

RESOURCES

A Political Ecology of British Columbia's Community Forests

Caitlyn Vernon

Forestry practices in British Columbia (B.C.), Canada, supported by government policies and implemented primarily by multinational corporations, have resulted in ecological degradation and social conflicts. Industrial harvesting practices not only reduce the number of jobs as the rate of cut increases, they also undermine the conditions for future harvests, all in the name of efficiency and profitability. In response, social and environmental movements have united in a red-green strategic alliance in the struggle for local control over decision-making in B.C.'s forests.

In the watersheds surrounding the villages of Harrop and Proctor in Southeastern B.C., loggers and environmentalists head into the woods together to harvest trees and botanical forest products under the auspices of a community cooperative. This alliance has not come easily. For decades residents have expressed concerns to the provincial government that logging in the nearby watersheds would affect their drinking water and the health of the forest. They lobbied to have their viewpoints considered but were consistently excluded from forestry planning processes. Over the years, a handful of determined people organized a society, developed an ecologically sustainable forest management plan, and gained the involvement of over 60 percent of local residents. Finally, in 1998 the communities were able to apply to the provincial government for a Community Forest license, which grants the right to manage an area of public land. Today, the Harrop-Proctor Community Forest preserves clean drinking water and generates local employment through ecosystem-based forest management. The cooperative sells value-added forest products such as flooring, paneling, and garden planter boxes that are eco-certified by the Forest Stewardship Council, and it is conducting research into sustainable harvesting practices for non-timber forest products.

The communities of Harrop and Proctor are two of many in B.C. that have recently begun managing small areas of public forestland for local benefit. And there are dozens more B.C. communities that are actively seeking to manage their surrounding forests. It was in response to the struggles of communities such as these, their opposition to corporate forest management and the economic uncertainty this caused, that the provincial government created a new form of timber license that hands over some control of forest management to the local level. Community forests are now supported and promoted by both environmental and social movements as a radical means to enhance local control over decision-making and thereby provide rural employment options, revitalize communities, and utilize forestry practices that maintain ecological integrity and allow for multiple forest uses. The basic premise of community forestry is "local people making local decisions over local lands for the long-term benefit of local people."

But while community forests may serve to resolve resource management conflicts in certain locations, do they address the ecological contradiction of capitalism? Do they enable producers to control the means of production in a way that doesn't undermine the conditions of production? And do they enable decision-makers to incorporate a multiplicity of values beyond the monetary or to redefine notions of value and progress?

Forestry in British Columbia

More than 95 percent of British Columbia is publicly owned land (known as Crown land), and of this, 83 percent is forested. Under the Canadian Constitution, the provincial governments are responsible for regulating access to this common land for commercial and livelihood purposes. Prior to the 1940s, however, the rate of timber harvest was unregulated in British Columbia. Apprehensions at that time “over the ‘cut and run’ development of the forest industry that had resulted in an unbalanced pattern of timber harvesting, inadequate provisions for future forest crops and the creation of ‘ghost towns’ in the wake of an advancing forest industry” led to the establishment of the B.C. forest tenure system. Through a system of licenses known as timber tenures, the B.C. government allocates the rights to manage and harvest public forestlands to private parties. The word “tenure” is “an allusion to the English tenurial system of landholding, whereby a subject had to render certain services to the Crown in order to have the right to work and occupy the land.” This notion survives in the context of B.C.’s timber tenures, where in order to obtain rights to harvest timber from Crown land, the licensees may be obliged to operate processing facilities and comply with government forestry regulations. However, over time, the responsibilities of tenure licensees have diminished, while their right to harvest public forests has remained.

British Columbia’s tenure system was designed to “insulate forest-based communities from the boom and bust cycles of the forest sector by introducing sustained-yield forestry and encouraging investment by large ‘integrated’ companies.” Implementing sustained-yield forestry meant replacing old-growth forests with managed timber crops to be harvested on periodic, predictable rotations, a system that encouraged high volume timber extraction and clear-cut logging. This practice confirms Faber’s observation that capital on a global scale is relying on increasingly unsustainable forms of production to increase accumulation.

The current tenure system and associated means of production provide revenue to the provincial government and profits to forest company shareholders, but do not sustain either the forest ecosystems or the forest-based communities. Corporate integration and sustained-yield forestry have resulted in major downturns in the forest economy, wood shortages, decreased employment per unit cut (concurrent with increased company profits), and mill overcapacity. Mills designed for the harvest from first-growth forests are currently experiencing the “falldown” effect—reduced cut levels that reflect the lower wood volume available in second-growth forests—while the impacts of the consequent layoffs and mill closures are felt by workers and communities. Sustained-yield management focuses on exploiting one aspect of the forest—commercially valuable trees—and thus decreases ecological sustainability by simplifying forest ecosystems. Furthermore, the heavy mechanization utilized by industrial forestry results in soil compaction and erosion, water pollution, and habitat destruction, which, in turn, leads to the decline and disappearance of fish populations and endangers growing numbers of species and ecosystems. By these means, processes of environmental degradation—the result of capital accumulation—are displaced onto communities that lack the political and economic power to resist.

Rural communities are also facing chronic economic instability as unemployment soars. While the annual cut level has increased, the number of jobs in British Columbia continues to decrease: in 1961 there were 2 jobs per 1000 cubic meters (m^3) of timber harvested and a total of 32,000,000 m^3 cut compared to 1991 when the annual cut had risen to 74,000,000 m^3 and jobs had fallen to 0.88 per 1000 m^3 . Further illustrating how corporate forestry eliminates jobs through mechanization, Jäggi and Sandberg cite national data comparing forestry in Canada and Switzerland. By using small-scale selective cutting, value-added wood processing, and a multiple-use approach to forestry, the Swiss forest sector provides 83 jobs per 1000 hectares, while Canadian forestry provides only 3 jobs per 1000 hectares.

Furthermore, corporate integration of the means of production has excluded workers and provincial residents from decision-making. In 1998, fewer than 20 integrated forest products companies controlled

almost 70 percent of what was cut from B.C.'s public lands. The consolidation of forest management decision-making into the hands of corporations and their shareholders places short-term profits ahead of the interests of local employees, communities, and ecological sustainability. In response, there has been an ongoing struggle for increased local control over forest management throughout the history of colonial settlement in British Columbia. Rural communities and forest workers are engaged in a struggle with forest corporations and the government that represents corporate interests over the question of who has access to public forests, who makes the resource use decisions, and who benefits from the harvest. Frustration with these "ecological distribution conflicts" in British Columbia has strengthened the movement for more democratic access to the commons through the allocation of community forest tenures. Community forests are optimistically seen as a means to provide rural communities with increased decision-making power over the management of the forests surrounding them.

Community Forest Agreements

Although rural communities in British Columbia have historically been excluded from forestry decision-making, they have been left with the social inequalities and ecological consequences of industrial forestry as the timber (and financial benefits) are exported elsewhere. Community forests, which are defined as "a forestry operation managed by a local government, community group or First Nation for the benefit of the community," are seen by rural communities in B.C. as both an alternative to industrial forestry and a mechanism to enhance community self-determination: the "capacity of human beings to chart their own course, and to take part in decisions that will affect their lives."

Ever since the inception of B.C.'s forest tenure system in the 1940s, there have been recommendations for a diversification of tenures to include forest management by communities, but it wasn't until 1998 that the provincial government introduced a community forest tenure. In 1945, 1957, 1976, and again in 1991, public commissions on forestry in B.C. recommended that municipalities manage local forests in order to reintroduce competition for public timber, manage public forests for a more diverse mix of forest products, accommodate small forest licenses, and economically benefit the inhabitants of local communities. Large-scale forest tenures don't allow meaningful public participation in decision-making, whereas community forests embrace participatory democracy "where citizens and resource users are involved in making decisions and are thus responsible for them."

As public awareness grew in the 1970s and 1980s regarding the need to protect forest ecosystems from the negative impacts of industrial logging practices, the movement for community forestry was strengthened by the growing recognition that healthy ecosystems are the basis of healthy communities. Advocates of community forests argued that the B.C. forest tenure system, which links sustained-yield forest management with inflated harvest levels and a dependence on fertilizers and other chemical treatments, must be reformed to make possible ecologically based initiatives that maintain ecosystem and community health. "While environmentalists were focusing their attention on preservation, a growing number of people who worked in the labor movements, with communities, and with First Nations were becoming equally concerned with responsible management of the 'working forest.'" In contrast to the environmental movements working towards the protection of uninhabited wilderness areas, the movement for community forestry envisions a sustainable human presence on the landscape. As such, it can be called an "environmentalism of the poor," characterized by "social conflicts with an ecological content ... of the poor against the relatively rich." Although Martinez-Alier uses this term primarily to refer to the rural Third World, this concept connects class struggle with ecological interests and therefore also applies to rural British Columbia, particularly in how community forests represent a "material interest in the environment as a source and a requirement for livelihood" and a "demand for contemporary social justice among humans."

Throughout the 1990s, public support for community forests grew stronger in rural communities throughout B.C. This support was stimulated by the erosion of forestry jobs, growing concerns about the environmental sustainability of industrial forest practices, and a growing realization that local people had virtually no control over the very resources that provided their livelihoods, their water, and a portion of their food supplies. At that time, the only option available for a rural community to have a say in the management of the forests surrounding it was to participate in one of the government-led public land-use planning processes initiated in the 1990s. But as participants in public planning processes providing input into the management of industrial forest tenures, B.C.'s rural communities have not been able to challenge status-quo industrial forestry.

An underlying intent of participatory processes is to address society's power relations by including more interests into decision-making. However, participatory processes can also be used to "encourage a reassertion of control and power by dominant individuals and groups," if the act of inclusion functions in a way that "disempowers [those brought into the process] to challenge the prevailing hierarchies and inequalities in society." Processes often proceed as if everyone has an equal voice without recognizing that not all participants are empowered to challenge or change power structures. Community members participating in the public land-use planning deliberations have expressed frustration that controversial issues such as land tenure and the annual allowable cut were excluded, thereby limiting their involvement to an advisory capacity and allowing the government to retain "the power that really matters." As this example illustrates, many participatory approaches focus on relieving the symptoms of oppression rather than its causes, and further that the "emphasis on techniques of participation has detracted from a need to understand the causes of disempowerment." For community-based resource management to be effective, participation in planning processes is not enough: "states need to develop property ownership regimes that entrench community rights over local resources." Frustrations with the lack of decision-making authority granted to participants in B.C.'s land-use planning processes strengthened the movement for community forestry.

Another important factor in the growing demand for more community involvement in forest management was the fact that the availability of timber in areas out of view and inexpensive to log was diminishing in the 1990s, and forestry operations were moving into more contentious and expensive areas, such as community watersheds, where there was less public acceptance for logging. Gunter noted that it was in the interest of the provincial government to "transfer the responsibility of logging these difficult areas to community-based organizations" that presumably would be "better equipped to incorporate the concerns of community members into harvesting plans and to gain public support."

In short, the movement for community forestry arose out of concerns about forest sustainability, loss of jobs, declining health of rural communities, inadequate public involvement in forestry decision-making, a desire to value non-timber aspects of B.C.'s forests, and a recognition on the part of the provincial government that public approval of forest practices was becoming increasingly important. In response to these concerns, several B.C. communities prepared community forest feasibility studies, reports promoting community forestry were written by academics and non-governmental organizations, and a number of conferences were held on the topic.

In 1997 the B.C. government appointed a Community Forest Advisory Committee and finally, in 1998, legislative amendments to the provincial Forest Act created the Community Forest "Pilot" Program, a state-sanctioned mechanism for communities to participate in the management of local forests. Then in 2004 the "pilot" community forest agreements were replaced with a system of five-year "probationary" agreements that, if successfully assessed, can be extended into longer-term community forest agreements. As of 2007, twelve Probationary and six Long Term Community Forest Agreements have been awarded, and

over 88 communities have expressed interest. These legislative changes make community forestry a more realistic possibility for a greater number of communities in the province.

Community forest agreements grant exclusive rights to harvest timber from Crown lands and may also grant the right to manage and harvest non-timber forest products. The agreements are granted to legal entities representing community interests, such as community-owned corporations, cooperatives, town councils, and First Nation band councils. For example, the Burns Lake community forest is run as a community-owned corporation with the intention of being “a profitable, self-sufficient company capable of withstanding changes in market demand and commodity pricing” with the goal of generating a healthy profit for the community and revenue for the Crown. The Cowichan Lake community forest is a municipal co-op, Kaslo has a consensus-based non-profit society with appointees from local and regional government, and Harrop-Proctor “has both a society, dedicated to research and education, and a co-op, which acts as the business arm.”

Every community forest has a different story. They have large and small populations, wide-ranging goals, unique approaches to gathering community support, and diverse community organization structures. Some community forests have already been heavily logged; in others the forests are healthier. All community forest operations are obliged to harvest timber, but some are also focused on restoration and on harvesting non-timber forest products. The size of community forests ranges between the 418 hectares (ha) allocated to Bamfield/Huu-ay-aht and the 60,860 ha being managed by the Village of McBride, with an annual allowable cut of timber ranging from 1000 m³ to 62,631 m³. The extent of participation by community residents in forest management decision-making depends on the community forest governance structure, the extent of geographic isolation, the technical and business capacity of community members, and the personalities involved. The B.C. Community Forestry Association, a network of community-based organizations formed in 2002, provides a voice for the interests of all B.C. communities engaged in community forest management as well as those seeking to establish community forests.

Community forests are expected to provide local employment, increase the self-reliance of rural communities, involve local people in resource management decision-making, create a mechanism to resolve conflicts over timber harvesting in contentious areas, enable the protection of drinking water and other values important to communities, and increase opportunities for education and research. By including local people in decision-making—the very people who will bear the consequences if poor practices result in environmental degradation—community forestry can lead to more ecologically sustainable management, but it does not necessarily do so. Forest management styles of community forests range from status quo industrial forestry to innovative ecoforestry practices. Though the constraints of tenure and capital act as disincentives for ecologically sustainable forestry, one of the presumed strengths of community forestry is its ability to incorporate multiple values, including ecological values, into decision-making.

Incommensurable Values

The 1945 Royal Commission commented that “a tree may be of more real value in place in the forest than when converted into lumber.” This observation acknowledges that forestry is characterized by “incommensurable values,” or multiple values that can’t all be reduced to a single measurement such as money. Mainstream environmental economics estimates the monetary worth of non-monetary values through processes such as contingency evaluations and willingness-to-pay, assuming that value equals price. Conversely, ecological economists accept that there are many values and move beyond “taking nature into account” in money terms to recognizing value pluralism. Because social groups can use different standards of value to support their interests, “ecological distribution conflicts... are not only conflicts of interest, but also conflicts of values.” An indicator of both the ecological sustainability and democratization of forest

management is the extent to which the decision-makers are able to define the language of valuation and incorporate multiple values beyond an economic analysis.

The expressed goals of community forests illustrate the multiplicity of values they aim to represent, with emphasis on ecological sustainability, local livelihoods, and local decision-making. The B.C. Community Forest Association describes how the benefits of community forestry are both monetary and non-monetary: “On the monetary side, benefits include local employment and economic development. Non-monetary benefits are derived from the many values associated with forests, including ecological (such as the protection of drinking water), cultural, spiritual, medicinal, recreational, and aesthetic values.”

This attention to multiple values is characteristic of B.C.’s community forests, as illustrated by the following two examples. The goals of the Harrop-Proctor community forest include maintaining a healthy local environment, growth and harvest of high-quality wood, and assuring local employment through ecosystem-based planning, value-added manufacturing, expansion of a local sawmill and economic activities in the community, and the utilization of harvesting systems that respect “less profitable values” such as biodiversity and viewsapes. The Burns Lake community forest in northern B.C. aims to generate a source of revenue and employment for the community, test innovative harvesting practices, provide educational opportunities, protect biodiversity and fish/wildlife habitat, promote increased participation in management of the area’s forest resources, diversify the economy by promoting tourism and recreation, and generate funds for community projects.

A limiting factor in meeting these multiple goals is the extent to which the decision-making authority of community forests is constrained by government regulations and the quest for capital. In Marxist terms, the question becomes to what extent community forests have the autonomy to focus on use-value over exchange-value.

In capitalist commodity production, exchange-value (the exchangeability of a commodity, expressed only in quantitative terms and as money) predominates over use-value (satisfaction of human needs, grounded in nature and expressed qualitatively) on an expanding scale, with the goal of continuous accumulation of exchange-value. The use-values of forests can include both the quality and type of commodities produced as well as the recreational, spiritual, medicinal and educational uses of a standing forest. As can be seen in the goals expressed above, the intent of community forestry appears to be to simultaneously maximize both use-value (valuing non-monetary aspects of the forest and enhancing the quality of labor and production) and exchange-value (the emphasis on economic development).

This dual emphasis is illustrated by value-added production, in which the goal is to make more from less: more jobs, products and revenue from less wood harvested, thereby creating value. For example, selling high-quality wood locally and manufacturing furniture and other items for local (and export) consumption in multiple small businesses results in more jobs of higher quality and requires less wood than industrial forestry, which harvests high volumes of low-quality timber for export as pulp and unprocessed logs. Value-added production therefore emphasizes the qualitative over the quantitative, while simultaneously increasing the exchange-value of a given quantity of wood.

While on the one hand community forests are able to expand the range of values considered in decision-making, the government dependence on revenues from forest tenures results in policies and regulations that require the community forests to generate profits in the form of exchange-value, thereby limiting their capacity to realize multiple goals.

Contradictions of Capitalism

Addressing multiple values and reconciling diverse interests through community forests has been outlined as one proposed solution to the ecological distribution conflicts caused by industrial forestry in British Columbia. However, as Martinez-Alier points out, solving a conflict (such as where to put waste products) can be distinct from solving the problem (such as why is there so much waste produced). In fact, focusing on the conflict can be a distraction from the underlying issue of capital. Thus we see contradictory political meanings in community forests: on the one hand they destabilize capital by not solely focusing on commodity production, while on the other they subsidize the capitalist economy.

Capitalism degrades the conditions of its own production, is a non-equilibrating system that must grow or die, and intentionally and constantly widens the gap between rich and poor. The goal of increased profits and accumulation leads to a constant cutting of costs of the conditions of production, which in turn threatens profitability. Where community forests aim to support local employment and labor-intensive sustainable forestry practices, the requirement for financial viability could impose a pressure that supercedes these goals. In the first contradiction of capitalism, explains O'Connor, the attempt to defend or restore profits by increasing labor productivity has the unintended effect of reducing the final demand for consumer commodities, since the workers, fewer of them or paid less over time to reduce labor costs, have a decreased ability to purchase products. This contradiction could occur within community forestry if steps are taken to make the forest practices more efficient and the operation more profitable by replacing labor with technology, thereby reducing the local consumer demand for forest products.

Capitalism assumes limitless supplies of the conditions of production, including human labor power and the environment. In the unrelenting competitive drive to realize profit, argues Kovel, "it is a certainty that the conditions of production at some point or other will be degraded, which is to say that natural ecosystems will be destabilized and broken apart." As ecosystems (the source of materials used in production) are degraded through efforts to cut costs, the costs of production increase: the second contradiction of capitalism. If the price of labor is kept high by extracting extra value from nature (i.e., cutting the costs of production by externalizing ecological costs in order to pay workers a decent wage without reducing profit margins), then the second contradiction of capitalism overcomes the first, with the result that labor and the environment are placed into a competitive relationship. By incorporating multiple values into decision-making, the community forest movement tends to raise the costs of production and decrease possible profits, thereby defying the rules of capital.

But community forests are reformist, not revolutionary: they seek to democratize access to productive resources and decision-making around resource use but not to fundamentally change the economic system or property relations. This is typical of a state-sanctioned solution, designed to distract and appease while ensuring the maintenance of neoliberal values and the continued exploitation of nature by capital.

Even where community forests choose to structure themselves as a cooperative, such as in the example given above of the Harrop-Proctor Community Forest, capital, through competitive pressure, forces them to behave like capitalist enterprises. While the very notion of cooperative ownership by producers "cuts into the core of capitalist social relations, replacing hierarchy and control from above with freely associated labor," Kovel argues that "the *internal* cooperation of freely associated labor is forever hemmed in and compromised by the force field of value expansion embodied in the Market, whether this be expressed in dealings with banks or an unending pressure to exploit labor in order to stay afloat, or through hierarchies or bureaucracies..." This pressure is illustrated in lessons learned from Switzerland, where many of the goals of B.C.'s community forests have been implemented: forests are largely locally owned, there is

local decision-making and public participation, and harvesting is selective. As outlined by Jäggi and Sandberg,

the Swiss forestry model seeks to maintain a balance between ecology, economy and culture. Small-scale community forestry, local wood manufacturing and local decision-making are claimed to be as important as financial profits. Yet the Swiss forestry model is pressured by the globalization of forest production and the presence in the world market of cheap wood fiber and forest products.

The result has been that the costly, labor-intensive Swiss forest products can't compete in the global capitalist market where "the lowest common denominator of sustainable forestry determines economic efficiency and market share." As long as B.C.'s community forests are competing for economic profitability in the global market, the contradictions of capitalism dictate that even those that are run as cooperatives or as socially and ecologically responsible businesses will lead to ecological degradation and/or socio-economic inequities, since, as Kovel puts it, "there is no compromising with capital."

Thus the ecological sustainability of forestry practices and the associated health of forest communities can be judged by the degree to which the pressure of exchange-value is neutralized or overcome. The implementation of sustainable resource management requires that community-level decision-makers have the autonomy to define the goals and measures of progress and to set the level of resource extraction. As Kovel outlines, the creation of a collective anti-capitalist intention requires an offsetting belief system that allows decision-makers to renounce profitability and focus on use-value over exchange-value. This isn't the case with B.C.'s community forests, where the regulatory requirement to focus on economic profitability precludes the development of an explicitly anti-capitalist approach. Significantly, established community forests are hesitant to push for more radical reforms out of a concern to secure markets for their forest products and maintain their forest tenures.

Community Self-Determination in Context

In the struggle of rural communities to gain access to resource management decision-making in an environment where government-subsidized multinational corporations exploit the forests and export the profits, community forests are promoted as a means to achieve sustainable rural livelihoods that operate within ecological limits. Community forests are intended to increase the ability of people to meet their needs locally in response to what Rosewarne describes as the decreased capacity of people to meet their needs within specific places as a result of globalization. However, community forests must be critically analyzed regarding the extent to which they represent a democratization of decision-making. M'Gonigle and Dempsey warn that community forests can be a means for state actors to control community spaces, where the state "continues to set the terms for resource use and for who it empowers to control such uses."

B.C. communities seek local control of forest management in order to create more jobs and to practice sustainable forestry; however, in many cases the community forest structure has not afforded them the flexibility to do so. Currently the only realistic option for communities wanting to gain more local control is to acquire some form of forest tenure allocated by the provincial government. The B.C. government (the Crown) asserts title to the land (although this claim is contested by many First Nations) and thereby holds the ultimate decision-making authority; tenures are merely license agreements within this framework that grant "the authority to operate on and manage an area of public land as a business." Different types of timber tenures grant the licensee varying degrees of rights and responsibilities for varying lengths of time. In comparison with decision-making structures such as co-jurisdiction or co-management, forest tenures represent the minimum degree of power-sharing between the province and communities. And

as with other forms of tenure, Community Forest Agreements enhance local involvement but don't challenge the Crown's assertion of title; the government retains the final decision-making authority.

With tenure comes the legal obligation to engage in forest harvesting, and the conditions imposed by the license agreements limit the autonomy of community forests to self-determine forest management. The provincial government assesses community forests from the perspectives of “forest practices, environmental standards and compliance; return to the province in the form of revenues and landbase improvements; economic self-sufficiency; and sound management across all resources.” Based on this assessment, the government has the discretion to renew or not renew a community forest agreement. The criterion of revenue generation constrains the autonomy of the community forest to reduce its emphasis on exchange-value.

The system used by the provincial government to appraise and collect revenue from public forests significantly undermines community forestry. Revenue is collected through stumpage fees, “a fee approximating the value of trees cut, minus the costs of logging with a profit allowance,” paid to the provincial government for the right to harvest timber on Crown land. The stumpage appraisal system discriminates in favor of industrial logging by assuming minimum-cost logging and not accounting for costs associated with the extra public consultation or more comprehensive inventories done by community forestry. As a result, operations that choose to use more labor-intensive and lower-impact sustainable forest practices not only have no economic incentive to do so, they frequently have difficulty breaking even under the current appraisal system. “The current stumpage system often significantly limits the financial benefits community forests receive from harvesting,” and some even postpone or stop harvesting in response to high stumpage prices.

Besides paying stumpage fees to the government, community forests are also required to pay a “waste assessment” for “merchantable” timber—i.e., timber that could have been cut under the community forest agreement but that, at the community forest's discretion, is not cut or removed. In this way an incentive to harvest is built into the tenure framework, and community forests are penalized for choosing to cut less. In addition, communities wishing to practice ecologically sustainable forestry (with lower rates of logging than industrial forestry) are constrained by current laws that require tenure holders to log a minimum amount per year. If license holders log less than their quota, the government has the option to reduce their annual allowable cut proportionally in future years. This illustrates Kovel's view that the primary functions of the state are to supervise and legitimize accumulation. In British Columbia, the province depends on the accumulation of revenue generated from the forest companies and community forests that are granted access to control labor and production on public land.

The requirements of the tenure agreements preclude democratic self-determination by granting communities only limited authority over the means of production. For locally controlled and sustainable rural livelihoods, it is necessary to address the question of who has title to the land, an issue that cannot be separated from the legacy of colonial expansion and continued prevalence of racist policies.

Forest Tenures as Institutionalized Racism

According to Kovel, “a politics against and beyond capital needs to be as firmly rooted in overcoming racism as in ecological mending,” since the ecological crisis and imperial expansion are connected manifestations of the same dynamic. Specifically, M'Gonigle, et al. point out how “the centralization of resource management served colonial interests by undermining indigenous authority and giving the colonial government tremendous economic and political power.” Community forest tenures in British Columbia don't address the unresolved question of aboriginal title and the ongoing legacy of

colonialism. By considering First Nations a level of government on par with municipal governments and approaching community forests as a tenure allocated by the Crown, the province is not recognizing aboriginal title to the land. First Nations across the province are engaged in a struggle for recognition of their aboriginal rights and title through legal challenges, treaty negotiations, and direct action. By preferentially granting community forest tenures to non-aboriginal communities that are in partnerships with First Nations, the allocation of community forests can be seen as a government strategy to deflect attention from the underlying issue of aboriginal title and maintain economic certainty for development without giving up any jurisdictional authority.

A resource management decision-making process intended to overcome racism must involve reconciliation and reparations for the historical injustices of colonialism and be structured to value multiple forms of knowledge and participation. Although community forests are able to determine their own organizational structure, the management planning and paperwork dictated by the tenure agreement discriminates against aboriginal involvement by requiring the knowledge and use of Western, scientific, and bureaucratic relations to the natural world.

In summary, while community forests represent an expansion of democracy by increasing the involvement of local people in the management of public forests, they don't actively resist capital, they are not explicitly anti-racist, and the limitations of the tenure discourage ecologically sustainable forestry practices. Community forests are not free to self-determine their approach to forestry, and while they add an emphasis on the qualitative, they maintain the focus on quantitative growth. Given these considerations, what forms of decision-making would further increase community control over local lands in a way that prioritizes people and ecosystems over profits?

An Ecosocialist Approach to Resource Management Decision-Making

The ecological sustainability of community forestry ultimately depends on both the ability of local decision-makers to limit the rate of resource extraction to a sustainable scale and whether or not they choose to do so. From a thermodynamic perspective, "throughput" refers to the linear flow of materials and energy from ecosystem sources (mines, forests, fisheries) through the human economy (production, transportation, consumption, and disposal) to end up in ecosystem sinks for waste (oceans, dumps, atmosphere). Because throughput is linear, consumption involves the irreversible transformation of raw materials and energy into waste. The concept of throughput highlights the fundamental contradiction inherent in neoclassical economics, which sees the ecosystem as a sub-section of an infinitely growing economy and assumes that we can address ecological concerns through economic growth. But this assumption is incorrect. Because both the sources of raw materials and the capacity of the global ecosystem to absorb waste are limited, there must be limits to the quantitative growth of the human economy.

Ecosocialism provides a model for sustainable decision-making, because it considers the health of ecosystems along with the needs of human beings and values qualitative development over quantitative. Capitalism has proven itself unsustainable, concludes O'Connor, since the "sustainability of rural and urban existence, the worlds of indigenous peoples, the conditions of life for women, and safe workplaces are also inversely correlated with sustainability of profits." In contrast, ecosocialism prioritizes use-value over exchange-value, people and the natural world over profits, and provides a framework for decision-making that recognizes incommensurable values. Humans don't own the earth, but rather, belong to it. Thus, Kovel advocates a shift in property relations towards the notion of usufructuary use: the concept of using something that doesn't belong to you on the conditions that 1) you improve it and 2) you enjoy it.

The path towards ecosocialism requires “micro-communities serving the combined functions of resistance to capital, production of an ecological/socialist alternative to it, and mutual interconnection of their semi-autonomous sites through the vision of a common goal.” Kovel further outlines that ecosocialism requires the development of an ecological consciousness with enhanced receptivity to the natural world, an overcoming of racism and patriarchy, and the establishment of anti-capitalist spaces where producers control the means of production and where sufficiency and an emphasis on the qualitative replaces quantitative growth. O’Connor adds the need for a strong civil society that unites diverse social movements. The ecosocialist potential of community forestry depends on the capacity to articulate and implement what Kovel refers to as an “anti-capitalist intention formed out of the combined withdrawal of value from exchange and its replacement with transformed use-value production.”

Concurrently, community forests must facilitate a shift from an import-export model to a local recirculation of resources. Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen describe how removing oneself from capital requires both restoring the capacity to subsist and redefining notions of progress and development so that subsistence is valued. Given that continual growth in material throughput is not possible in a finite, resource-limited world, the concept of sustainability (so often used to mean sustainable growth, where growth implies increasing throughput) must be replaced with a focus on subsistence. Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen put forward the “subsistence perspective” as a practical means for establishing anti-capitalist spaces of production and giving value without linking it to money.

Subsistence is a form of resistance, and there can be no resistance without subsistence. Rather than asking for a bigger share of the pie, Mies recommends that a revolutionary strategy is to ask instead what we need, and how much, within a redefined concept of a good life. Likewise, M’Gonigle and Dempsey advocate that rather than assessing “the periphery and the margins in terms of their ability to achieve the status of a hyper-consumerist (and physically overextended) core,” the goal should be to transform the over-consumption of the core while helping to support the periphery. In their view, this requires a reduction in energy and resource throughput along with “new institutions of tenure that give local institutions real authority, control, and access to land.”

In this sense, local control over forestry decision-making must move beyond the priorities and limitations imposed by the tenure system and find ways to redefine progress. Key to such a redefinition is the shift from an anthropocentric to an ecocentric approach to the natural world and our place within it. Bringing people together to make decisions about the land and changing the institutional, regulatory, and economic environment to allow decision-makers the option to reduce the rate of resource extraction does not necessarily mean that they will choose to do so. There must also be the *desire* to reduce consumption and limit the rate of throughput to a sustainable scale.

Understanding the ecological limits to growth is predicated on a reorientation of human need made possible by the development of an ecological consciousness. As ecological citizens, we have both rights (to use the land as needed within sustainable limits) and responsibilities (to ensure we are not depleting the ability of the resource to provide for future generations or for other species.) To do this, we must move beyond seeing ourselves as separate from some external environment and more as an interconnected part of the places in which we live.

Ever-greater economic expansion and centralized decision-making have removed us from an ecological consciousness as decision-making elites are kept “away from direct evidence of the destabilizing effects of capitalist production” and “insulated from the consequences of their actions.” To the extent that community forests can make autonomous decisions, they represent a means for developing new relations

with the natural world through incorporating the local social and ecological consequences of forestry into decision-making.

“The precondition of an ecologically rational attitude toward nature is the recognition that nature far surpasses us and has its own intrinsic value, irreducible to our practice.” This kind of ecocentric approach necessarily involves humility, with the recognition that humans cannot expect or presume to ever completely understand ecosystem functions or our role in them. An ecocentric approach cannot be scientifically or discursively produced but rather develops out of forms of practical engagement that change our relations to the earth and to each other.

Community Ecosystem Trust: A Proposal for British Columbia

The Community Ecosystem Trust is proposed by a group of researchers with the POLIS Project on Ecological Governance at the University of Victoria as a model for reducing the inherent conflict between environmental protection and resource use that reconciles diverse interests while ensuring the sustainability of land and resources. In their innovative proposal, M’Gonigle, et al. aim to create the “Community Ecosystem Trust as a new designation for public lands,” establish a “process for transfer of management authority to communities,” and bring about “reform of existing resource agency mandates.”

They propose new provincial legislation for British Columbia, the Community Ecosystem Trust Facilitation Act, with the following four objectives:

- 1) Develop new community institutions for resource stewardship that maintain ecological integrity;
- 2) Reconcile aboriginal title and Crown sovereignty in a new intermediary land status, which overcomes the need to “prove” aboriginal title or “protect” Crown interests;
- 3) Develop governance structures for ongoing democratic participation, which ensure the benefits of resource use flow to the community; and
- 4) Reform the regulatory system, to “decrease the need for external rules of management by building sustainable ‘best practices’ right into production processes in trust communities.”

The idea is that interested communities will self-select to participate, and government agencies will respond by refining, not relinquishing, their mandates. The goal is to demonstrate in a small number of initial communities that the trust can succeed by establishing a precedent for others to follow and engaging people in practical alternatives that show change is possible. This is an example of the model of ecosocialist development that Kovel proposes, which is to “foster the activating potentials of ensembles in order to catalyze the emergence of others so as to draw together those points into ever more dynamic bodies.”

The parties involved in a trust are the settlers (those who hold title to the property—the Crown and aboriginal peoples), the trustees (who manage the property on behalf of the beneficiaries through a community institution), and the beneficiaries (the local community, including local First Nations and all the people of the province). The ecosystem trust model can facilitate more ecologically sustainable forest practices by re-situating “both private market activity and state regulation within a local community-based context.” Key to this is the ability of the community involved to reduce the throughput of material and energy resources. Implementation of the proposed Community Ecosystem Trust Facilitation Act provides the state with a mechanism to overcome the contradiction whereby “the central state has both supported overexploitation and attempted to regulate its negative consequences.”

The Community Ecosystem Trust appears to address racism to the extent that aboriginal title is recognized, and it facilitates an ecocentric approach in that all actions must be ecologically sustainable. The emphasis on reduced resource throughput indicates a redefinition of the notion of progress. However, it is

unclear to what extent the Community Ecosystem Trust concept would address capital. The proposed structure appears to allow communities the autonomy to focus on subsistence and use-value over exchange-value, but trustees would still be competing for economic profitability in the global market. Certainly the community-based governance structures would enable producers to be more clearly in control of the means of production than they are with community forests, and the reformed regulatory environment would reduce the policy constraints. While in many ways it can be considered a radical proposal, the Community Ecosystem Trust falls short of articulating an anti-capitalist intention. Without a clear intent to withdraw value from exchange, the Community Ecosystem Trust risks undermining the success of its objectives.

Conclusion

The concept of the Community Ecosystem Trust offers a practical means to begin to shift forestry practices and decision-making in British Columbia towards the ideals of ecosocialism. But the proposal has not yet been implemented. Meanwhile, social and environmental movements continue to put their energy towards community forests, despite their limitations. Community forests involve local people in forest management, include non-monetary values in decision-making, and allow for multiple forest uses. But it is doubtful whether B.C.'s community forests can achieve their goals of democratization, social justice and ecological integrity within a capitalist global economy and a tenure system that constrains the autonomy of decision-making, provides a disincentive for ecologically sustainable practices, and emphasizes financial profitability. Given that the pursuit of profits in the form of exchange-value will inherently undermine the conditions of production and hence the realization of social and ecological goals, movements to enhance democracy, ecological integrity, and local control in resource stewardship decision-making cannot succeed unless they incorporate an anti-capitalist intention within an ecocentric framework.