

Introduction

The Sechelt Community Forest is a logging company. It is licensed by the provincial government to log within certain mandated areas and required to meet a minimum annual cut. This business venture is owned by a single shareholder - the District of Sechelt. Although the District claims to maintain an "arms-length" relationship, we suspect that the purpose of this policy is to insulate the District of Sechelt from public pressure related to the community forest.



A History of Public Concerns Ignored

The SCCA is not categorically opposed to community forests, per se. We were the original proponents of community forestry in the Sunshine Coast Regional District, and so we were very interested when the District of Sechelt announced its intention to apply for a "probationary community forest agreement" in 2003. Unfortunately, it soon became obvious that the District's application was entirely about opening up the Chapman/Gray drinking watershed (and other sensitive areas) to logging and that the District did not intend to genuinely consider the concerns of the community about this.

Just about everyone imaginable (including the Sechelt Indian Band, the SCRDC, the Town of Gibsons, community associations etc.) advised the District during the application process to stay out of the watersheds. All were ignored!

When the first "final" application went to government, the SCCA made a submission to the Minister of Forest's Community Forest Advisory Committee (CFAC) in which we provided [the](#)

[public responses that the District had failed to include in its application](#). Subsequently CFAC killed the application, determining that it was incomplete and incompetent and that the applicant had "failed to make a full and frank disclosure of public opposition".

The District of Sechelt then asked the Minister for a new "direct invitation" to apply. In this second application there was no attempt whatsoever to consult with the public, in fact the public was not even aware of this second attempt. As well, the Ministry of Forests took the lead in writing the second application, advised the District not to engage in any more public consultations and subsequently recommended that the Minister approve the application it had written.

After the community forest licence was established (May 31, 2006), they adopted [extremely low environmental standards in their Forest Stewardship Plan](#). They supported Western Forest Products' against the SCRD's Local Board of Health ruling regarding logging in the Chapman and Gray watersheds last summer, and publicly opposed (in writing) any application of ecosystem based management or any new protected areas in this Forest District. And finally, in March 2008, the community forest entered the watershed and started cutting immature trees before meeting with either the Sechelt Indian Band or the SCRD, while claiming that they had the support of the Band!

Update - June 2008

The SCCA has not participated in the CF's "advisory committee" because we don't think it is a genuine venue where the real issues can be raised and fairly considered. It has been our experience that participation in community forest functions is cynically and manipulatively misconstrued as "public support", even if public input is severely critical.

In March, 2008, after [the Sechelt Indian Band nominated the Chapman and Gray Creek watersheds for interim protection](#), the Sechelt Community Forest moved out of the watersheds to facilitate government-to-government negotiations. The provincial government will soon make a decision on establishing permanent protections for SIB priority areas.

The intentions of the Sechelt Indian Government and the Sunshine Coast Regional District for the watersheds have been known for some time and are expressed in a [Joint Watershed Management Agreement](#), signed October 1, 2005.

It appears that the community forest will be given new operating area(s) as compensation for the lost cutting rights.

We hope the community forest owners see this as an opportunity for a fresh start. An honest and genuinely respectful approach to public consultation could well provide the direction that the community forest needs to have if it is to become the environmentally responsible, socially acceptable and economically feasible enterprise that everyone would like it to be.

Update - October 2009

The SCCA continues to have concerns about how the Sechelt Community Forest operates.

On June 9, 2009 the SCCA filed a [Freedom of Information request](#) to the District of Sechelt seeking information about raw-log exports, benefits to directors of the community forest company, wages, salaries, etc., of staff and employees. The request was referred by the District of Sechelt to Sechelt Community Projects, Incorporated (SCPI - the Community Forest). SCPI answered the request on August 14, 2009. The SCCA felt that critical information was withheld from SCPI's response and filed a formal [request for review](#) with the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

The Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner (OIPC) is now conducting its review. The OIPC has directed The Sechelt Community Forests to provide the OIPC with all documentation related to our request along with explanations, footnoted to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, for all refusals to release the requested information.

Our [letter to the editor](#) about using FOI requests to help bring the community forest corporation into the light of day was published in the Coast Reporter on September 11, 2009. (See also the [Fall 2009 SCCA Newsletter](#) about the Sechelt Community Forest; "Unanswered questions, questionable practices.")

[Community Forest Documents and Links](#)