

A Little Lecture on the Big Burn:

by Briony Penn

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Big Burn.

While the political winds were changing, the climatic winds were blowing in profound effects on our forests. Interior forests experienced huge hits from record wildfires, mountain pine beetle, other large-scale insect infestations like western spruce budworm, and diseases like Dothistroma. The mountain pine beetle alone has damaged 15 million hectares, 30 to 60% of which staff estimate is not satisfactorily restocked (referred to as NSR lands). Fires have burned over a million hectares. A third of a million hectares have been left unstocked from small-scale salvage logging without obligation to reforest.

The "green rangers" are a cohort of influential and well-respected professional foresters from the forest service led by Anthony Britneff, 39 years as a senior professional in the forest inventory, silviculture and forest health programs of the service. He expresses the sentiment of the group. This government might think that by rendering the Forest Service dysfunctional and by not investing in the renewal of forestlands, it will eventually rationalize the privatization of provincial forests at fire-sale prices. Enclose the commons? Wake up B.C.!

Jim Pojar, provincial forest ecologist for over 25 years out of Smithers, and internationally-regarded specialist on B.C.'s ecosystems, states Government wants to deregulate and effectively privatize our public forests, presenting 'hard times' with forest die-off and declining revenue from forestry as a convenient rationale to impose the ideology. Their vision seems to be to maximize the net present value of forest resources, liquidate as much wood as quickly as possible, manage only for fibre or biomass, sell off forestland to industry and let them deal with the hassle—and maybe make some extra money in real estate. If that is your vision, you don't need a forest service and you don't need a regulatory and management regime.

Del Meidinger, chief provincial forest ecologist for 30 years whose work with forest classification systems led the world as a management tool and won him the Premier's Legacy Award, asks Why are they de-emphasizing forest stewardship? The forests support so many ecosystem services. Really what is at stake is the protection of the public interest in our forests. Adjunct professor of forestry with an Emeritus position in the forest service, Alan Vyse at Thompson River University in Kamloops, states, The facts stand for themselves. There are lots of concerns out there about the change in culture surrounding our public forests and I share them. What we need now with all the challenges of increased pests, fire and other climate change issues is an informed and proactive forest service to identify and solve the problems.

Pojar has recently written a scientific report, *New Climate for Conservation*, peer-reviewed by international climate scientists like Dr. Andrew Weaver and Dr. Jim Hansen, highlighting the challenges facing BC's forests from climate change. Our healthy ecosystems are already impacted and will cause dire consequences for fragmented or degraded ecosystems. As Vyse points out, How do you meet these challenges when you reduce your staff and researchers? In the various cuts including the latest one, they have eliminated 1500 years of accumulated expertise in technical issues. How can you be proactive and justify these cuts?

The evidence for this new direction comes from internal ministry documents, which describe the new mission statement for the Ministry — to provide a superior service to resource stakeholders by supporting competitive business conditions giving priority to

Enhancing industry competitiveness and Identifying clear outcomes for investors. An earlier internal memo dated June 9th, 2009 clearly articulates the new single-function mandate of the forest service of fulfilling our role as advocates for the forest industry. This may have been true in the past, but it was never written boldly on the bottom of the stationary.

requirement for resource analysis reporting from the Ministry of Forests and Range Act has left the public with limited and confusing facts. After 2002, the ministry's Annual Reports shrink in half and reporting on forest management activities takes a downward dive. John Betts, head of the Western Silvicultural Contractors' Association, remarks

pathogens [disease like Septoria musiva] in hybrid poplar plantations that could jump to native cottonwoods and create a problem for our native forests. The first thing you need, of course, is good inventory of all your lands. So even if the government wants to implement its own plans to privatise, it now lacks credible inventory information.

The recommendations of the Woodbridge Report echo exactly those of the Working Roundtable on Forestry, set up by Bell, who published their report the year before. Of the 15 members, 12 were industry representatives. The lone academic, Derek Thompson, also a former deputy minister, stated that tenure reform dominated the discussions, but we couldn't even get consensus with just industry folk at the table. Thompson recounts why. There was a great deal of trepidation from government about taking the discourse into the public realm because of the potential for uncontrollable controversy. Tenure reform is critical because industry also wants the ability to sell real estate should the biofuel industry not pay off. The B.C. forest industry is poised for this type of asset liquidation.

Most of B.C.'s forest industry is now controlled by vertically integrated investment firms specializing in asset liquidation. In 2007, Third Avenue Management LLC, out of New York became the largest shareholder in B.C.'s two pulp and paper companies, Canfor and Catalyst adding to its existing shareholdings through Third Avenue Trust in

Alan Vyse points to the fact that regardless of the type of future business interests from biofuels to ecosystem services, and whether the government is relying on professional reliance, accreditation or international standards, where is the discussion about what those public interests are? It is way past time for some fairly significant discussions on the future of our public forests. Will it create an uncontrollable controversy? It is hard to imagine anything worse than if the public weren't consulted.

The voices of the whistle blowers point to a colossal failure of imagination by government that has implications to forest health, climate change mitigation and adaptation, other public interests in Crown lands from public access to biodiversity and water quality, first nation interests and international credibility on carbon accounting and standards. At a time when our top scientists are telling us we have to save sinks and stop emissions, we are preparing to chop down sinks and release their emissions. Secondly, doing this with huge political and economic risk. Third, instead of investing in the valuable work of restoration and conservation at a time when labour and communities could most benefit from it, we are abandoning the more marginal areas and threatening to sell off the highest productivity areas that have values globally in climate change mitigation and adaptation. Fourth, this is being proposed with no oversight or public consultation that even industry is nervous about and can't reach consensus on.

The consensus coming from the green rangers is that we have the ability to turn B.C. around and back into a world leader in climate change action. We still have the landbase, unconverted native forests, the expertise and shared cultural values of fairness, justice and stewardship. The year before the B.C. Forest Service was gutted, a group of the green rangers proposed these ecological principles govern the management of our crown lands.

1. Make ecological sustainability the fundamental objective of forest management.
2. Use a hierarchy of scales when planning forest practices.
3. Establish a rate-of-cut that does not compromise the long-term ecological integrity of landscapes and watersheds
4. Engage local communities and incorporate local knowledge in establishing decision-making processes and in planning forest management.
5. Conserve all native species and their habitats within the range of natural variability.
6. Protect rivers, lakes, estuaries and marine shores.
7. Focus silvicultural systems primarily on what is retained rather than on what is removed.
8. Incorporate ecological restoration of degraded landscapes, stands and sites into forest management.
9. Acknowledge uncertainty and monitor the ecological consequences of forest practices.