

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Forest conversation is healthy for Golden community

Golden, BC – September 13, 2011 – A Golden community dialogue session on forestry last week echoed what *Healthy Forests- Healthy Communities* has heard across the Province.

The open invitation resulted in a Golden twenty-person discussion group of woodlot licensees, professional foresters, logging contractors, woodlands manager, recreationalists, outdoorsman, community citizens and politicians. Ron Oszust, CSRD Area A Director, Norm Macdonald, MLA for Columbia River - Revelstoke, Irv Graham, local woodlot licensee, Holly Magoon, of Golden Area Initiatives and Ryan Watmough, with the Golden & District Community Foundation took notes for each of the break-out discussion groups.

Denise English, a registered professional forester and woodlot licensee, has been researching this movement and facilitated the dialogue. Ms. English is the Chair of the Golden & District Community Foundation's Vital Signs Committee, which sponsored a Forest Industry Session in April. That event featured speakers from the Ministry of Forests, Ministry of Economic & Skills Development, and Tembec.

Crown land represents 95% of land in BC. For such a large proportion of resources, many citizens and forest industry professionals don't believe that there is enough attention on the management of such a large resource.

Started in January of 2011, *Healthy Forests-Healthy Communities: A conversation on BC forests* (HFHC) promotes discussion and debate about the future of our forests. The HFHC is non-partisan, volunteer-supported initiative coordinated by registered professional forester Bill Bourgeois of North Vancouver. The Vancouver Foundation is a partner of the HFHC province-wide initiative, while Columbia Basin Trust and the Columbia Woodlot Association (CWA) supported the Golden dialogue session, which followed the CWA Annual General Meeting.

Like other meetings across the province, the discussions in Golden touched on local citizens' perceived lack of control or influence, frustration from reduced government resources, and lack of information sharing.

Organizer Denise English was generally pleased with the turnout, including the local "decision-makers," but noted, "There was a noticeable lack of government representatives – both municipal government and compliance officers."

The communities of Grand Forks and Midway held HFHC conversations in June and the groups of councilors and forest industry professionals in attendance realized that to make a sustainable plan for forests, there must be environmental protection, land use for multiple groups, an economic component and the ability to adjust the forest vision and plan as conditions change.

Recently, the HFHC published four key findings from the six summer Community Dialogue Sessions:

- 1) more community influence wanted in decision-making,
- 2) better information wanted on forest lands,
- 3) continued concern for the future, and
- 4) the desire for viable and sustainable industry.

The discussions in Golden on September 8th explored the same four key findings and essentially captured the 12 common points compiled by HFHC from 37 BC experts.

One of those BC experts, Bill Bourgeois, a Ph.D. and Registered Professional Forester, encourages all residents of forestry communities to “get involved” in forestry discussions.

“People have been reluctant to speak out for various reasons,” explained Mr. Bourgeois. “While communities may not think they have any ability to control what happens on their local-regional forests, this is not the case. Things are going to change and BC’s communities are going to have even more formal voice in the future.”

Looking to the future, Mr. Bourgeois sees communities utilizing the existing “3rd party independent certification” of forest management practices adopted by companies and Government. The three certification systems commonly used in BC expect communities to be consulted and comment on local forestry practices. Simply put, “some CEOs may not care about forest management, but they do care about what their customers have to say and the message is practice sustainable forest management.” If customers and communities do not support an individual company’s practices, then they can vote with their wallets and buy products from companies with sustainable practices in place. The communities also need to inform the market place regarding their concerns over forest management in the local forests.

Community forests are another tactic for supporting more local control of forests and exist across BC. The establishment of a community forest in Golden was one concept that was mentioned at a few discussion tables during the September 8th meeting.

Mr. Bourgeois believes the community forest concept is “fundamentally sound. However, the government is not giving enough volume of wood to create viable and sustainable businesses. In the Interior, the minimum requirement is about 100,000m³ of Allowable Annual Cut (AAC). If a community gets less, say 30,000m³, the community can simply have some control over a small area regarding how it is managed, but it will be done by a contractor who has to have other logging opportunities to be viable and sustainable.”

If Golden was to apply for a community forest, Mr. Bourgeois would recommend applying for 100,000m³, which would be very challenging to arrange with the Province and require an innovative approach. Currently, Golden's reserve has been cut substantially in the last year, down to 4,850m³, and all of the Golden Timber Supply Area's AAC has been allocated to existing licensees and BC Timber Sales (BCTS) a part of the Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resources Operations. If the government reallocates the allowable cut, then they would likely take from BCTS. There are other ways to package the increased request, like how the community works with BCTS, and this arrangement could reduce other pressures for support off the government's shoulders.

A community forest, which had been explored a number of years ago, is not the only solution to building local control in forestry. This is one example of many mechanisms that communities can have influence on the forestry industry. But the first step is letting our community's voices be heard and Thursday's meeting started Golden in the right direction.

"Communities are no different than companies." Mr. Bourgeois probes, "How does Golden become more self-sufficient?" A community forest provides revenue and jobs to become more self-sufficient and diversified. There are other opportunities such as tree farms, co-operatives, and value-added manufacturing businesses. Communities should maximize their internal resources and opportunities."

It's time to start asking and defining 'What is Golden's vision for the local-regional forest?' Bill Bourgeois suggests that once this has been identified and supported by the community, each one of the forestry companies, including BCTS, operating in the area should be invited to demonstrate to the public how they are contributing to this vision. If they can't show how, then they aren't following sustainable forestry management principles. "

Ms. English plans to compile the notes from the Golden Community Dialogue Session recorders, distribute the information to participants and the local decision-makers in the forestry industry and local government.

For more information about HFHC, visit <http://bcforestconversation.com>.

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Bill Bourgeois – Coordinator

Phone: 604-924-0765

Email: info@bcforestconversation.com

Web: <http://bcforestconversation.com>

Columbia Woodlot Association

Denise English – Member

Phone: 250-344-2698

Email: dlenglish@davincibb.net