

City Mulls Community Forest Certification

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By Florentia Scott

Should managers of the Alberni Valley's proposed community forest seek third-party certification? That's one of the questions the city wants residents to answer as they provide input into how the forest will be managed.

But some local forest activists are concerned about how the question has been asked. "The question is worded so as to make it seem like it wouldn't be worth it, but I think that certification is very necessary for a community forest," said Judy Carlson, a local trail advocate. "This proposed area was already certified under the Canadian CSA standards, so it shouldn't cost any more to continue this certification, and it would insure that there will be continued public input regarding logging practices. "

There are three major types of forest certification, all providing a mechanism to track wood from the stump to the end user, who is guaranteed a product harvested in a responsible, environmentally sustainable manner.

Independent third-party audits monitor the process against certain standards such as cut block size and riparian management.

TimberWest has certified its forests under the American Forest & Paper Association's North American Sustainable Forestry Initiative.

Western Forest Products is certified under the Canadian Standards Association program. Several community forests in B.C. have chosen the Forest Stewardship Council's certification. Each process has slightly different requirements and standards.

"The CSA standard calls for a community advisory body, which provides a forum to discuss logging issues," said Carlson. "I think it's useful and should be continued."

Neither Ken Watson, city manager, nor Darren Hiller, president of DRH Forest Consulting, who has been hired by the city to prepare a feasibility study, were able to give any figures on how much they thought certification might cost.

Both stressed the purpose of the survey is to gather input from residents, and that no decisions have been made on this, or any other community forest management issue, at this time.

"It's premature to say," said Watson. No decisions made about certification. Certainly the smaller the woodlot the higher percentage cost it would be to certify."

Hiller said costs would not be reduced just because the area is already certified.

"A new licensee for that piece of Crown land will have to go through the entire certification process, with audits and paperwork in place," said Hiller. "It will take a minimum of six months. For a small cut, it is a large cost."

Carlson says the proposed site covers areas that are important for recreation, and that certification would give the community greater oversight in how the forest is managed. “The west section includes the original Klitsa Trail, the Brigade Lake Trail, and the trail to Adder Mountain.

“The east section includes the Teodoro Trail, the trail to the Sproat Lake lookout, and a large area of old growth below the lookout that also might be nice for hiking,” said Carlson.

“The directors of the community forest seem to recognize the importance of trails for outdoor recreation but so far this is not shown on the maps.

“There are even proposed logging roads shown across the Teodoro Trail and up to Brigade Lake. I think it is important that they hear from as many people as possible who do use the trails and who think they are important for community health.”

Watson says the city hopes to be logging in the area by spring, but Hillers thinks it’s more likely to be summer.

“There’s a lot of work that has to happen,” said Hillers. “The land has to be deleted from the TFL before the formal invitation to apply can come out, then you have 120 days to go through the process including consultation.

“The city wants to do public consultation first, so that’s what we’re doing now. We gather all the information. If a large percentage of the population wanted certification, that would help sell the idea.”

The city’s question reads as follows:

“Independent "third-party" certification assesses forest management by evaluating it against pre-established criteria. The cost of certification may reduce the revenue generated for the community. Is independent certification of the Port Alberni Community Forest important?

- No
- Yes, Only if the cost does not significantly reduce revenue for the community.
- Yes, At any cost.”

For more information on the Port Alberni Community Forest initiative, and to fill out the online questionnaire, see : <http://www.communityforest.ca/survey.php>

For more details on the different types of forest management certification, see: <http://www.for.gov.bc.ca/het/certification/>

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