

THIS MONTH'S ISSUE



SUBSCRIBE
TO BCBUSINESS MAG

→ LATEST STORIES



Shown the Gate

Yoga battlefield

Promotional Feature: Task Masters

Promotional Feature: An Integrated Approach

Deep Freeze

→ MOST EMAILED



Yoga battlefield

Shown the Gate

Promotional Feature: An Integrated Approach

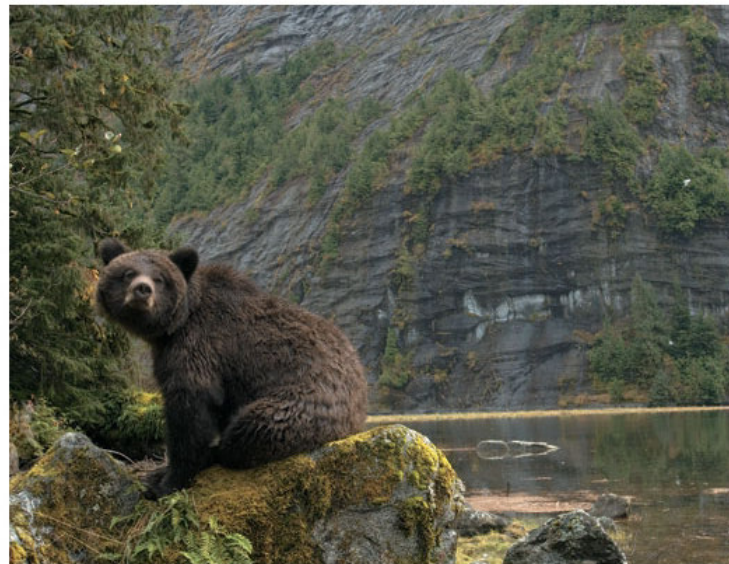
HOME » TOP STORIES » BEAR MARKET

By Andrew Findlay | Image/Photo: Ian Macallister | Published: October 01, 2007

Bear Market

PRINT EMAIL SHARE TEXT SIZE: A A A

As the nautical miles click by, the inlet narrows. Rain squalls blow in and out. We huddle for shelter in the wheelhouse. It's cold for June. No boats in sight, no contrails in the sky, no signs of historic industry except for a few A-frame clear cuts that marked the efforts of forest companies to log some of these remote Central Coast inlets. Those efforts were finally halted when environmentalists, then the public and later the world, awoke to the fact that B.C. is sitting on some of the largest, most spectacular tracts of pristine temperate rainforest left in world.



When McAllister first sailed through these inlets in the early 1990s with his father and a ragtag bunch of other

environmentalists, B.C.'s Central Coast was an obscure region, far off the radar screen of the international conservation movement. It was business as usual for big logging, with plans to harvest timber in more than 100 pristine watersheds. The spirit bear was regarded as a mythical creature.

RELATED LINKS

- ▶ Shown the Gate
- ▶ Promotional Feature: Task Masters
- ▶ Promotional Feature: An Integrated Approach
- ▶ Deep Freeze
- ▶ Yoga battlefield

Want to build a legacy for your community?

vancouver foundation

As the nautical miles click by, the inlet narrows. Rain squalls blow in and out. We huddle for shelter in the wheelhouse. It's cold for June. No boats in sight, no contrails in the sky, no signs of historic industry except for a few A-frame clear cuts that marked the efforts of forest companies to log some of these remote Central Coast inlets. Those efforts were finally halted when environmentalists, then the public and later the world, awoke to the fact that B.C. is sitting on some of the largest, most spectacular tracts of pristine temperate rainforest left in world.

When McAllister first sailed through these inlets in the early 1990s with his father and a ragtag bunch of other environmentalists, B.C.'s Central Coast was an obscure region, far off the radar screen of the international conservation movement. It was business as usual for big logging, with plans to harvest timber in more than 100 pristine watersheds. The spirit bear was regarded as a mythical creature.

That was then. More than 15 years later, it's a dramatically different story. The spirit bear (a sub-species of black bear with a recessive trait in the gene pool that gives its coat a cream colour) is B.C.'s poster animal, the province's official mammal. More importantly, an ambitious conservation plan for the Central and North Coast regions is underway, based on three pillars: conservation financing, protected areas and a so-called "ecosystem-based management" of the land. Some big U.S. corporations and NGOs have a lot of influence in how this rainforest is protected, and McAllister says he's not quite sure how to feel about it.

Think of Roscoe Inlet as the hub of a wheel, with spokes that reach all the way to the premier's office, the corporate headquarters of logging multinationals, the foreign offices of some of B.C. wood exporters' largest customers, the influential command centres of the most affluent philanthropic foundations in the U.S., environmental groups and First Nation chiefs and their councils. It has brought long-standing combatants to the table to discuss, on more or less equal terms, the future of what is now widely recognized as one of the last great terrestrial conservation opportunities on the globe.

What's being envisioned is something groundbreaking: conservation with jobs, and ecological protection with economic opportunity. It's a strange, unlikely situation that the environmental movement helped to choreograph as an antecedent to the Great Bear Rainforest Agreement, a situation that, at least in part, has green activists, logging executives and government bureaucrats reporting to people with American zip codes.

For perhaps the first time in our history, foreign companies and American philanthropists are playing a key, albeit quiet, behind-the-scenes role in shaping a conservation agenda in B.C. The Great Bear Rainforest is their flagship project.

The Great Bear Rainforest is a 24/7 preoccupation for Merran Smith, coastal coordinator for the San Francisco based NGO ForestEthics. The veteran environmental activist is more than familiar with the traditionally adversarial role of environmentalist, exchanging salvos with forestry executives and logging companies. Today Smith is one of the activists credited with masterminding a seminal paradigm shift in the environmental movement, a shift that has replaced the unpalatable "jobs or the environment" with the more digestible "jobs and the environment." And Smith is the first to admit that, like it or not, influential philanthropists and companies with emerging green platforms now have a strong hand in the B.C. conservation movement.

Just how far B.C. has travelled from the tempestuous days of forestry conflict was perhaps best revealed on May 9 of this year when loggers, First Nations, government representatives and environmentalists stood shoulder-to-shoulder to accept the Earth Award from the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) for their efforts in forging a Great Bear Rainforest deal. A decade ago, it would have been virtually unthinkable to get these combatants in the same room, let alone gather them for a grip-and-grin photo op. Smith was among the unlikely co-recipients.

"Originally I realized that the scale we were talking about was not one, not six but more than a hundred valleys. We were trying to do high-level conservation in a huge area that took a different approach," Smith explains. "We knew that we couldn't talk conservation without also having a conversation about economy."

The tract of land in question is huge: a chunk of terrain the size of Switzerland with just 30,000 inhabitants but 17 distinct First Nations, each with its own aspirations for development and hopes of breaking the cycle of poverty and social dysfunction that affects so many remote aboriginal settlements.

"Transforming the economy is critical. It's the key to large-scale conservation. We can't ask First Nations to starve. For this project to be durable, First Nations communities have to be healthy with jobs and an economy," Smith says.

The clever and sophisticated "markets campaign," which recruited the support of foreign companies in the battle to save the Great Bear Rainforest from industrial-scale development, forced forest companies and government to the table. However, environmentalists quickly realized that if they wanted to simultaneously conserve habitat and promote small-footprint economic development, they had to come to the table with money, an effort that they knew would quickly overwhelm their conventional fundraising capacity.

In 2002 B.C. enviros turned to the U.S.-based Nature Conservancy for fundraising help. Erica Bailey, director of resources for the Nature Conservancy's Great Bear Rainforest project, says B.C.'s Central and North Coast presented an opportunity the organization couldn't pass on: to do broad-level conservation on a

chunk of terrain with world-class biodiversity and cultural values, for which there is nothing even remotely comparable south of the 49th parallel.

“We realized that most of the biodiversity in the world happens outside of the U.S., so we had to step it up a notch. It was a case of how can we not take this on?” Bailey explains of the Nature Conservancy’s decision to accept the fundraising challenge. “I’ve done conservation work in 12 countries, and I’ve never seen anything like the Great Bear Rainforest.”

It would turn out to be an astonishingly successful campaign. In just four years, the Nature Conservancy rallied private foundations and philanthropists in the U.S. and Canada to the tune of \$60 million for the Coast Opportunities Fund, by far the largest international conservation project in both monetary value and geographic scale that the Nature Conservancy has ever been involved with.

Bailey says it was a relatively easy sell. American billionaires and millionaires, who had arguably made their fortunes wreaking environmental havoc elsewhere in the world, would soon be lining up to contribute to the Great Bear bank account, among them the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, the David and Lucille Packard Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and scores of other individual donors who have kept their contributions quiet.

The San Francisco-based Hewlett Foundation alone has anted in with a mountainous \$5 million for the Coast Opportunities Fund; however, a Hewlett representative estimates the foundation has contributed another \$15 million over the years to support environmental groups working on the Great Bear Rainforest campaign. “From a pure conservation perspective, it was one of the best opportunities we had ever encountered,” says Rhea Suh, program officer for the Hewlett Foundation, which has a long history of supporting conservation in America’s Pacific Northwest.

Suh says the Great Bear project goes far beyond trees, birds, animals and pretty postcards. The involvement of industry, government and First Nations – with rights and title recognized by courts of law – as well as environmentalists, elevated the project into a class of its own. According to Suh, most of the world’s remaining conservation efforts will necessarily involve indigenous populations, and that’s another reason people will be watching the B.C. experiment with a scientist’s eye for detail.

“Though this is a landmark deal and hopefully a model agreement for the world, there’s still a lot of work to be done. From our perspective, we’re talking about a relatively significant amount of money, so we remain engaged with the issue and we have been in direct contact with the premier’s office on several occasions,” Suh says.

Clearly the combination of ecology and native culture is a big draw for American donors, as well as consumers in countries such as Japan and Germany that buy B.C. wood fibre.

In February 2006, more than 100 news media outlets from around the world were on hand to cover the B.C. government’s announcement of the Great Bear Rainforest Agreement, guaranteeing First Nations involvement in land-use planning. The agreement includes 443,000 hectares of previously protected areas, 1.3 million hectares of newly negotiated parks and application of light-touch ecosystem-based management by 2009. And last January, Stephen Harper’s Conservative government bought some green votes when it matched a provincial contribution of \$30 million that, combined with \$60 million in private donations, brought the financing package, or Coast Opportunities Fund, to a whopping total of \$120 million.

Coastal First Nations are sitting on half of the Coast Opportunity Fund; a \$60 million pot of money supplied by the federal and B.C. governments and earmarked for sustainable economic development. (The private portion will go toward financing conservation-related activities, such as scientific research and park facilities.) In theory it’s meant to fund First Nations economic initiatives that are consistent with the overall conservation goals of the Great Bear Rainforest. In reality, exactly what this new economy will look like remains ambiguous.

While the future of coastal First Nations unfolds in the Great Bear Rainforest, the forest industry also ponders a new reality, one defined largely by NGOs and their funding advisers. It's been tough sledding on the Central and North Coast since the international spotlight started shining on the Great Bear Rainforest. Environmentalists have excavated, examined and documented the logging practices of companies such as Western Forest Products Inc., Weyerhaeuser Co., Norske Skogindustrier ASA and International Forest Products Ltd. (Interfor) with the zeal of archeologists unearthing an ancient tomb. However, in this case it wasn't just environmentalists who were digging up dirt and cranking the heat; customers of B.C. wood fibre from around the world had joined the chorus of critics, along with American philanthropic money. For Rick Slaco, Interfor's chief forester and VP, recognition from the WWF was but a brief moment of gratification in a long uphill struggle.

Currently, Interfor is one of a number of companies playing an advisory role for government and First Nations in the development of the highly touted ecosystem-based management, or EBM, principles that will set the future tone of forest resource development on B.C.'s coast. The company has already taken steps to implement EBM practices on its entire Central and North Coast operations, which account for roughly 50 per cent of the company's forestry activities. The new principles purport to take logging to a new level by strictly managing for riparian areas, endangered species, sensitive ecosystems and cultural sites. However, says Slaco, these principles have to be balanced with business viability and jobs for coastal people.

"It's incredibly challenging. As a company, we believe in EBM and believe that it's something that we can apply in a viable manner. It's a learning process for everybody involved, and it's going to cost more because of the increased planning involved. To think that everything will be perfect by 2009 is a little naive," Slaco says about the impending deadline for EBM implementation that enviros are pushing hard for.

Accepting the WWF award was cause for reflection. "We're trying to do something special here, and to have the world recognize that was gratifying," Slaco says. However, when the world recognizes, the world also watches, and Interfor's point man on the coast concedes that there is a strong expectation for "substance and follow-through" on the commitments made in the Great Bear Rainforest.

One person feeling pressure to see the provincial government's commitments to the Great Bear Rainforest bear fruit is Pat Bell, minister of agriculture and lands. He tends to shrug off suggestions that overseas interests and American philanthropists are the puppet masters of the B.C. conservation movement. However, clearly any PR points scored during a press conference trumpeting victory in the rainforest could translate into an international embarrassment if the government drags its feet.

Legislation introduced in April 2006, known as the Park (Conservancy Enabling) Amendment Act, provided for the creation of a new type of protection that permits traditional First Nations use of the land, small hydro projects, roads and other vaguely specified activities. At the same time, 29 new conservancy areas were created, totaling 541,000 hectares. There are plans to announce another 85 protected areas by year's end. In some respects, creating parks is lightweight fare. The real heavy lifting is happening around the other government commitment: ecosystem-based management and the promise of new light-touch logging on the coast.

"It's a very complex file. These are not natural groups to be getting together," Bell says about the fact that enviros, forest industry execs, First Nations and government have all been rolling up their sleeves together to hammer out what EBM will look like on the ground.

He's also well aware of the dollars that American philanthropists have committed to the Great Bear Rainforest and of the influence of international wood-products customers, who clearly would view the continuation of status-quo clear-cutting of coastal old growth as unacceptable. Perhaps more influential than all of the above is the pressure he feels from closer to home, the pressure that comes from down the legislature hallways. It's widely known that Premier Gordon Campbell, no friend of greens in the past, wants this landmark deal to be the foundation of an environmental legacy he hopes will be remembered long

after he has left office. After all, the spirit bear is our provincial mammal (so named by Campbell in his 2006 throne speech).

“The premier is very interested in this file and he often reminds us how important it is,” Bell says.

It’s quite possible that we wouldn’t even be talking about the Great Bear Rainforest today if it weren’t for the intervention of big business, or rather the successful effort by environmentalists to marshal the private sector and leverage change in B.C.’s coastal forests. Capital from afar continues to scrutinize the Great Bear Rainforest Agreement.

Lutz Druege is director of sustainability for the Association of German Magazine Publishers, an organization whose members are significant end users of B.C. pulp. And anything green and North American Aboriginal resonates particularly strongly with the German consumer. “It all comes down to the subject of reputation management regarding sustainable resourcing,” Druege comments via email from his Berlin office. “The red line in all our activities was to point out how important this is for the German market and what consequences could happen if forestry practices did not change. We and our customers are still very much interested in the Great Bear Rainforest issue.”

In 2000, at the urging of ForestEthics, Lowe’s Companies Inc. – a retailer with 1,500 outlets across the U.S. – published its wood-procurement policy, ensuring that all wood products sold in its stores “originate from well-managed, non-endangered forests.” Since launching its wood-procurement policy, Lowe’s has been quietly putting pressure on the B.C. government to get things right on the coast, through direct contact with the premier’s office and the Ministry of Forests and Range.

“Our message is that the forest industry is important to the B.C. economy, and it’s important to our supply chain,” says Michael Chenard, Lowe’s director of environmental affairs. “We have a very strong interest in seeing a positive solution on the B.C. coast.”

The boardrooms of big business and American philanthropy feel like a long way from the grassroots activism that launched the Great Bear campaign. The fact that American foundations and European executives have a direct line to the premier’s office and are helping shape the future of B.C.’s conservation movement is somewhat unsettling for a front-line activist such as Ian McAllister.

Back in Roscoe Inlet, there’s barely a ripple on the water. From the deck of the Habitat, McAllister and I scan Quartcha Creek estuary hoping to see a wolf. Instead, we have to be content with a young female grizzly fastidiously foraging the estuary for starchy chocolate lily bulbs, favourite spring staple of bears.

McAllister, like a lot of people, isn’t quite ready to bust out the party favours and start cutting ribbons. Questions remain. What kind of economic activity will be permitted in the new conservancy areas? At the end of the day, will EBM forge a new direction for sustainable logging, or will it be business as usual in the clear-cuts? Will the Great Bear Rainforest usher in a new era of prosperity for coastal First Nations? Is the War in the Woods over once and for all? The eyes of the world are watching B.C.’s bold experiment to marry conservation with economic opportunity, ecology with jobs, hopefully blazing a path for others to follow.

I look out into Roscoe Inlet, the water ruffled by gentle wind. There are no other people in sight, no boats, no signs of human disturbance. Lonely as this place seems, the world is watching what happens to culturally and ecologically rich places such as Roscoe Inlet. Beautiful treasures like this fjord have moved more than one wealthy philanthropist with an environmental conscience to dip into their bank account and cut a healthy cheque to help preserve it, help push resource development in a more sustainable direction. It is here that one of the world’s most innovative and hard-fought conservation efforts is unfolding. It could be a template for sustainable economic development and conservation that the rest of the world will look to for inspiration.

Either that, or it will be a fantastic disappointment.

Comments

[What an utterly disgusting](#)

By Anonymous, October 1, 2007 at 22:28

What an utterly disgusting crock of shit. On what basis could anyone envision success for this RSP GBR pie in the sky win win funding initiative. It is a failed gambit. There is no basis for optimism. It is a done deal and the deal looks an awful lot like our worst environmental fears for the forests of the central coast of BC. No conservation of remaining critical environment, no restoration of agroforestry modified critical habitat, equivocating protection of vast areas of rock, ice and low value forest, no commitment to stop industrial logging in the few remaining old growth stands and particularly no commitment to stop logging the very scarce remaining alluvial zone forests. Regular liquidation and conversion logging has been stalled while highly focussed helicopter highgrading is targeting all of the remaining original old growth cedar and cypress. These are two species we have been completely unsuccessful at replanting and restoring to their historic level of ecosystem importance and function. The alluvial zone of the central coast forest has been excoriated and that is the jewel, the biodiversity engine, and the critical source of resilience in the remaining original coastal forests of BC. The US foundation idiots payed the RSP enviros to create the PR appearance of a win win environmental and industrial solution but they simply have no idea how the coastal forest is structured and how easily its critical functioning components can be destroyed. The alluvial zone occupying perhaps 8% of the total coastal forest area is like the distributor in a car engine. If it is removed, the engine looks nice but ceases to function. The forest industry identified that it particularly wanted the remaining alluvial forests (the distributor) and the US funders identified that they wanted announceably huge areas of forest protected. The RSP enviros brokered a deal to provide both with what they wanted but in doing so they have deprived the already damaged coastal forest of its critical capacity for maintaining and restoring biodiversity and resilience. The win win deal looks good on the idiotic RSP enviros and it delivered their money's worth in announcements to the US foundation funders, and it even works very nicely for the forest industry who would just like to leave with some cash but it does not work at all for the coastal forest. The BC Ministry of Forests went to sleep at the switch, violated its protection mandate and in the manufactured fog enviro and forest industry optimism, allowed this travesty to occur. That is not environmentalism. It is simply brokered deal by the public forest is exploited and our forest environment suffers a catastrophic loss. Michael Major\