

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
AND A
QUALITY ENVIRONMENT

Proceedings of a Workshop
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edited by

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FOREWORD

Our Common Future was the theme for National Environment Week in early June, 1988. Environment Canada provided enabling funds to organizations wanting to advance this theme in their geographical area. The workshop held by the Northern Institute for Conservation Research was among the first formal attempts to bring the notion of sustainable development, as defined by Brundtland, to northwestern British Columbia.

It was intended from the beginning that the idea of sustainable development be discussed and, if possible, adapted to the local context by the people who live here. It is important that we see what local people feel is relevant to securing our common future. As it turns out, there were stunning similarities in what the workshop groups identified as important for achieving a more sustainable society. It is my hope that you find the following pages informative and useful.

Thanks are due to the committee that organized this workshop. This included Colin Harivel, Wilf Dreher, Greg Merideth, and Louise Kilby. Special thanks are extended to Lee Ann Hockin-Grant for the many hours of nitty-gritty organization and list making. Final editing and production of these proceedings were left in my hands.

The ideas herein belong to everyone.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD.....	i
INTRODUCTION By Brian Wilkes.....	iii

PRESENTATIONS

OUR COMMON FUTURE IN BRITISH COLUMBIA By Anthony H. J. Dorcey	1
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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND...

AGRICULTURE, By Don Knoerr.....	9
FISHERIES By Bill Lafeaux-Valentine.....	14
MINING By John Dick.....	19
WILDLIFE By Doug Steventon.....	23
FORESTRY By Ray Travers.....	28
TOURISM By Greg Merideth.....	40

WORKSHOP REPORTS

AGRICULTURE - Wayne Haddow.....	49
FISHERIES - Dionys DeLeeuw.....	52
MINING - Jim Nyland.....	55
WILDLIFE - Rosemary Fox.....	58
FORESTRY - Rod De Boice.....	60
TOURISM - Brian Fuhr.....	62

<u>WORKSHOP SUMMARY</u> - By Irving Fox	64
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INTRODUCTION

By Brian Wilkes,

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This workshop, Sustainable Development and a Quality Environment, was held on June 6, 1988 as part of the national celebration of Environment week, May 30 - June 5, 1988. It was inspired by the Brundtland Commission Report, Our Common Future, and the CCREM Task Force Report on Environment and Economy. Environment Canada provided the financial means of staging the event.

After examining the Brundtland and CCREM reports, it was felt we needed to do something in the northwest to extend the awareness of the renewed direction toward environmentally sound economic development. If something like this workshop had not happened, the ideas in the Brundtland report, might have a better impact, earlier.

The workshop was organized to discuss our common future as it relates to six critical resource sectors and issues in the northwest. How we manage forests, fishstocks, mine developments, tourism potential, agriculture, and wildlife has a direct bearing on the economy of this region. Also, because the public is placing greater aesthetic appreciation on these values, their management is coming into sharper public focus all the time. Conflicts between resource users are arising, and scarcity in certain sectors such as fisheries or timber are starting to appear.

We live on a resource frontier, and it is pertinent and relevant to examine any promising new model which better integrates development and environment. Brundtland offers SUSTAINABILITY as the key concept linking resource development and a quality environment. We do seem to want both here.

The workshop consisted of seven papers presented during the morning, followed by small group discussions structured around specific questions. The seven papers consisted of an overview of Brundtland, followed by presenters speaking on sustainable agriculture, fisheries, tourism, mining, forestry and wildlife.

The six workshop discussion groups addressed one of these resource topics using the questions below as a guide :

1. What does sustainability mean to the group? (Sustain what? : economic growth? environmental values? resource base? others?)
2. What specific steps does the group think should be taken next to direct this management toward sustainability?

3. What criteria should be used to judge if sustainability is achieved? (What would sustainability look like?)
4. How would sustainability in this sector impact on other resource sectors, public environmental values, and economic or community stability? How are these linked?
5. Does the group see the settlement of Indian land claims and the introduction of Indian management systems as promising alternative?
6. Does the group have specific ideas for demonstration projects or other activities which should be carried out in the future to further public awareness and consensus on achieving sustainable development?

After the discussions each group presented a 10 minute summary of their subject workshop. Finally a concluding presentation wrapped it up in the late afternoon.

The workshop attracted 75 participants from across the northwest.

Key points of the presenters were as follows:

Agriculture: - Priority is to ensure the survival of farm units large enough to be economically viable. The ALR needs to be strengthened. We can have an agriculture only if we have an agricultural land base. There must be a market for the products from the land. Auctioning agricultural land to non farmers leads to the break up of farm units. To achieve a sustainable agriculture requires maintaining farm sizes large enough to provide an attractive living. Alienating Crown arable land by auction works against this. Tying agricultural production with small scale forestry practices may serve to maximize the efficiency of both.

Forestry: - It was clear that forestry as currently practised is not sustainable, but workshop discussion on what to do about it was equivocal. This workshop provided the most heated discussion. Many participants were aware of a growing public awareness that the forests are being overcut.

Fisheries: - Fisheries are also not currently sustainable, and it is clear competing interests are not going to diminish their demands on a dwindling resource. Critical fisheries issues such as the mixed stock fishery - steelhead interception problem in the Skeena are social as well as biological. They require a public process of information sharing, debate, negotiation and conflict resolution. Government leadership for this is not in place.

Tourism: - The key point of the speaker on tourism was that in order to fulfil the potential of tourism and sustain it we have to also successfully sustain the environmental setting which makes B.C. so attractive. Tourism potential needs to be seen as a legitimate consideration in development planning; landscapes may in fact be worth more in tourism over the long term than forestry or other extractive uses.

Mines: - where mine development proceeds, it must be carried out in ways that will not diminish the sustainability of other local resource values. Further, mining developments which result in the development of settlements should contribute to the persistence of the settlement after the mineral is exhausted. Mining legislation needs revision; no other development sector is allowed land tenure and resource ownership prior to any feasibility or development planning or government approvals.

Wildlife: - Sustaining wildlife populations requires the same skilful public management as does the fisheries sector. The speaker highlighted the need for more public support and larger budgets to wildlife agencies. Currently there aren't even accurate counts of some species. Sustaining wildlife is impaired if it is not even clear what exists out there.

This proceedings contains the presentations in full. The reports from each discussion group make interesting reading as well. The similarity of central conclusions from each of the groups was amazing.

I have summarized these basic similarities below:

1. First, there was agreement that there is currently a problem. The six resource sectors examined are not now being managed sustainably. However for some it is apparent that minor changes would improve things substantially.
2. There is a need for clear and concise definitions for terms such as "sustainable development". Also it is necessary for government to be clear about where it sees the link between environment and economy.
3. All workshops identified the crucial need for integrated resource planning and management. Clearly this is not now happening. Further it was seen as a process with a public consultation component.
4. All workshops called for the creation of local resource management committees. These would consist of government and public representatives and would be the front line and first opportunity to build more integrated management, as mentioned in the previous point.

5. All groups called for comprehensive public education on environmental matters, including the Brundtland Report and the environment-economy relationship. Further, there was a unanimous call for public involvement through management committees, workshops, consultations, etc. The concern was that the mainstream public is blissfully unaware and unconcerned about the present state of the environment, or the future consequences of doing nothing now.
6. All workshops suggested the use of demonstration projects carried out at the local level. These would serve to publicly demonstrate the environment-economy link, and that we only have an economic future if we have a resource base to support it. Several suggested projects include a model energy recovery project at wood waste burners and a "demonstration" conservation strategy for a small area such as a river basin.
7. There was a perception among the groups that they did not know enough about Indian resource management systems to decide if the settlement of land claims would advance achieving sustainable development. This highlights the need for more public information on this important subject.
8. Finally, there was unanimous agreement that the workshop signalled a need for follow-up action. There were a number of ideas on this, including creation of a regional round table, and publishing a proceedings.

This degree of common concern among the workshops is important. It represents a distillation of public opinion about where improvements need to be made. The continuing challenge is to pursue these improvements with relentless vigour.