in early 2006 as a community expression of concern and dissatisfaction with:

- log exports
- damage to drinking water supplies
- forestry sustainability issues related to environmental, economic and social aspects of Alberni region operations.

SOVA's response to the review is defined by its founding principles.

We have a role in animating the broad community discussion of the issues related to forestry in the region. We do not envision our organization actively engaging in the details and mechanics of the implementation of all the recommendations. SOVA will focus on recommendations and subsequent implementation efforts related to log exports, drinking water protection, and forestry sustainability. At the same time, we will support, in principle, the implementation activities generated around the other recommendations where they appear to have merit and are supported by other sectors of the community.

4. SOVA Relates directly to a number of recommendations

We will focus our efforts on establishing the overall implementation process and dealing directly with recommendations 4,5,6,10,13, and 19

5. Implementation process

The preconditions for successful implementation of any of the recommendations are:

1. support at the local level
2. support from the provincial government to execute the changes
3. a process that will move things forward

In some cases, we envision that a particular recommendation may be altered somewhat to better attain the intended result.

We recommend the establishment of an implementation task force made up of SOVA, city and regional representatives, and provincial officials to establish an implementation process, identify local champions for each recommendation, and to bring appropriate government resources and agencies together with the local parties.

The provincial government should provide a secretariat/facilitator function in Port Alberni to assist the task force and to act as a proactive advocate for the community in its dealings with the various agencies involved in implementing the diverse range of recommendations.

6. Going Further

Although SOVA does not agree with all the underlying assumptions of the Review, it is clear that incremental gains can be made by a concerted effort to implement most of the recommendations.

We fully endorse the spirit and intent of recommendation 19 and the development of a vision and set of priorities to guide the community forward.

The Review of the Port Alberni Forest Industry and the ensuing engagement process between the community and the provincial government can provide a framework for making progress. Gains made by implementing the recommendations should be followed with further analysis and more ambitious targets.

7. Gaps

The Review does not give many extensive plans or recommendations to improve the performance of the forest industry, environmental outcomes, or social indicators. The region is ranked near the bottom of BC Stats social indicators, and reaction to environmental threats is growing in the community

We recommend that the implementation process should include a triple bottom line approach that pays attention not only to the economy, but also to the environment and social well being.

Suggestions for further work in these areas are outlined below.

A. Forest Industry

- establish a more collaborative approach between the companies and the community
- address viability of processing facilities and specific changes required
- analysis of the significance of age class/species gap on land base and its impact on future viability
- fix for broken sustained yield management
- vision for viable forest industry
- old growth management strategy as an economic driver

The most significant statements about the forest sector in the Review are:

"In our view, the future of Port Alberni's sawmills and paper mill cannot be assured and the Valley's future economic health is contingent on greater diversification of its economy."

"We do not believe it is likely that private capital will invest in a large-volume small-log mill since sufficient volumes of small logs do not currently exist."

“We believe there is scope for increased secondary manufacturing in the forest sector. However, this will require entrepreneurship that has not been historically nurtured in the Alberni Valley and more action by the government to create an active market in logs that will allow, in the government’s words, "the wood to go to the mill best suited to handle it in British Columbia"

“The City of Port Alberni has recognized the cost pressures of the existing manufacturing plants and has reduced industrial tax rates and provided a property tax moratorium for new investment in major industrial improvements. These changes may not be significant enough to ensure continuation of these plants, since the negative impacts of outside, and uncontrollable, variables may well overshadow the benefits of any reduced taxes." pg.50

The future of the Alberni Valley depends on how the community responds to the conditions and challenges laid out in these statements. The first question we need to ask is whether they are correct. Do these statements accurately reflect reality, or is the prognosis too pessimistic? Although it is likely that trees will continue to be harvested in the region, the focus here is the risk to the manufacturing sector. In view of the experience and expertise of the writers, it behoves us to seriously consider the implications of their analysis. Are we able to appreciate the depth of change necessary to bring our community to a place where we can take advantage of new opportunities? There is a great danger that we could expend valuable resources and community efforts trying unsuccessfully to maintain the status quo or attempting to go in a wrong direction.

A backward look at the economic history of the region indicates that no single product has been durable enough in the marketplace or abundant enough in nature to provide a secure future. It is reasonable to think that our economy is always in a transitory state and that the present economic activity will evolve into something else. Based on the constraints and conditions we are given, where are the opportunities for the future?

Although the Review essentially closes the door to the status quo, how can even a forest manufacturing sector of diminished scale endure and make a continued long term contribution to the economy?

It is essential that there be additional work done on this question. Where are the strengths and is there anything we can focus on for the next economic cycle. The previous period supported a sustained period of economic security and built the current community infrastructure. What will build our community tomorrow?

The Review mentions the importance of entrepreneurship regarding secondary manufacturing and at the same time fails to mention its significance in the recommended overall diversification of the economy. As we shift from a resource extraction economy the human resource will be the critical factor in our community. The inflow of new expertise and the ability of local creative businesses to link with niche markets globally requires a different orientation. This has been done before in other communities and we need to search the world for a set of skills and opportunities that will fit our particular evolving situation.

According to the Review, we do not have sufficient log volume for a high-volume small log mill. If this is the case are there other types of products that we could produce here with that timber? What about log and timber frame structures, smaller volume mills cutting for specialized downstream products or entirely other uses for the timber land base.

The recent Coastal Forest Plan commits to product development research on hemlock. This is very important because hemlock is the predominant species of second growth on our public lands and currently the majority of fir is exported out of the community from the surrounding private lands.

The hemlock silviculture and product development work could focus on Port Alberni.

B. Environmental

- climate change policy integration
- watershed management strategies
- fire mitigation strategies for excess wood waste on forest floor
- improved wildlife management
- protection from private property damage for owners adjacent to Private Managed Forest Land

C. Social

- analysis of Port Alberni's low social indicators. Are they a cause of or a result of poor economic performance?
- the human resource is the wealth resource

8. Tabulation of Recommendations showing SOVA support, priority, local advocate, and effort to implement

SOVA tabulation of recommendations. (draft only, need lots of discussion to assign final indices)

The following table summarizes SOVA's response to the recommendations. It indicates:

- a. SOVA support in principle (yes, qualified, no)
- b. SOVA priority (low, medium, high),
- c. SOVA's suggested advocate,
- d. overall effort/resources required by all parties to implement (high, medium, low)

| Recommendation | a. SOVA support | b. SOVA priority | c. suggested advocate | d. effort / resources required |
|---|--|------------------|--|--------------------------------|
| 4. PMFLC- Public information | yes | high | SOVA | medium |
| 5. PMFLC Forest practices | yes | high | SOVA | medium |
| 6. PMFLC Funding | yes | high | SOVA | medium |
| 10. Access to Forest Lands | yes | high | SOVA | low |
| 18. Alberni Rail branch line | yes | high | Regional District | high |
| 19. Strategic Economic Development Plan | yes | high | Port Alberni Economic Development Officer | medium |
| 1. Enhancing local log market | yes | medium | local independent forestry operators | low |
| 2. Concentration of harvesting rights | qualified, allocate existing volumes first | medium | local independent forestry operators | low |
| 3. Aggregation of tenures | yes | medium | local independent forestry operators | low |
| 7. Taxation of major industry | qualified | medium | City of Port Alberni | high |
| 8. Taxation of major industry for school purposes | qualified | medium | City of Port Alberni | high |
| 9. Evaluate expanding boundaries of Port Alberni | qualified, explore benefits | medium | City of Port Alberni | medium |
| 11. Tourism Development | yes | medium | local tourism organizations/ PA Economic Development Officer | medium |
| 13. Forest technician training centre | yes | medium | SOVA, North Island College | medium |
| 14. Outdoor recreation management training | yes | medium | local outdoor recreation and tourism organizations North Island College | medium |
| 16. Second highway access | yes | medium | Regional district | high |
| 15. Agriculture viability | yes | low | local agriculture producers | low |
| 12. Retirement destination | yes | low | Port Alberni Economic Development Officer | medium |
| 17. Airport development | yes | low | Regional District | high |