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Presidents Report
Wombat Forest Society
2001-2002

As usual the Wombat Forest Society has had a very busy and very significant year. The Brack's Government's release of the Vanclay Report has seen the ripples from the WFS's work spread statewide.

As reported at the WFS AGM last year, the WFS had presented the Premier, Minister Garbutt and a host of MP's and senior public servants, the findings of our modelling of every Forest Management Area in the State. This work showed issues in many areas. The government then hired Prof. Vanclay from Southern Cross University NSW, to review the sustainable yield figures across the State.

The Vanclay report has brought about an average reduction in logging rates of 30% statewide. In our region the report recommended a drop of 79%. Prof. Vanclay, stated in the media "that the WFS has done some very good work and in many areas was more accurate than NRE."

This means that since the WFS started in 1994, the sawlog yield was 70000m3pa, in 1996 a review dropped this figure to 58 000m3pa, the Regional Forest Agreement set it at 40 000m3pa and Vanclay- 8 600m3pa. There has been a corresponding reduction in the woodchip levels as the sawlog quota has dropped.

The current sticking point has been the failure of the sawmillers of the region to take up redundancy pay-outs to date. During the RFA we heard the industry tell us just how 'conservation minded they were'.

At the time of the announcement of the Vanclay findings, The State Government announced some major reform of NRE. These reforms now include splitting the department into two separate entities. One will be the commercial arm, answerable to one minister and the other forest management will be answerable to another minister.

It is unfortunate that within the conservation movement there are those that are perpetually pessimistic and never acknowledge any reform. The WFS believes that every incremental gain is a win for the forest. These people are driven by their own agendas, their own ambitions and a potentially a real problem to communities. The rise of the green politic now means that there must be perpetual criticism in order for these people to have a platform in elections. They believe that a once in every four years electoral opportunity is all that democracy is about. The Wombat Forest Society believes in participating and lobbying within the democratic process at all time. The wins and the reforms that WFS have been able to achieve with this approach shows that a mature and sophisticated approach can have enormous gains.

I am concerned about our community, which has dealt with this issue in an inclusive and sophisticated manner, is now vulnerable to division by those seeking personal goals. The behaviour of a number of these candidates leaves a lot to be desired, they believe that their very recent involvement in the issue has equipped them as total experts with the ability to judge what at community should say, should do and should expect. Parcelled with an aggressive and exclusive attempts to undermine existing long-term campaigns.

The most exciting development from the state government's reforms has been the announcement that our community will be the pilot for Community Forest Management within the state.

Internationally this is where the game is at. It is gratifying that the government has recognized that this community has the maturity for this scheme. I urge all WFS members to be involved in this process.

The community management process has recently started in the region. The way in which it has been implemented has left a lot to be desired. I call on this community to persevere. At some stage in the near future, how this process progresses will be in our hands. This is when we, as a local community, can move forward into a wholistic vision, both environmentally and socially, that we can all operate within.

One of the most proactive things that people in our local community can do at present is to think about what employment opportunities we can find for the displaced timber workers. Most of these are the victims of the greed of the big end of the timber industry. They have families, and are a part of our community. It is up to us to take some responsibility for the effects of forcing sustainability. The WFS will be launching a registry of jobs for displaced timber workers, details will be made public in the near future.

In the bush, the fight against NRE's mismanagement continues. It is frustrating to be still fighting for our local NRE staff to mark coupes properly. These people seem to think that their role is to be the procurement arm of the local timber industry. The staff are not marking coupes in accordance with the code, waterways are trashed, habitat destroyed and far too many trees stolen.

The Wombat Forest Society has recently made direct contact with the Premier and presented our concerns over the ability of NRE to carry out proper audits of their own work. I suggested to the Premier that an independent Authority should be carrying out this work. It is gratifying to see one month later that the Government has now appointed the EPA in this role.

The WFS has had many wins in the other campaign area over the past year. We have successfully stopped logging in many coupes through detailed pre-logging negotiation with NRE and supporting of local community members concerns. Much of this work is done through detailed submissions to the current Wood Utilisation Plans. Also, working with local campaigner Gary McIntosh, we negotiated a intense logging operation being modified to selective logging at the Lerdederg coupe. The coupe was afforded a 100m Special Protection Zone on the Lerderderg River and further protection of upper tributaries. The work on water issues, led by Loris Duclos, was recognised with 11,000ha of forest area being pulled off the logging schedules due to water catchment considerations.

Most importantly, the Wombat Forest Society has undertaken a community campaign of information support. WFS produced a detailed schedule of all current and future logging coupes in the Wombat Forest, including location, log volumes, logging application and possible issues. This documentation has been widely distributed within local Wombat Forest communities and campaigners with supporting identification mapping. These important resources have played a significant role in the increased empowerment of localised campaigns. We have also produced a CD Rom that contains many documents, maps wups, etc. Following up, the Wombat Forest Society has provided more detailed analysis and support, especially to the Lyonville, Spargo Creek, Dry Diggings, Creswick and Glenlyon communities. Now, more than ever before, these local communities are standing up for their forests instead of the workload being carried by few. In recognition of this, the Wombat Forest Society has developed an extensive & accessible data base of all birds, mammals, reptiles, trees, plants, plant communities and grasses These valuable community lists have been published in our current newsletter with a first newsletter run of 200 already distributed. Thank-you to all those people who contributed to this wonderful resource.

The Wombat Forest Society monthly meetings have been extremely well attended, providing much local support and an inclusive platform for all of our campaign directions. More importantly, they have enabled local community and other participants to better understand and successfully campaign on the complexities of the local forest debate. The Wombat Forest Society would like to recognise the work of committee member John Endacott in the Moorabool Shire's Roadside Vegetation Plan, which includes plant & weed identification and suggested Wombat Forest drives.

Furthermore, the Wombat Forest Society Website is currently under final construction by my son, Charley. The site is shaping up extremely well and will soon be posted with Wombat Forest Society campaign and general information. The web-site is user-friendly allowing for options of expanding into local interactive and input opportunities. The Wombat Forest Society email list continues to grow with over 100 participants involved. We believe that self empowerment of individuals and groups is an effective tool. Instead of NRE dealing with one organisation or a handful of individuals, the more that get involved then the harder it is for NRE to get away with the shocking management we have. I believe that we need a lot of staff replaced in NRE, they are not carrying out their role and have failed.

The WFS has maintained its involvement on the West RFA Farm Sawlog Project steering committee. This will see the planting of up to 50 000hectares of hardwood sawlog trees, established within an environmental context. We believe that this is a responsible approach to the issues of replenishing degraded Western Victoria and providing sawlogs for the future. The Wombat Forest Society continues membership and support of Earthworker, a Trades Hall initiative seeking working relationships between conservation groups and trade union. An important role of this group is the establishment of viable Hemp industry in Victoria.

What the West RFA Sawlog steering committee has learnt from commissioning CSIRO to undertake growth studies, is that you need a lot longer to grow a hardwood sawlog than some suggest. Some conservationists are preaching that you can grow a sawlog in 15 years- rubbish! You might be able to grow a stick of cellulose that quick if you pump it full of chemical fertilisers and maintain a barrage of herbicides and pesticides and then treat the cellulose stick with deadly poisons to make it durable. Realistically it takes 30-50 years to grow a sawlog and so the lead time for a supplementary resource supply is quite long.

A review of what we set out to achieve when the WFS started, compared to what we have achieved is very satisfying. Not only have we bought about the most significant logging reductions in the State, we have had effects in many other areas. The move to community management was what the WFS had lobbied for 5 years, and now we are getting it. The list of achievements goes on. I believe that we have been one of the most successful forest groups in Australia.

Having been involved with the WFS since day one and been President for the past 5 years, it is time for me to move on and the WFS to find a new direction and new energy. I thank all those people that have been involved with the Society and all of our loyal supporters. I especially want to thank Peter O'Mara who has been a tireless contributor to the WFS.

I feel satisfied in our achievements and angry at the aggressive and divisive arrival of the right wing extremists of the conservation movement and their agents (Doctors for Forests, Liberals for Forests and some Greens). The Wilderness Society are renowned for splitting communities, for vilifying groups and individuals that do not hold their environmentally simplistic and shocking ideologies. I call on the community to carry on as we have and to reject these 'city greenies' from attempting to destroy a sophisticated and intelligent campaign and really good community.

Thanks to all the members that have supported us over the years.

Tim Anderson.

FUTURE POSSIBILITIES

The following is excerpted from a new publication of the David Suzuki Foundation. A PDF summary is available at:
http://www.davidsuzuki.org/campaigns_and_programs/canadian_rainforests/solutions/principles.asp

"A CUT ABOVE: Ecological Principles for Sustainable Forestry on BC's Coast"
by Ronnie Drever

A CUT ABOVE outlines nine principles to guide the development and implementation of ecologically sustainable forest practices in coastal British Columbia. Drafted with help from an advisory team of leaders in the field of ecological sustainability, these guiding principles illustrate a fundamentally different approach to forest management and planning in comparison to the current, industrial model. The report provides an ecological rationale for each principle, as well as examples of "best practices" drawn from existing frameworks in other jurisdictions to
Illustrate realistic models of how the principles can be applied on the ground. Also detailed are relevant "current practices" in British Columbia and key areas of ecological uncertainty that exist regarding each principle.

What are the guiding principles?
Principle 1
Make the well-being of the lands and waters the fundamental goal of management.
The management of forests must put ecosystems first, above short-term economic imperatives. Ensuring the well-being of the lands and waters means maintaining the health and diversity of life, maintaining the productivity of soils, forests, and rivers, and maintaining the capacity of forest ecosystems to deal with and adapt to change. Healthy and functional forests are fundamental to maintaining cultures and economies. Without maintaining the well-being of the lands and waters, the values that forests provide (e.g., clean water, fish habitat, places of spiritual value) disappear in the long term.

Principle 2

Plan forest practices in a hierarchy, starting with the "big picture" level. Ecologically sound decisions and plans are best made by integrating the many different levels that provide the planning context for a specific area (i.e., the region, the sub-region, the landscape, and the forest site in question). In the big picture, it is best to decide what the broad management objectives will be for the region and ensure all decisions regarding management at each level are consistent with that general direction. This process ensures that the sum of many small local decisions does not cumulatively result in ecological disasters at the regional level.

Principle 3

Establish a rate-of-cut that sustains the integrity of the forest. Nature affords the luxury of harvesting within limits. Taking more than what nature can provide risks permanent damage to the forests and rivers, and to their capacity to provide for future generations. One need only to look at the northern cod fishery on Canada's east coast to understand the dire consequences of not setting an ecologically sustainable rate of harvesting: resource collapse, a devastated economy, and a lost way of life. It is therefore critical to establish a rate-of-cut in a way that resembles spending the interest and not the capital of a bank account. The rate-of-cut is a key variable that affects almost all other management decisions. If it is set too high, it is impossible to make sustainable decisions

regarding where not to harvest (e.g., streamsides) and determining what types of cutting are appropriate. It is therefore important that the rate-of-cut be low enough to make ecologically sound decisions for the entire ecosystem.

Principle 4

Ensure local knowledge and control are central to decision-making and planning. Local communities have the most at stake with respect to how forests are managed. Logging, especially unsustainable logging, affects their viewscapes, traditional use of local areas, and employment, especially in other sectors like fishing and tourism. Input from these communities in planning forest management is key for sustainability, as it is they that must live with the consequences of unsustainable practices. First Nations people are especially important in this regard. Their traditional knowledge
has evolved for thousands of years with the natural systems that form the basis of their cultures. The respect for life and the natural world that defines these cultures is a critical ingredient of sustainability. The meaningful and respectful incorporation of local and traditional knowledge into the control and decision-making processes of forest management will go a long way in ensuring that management decisions sustain the well-being of forests, waters, and the people who live in the area.

Principle 5

Conserve all native plants and animals. This principle is about respecting the complex connections and interdependency of all life within a healthy ecosystem. Given these
interconnections, keeping the desired values of forests (e.g., fish habitat, hunting grounds) means conserving all the components of a forest – from mushrooms and lichens to salmon and grizzly bears. Only by conserving all the components can we ensure the health of the whole ecosystem. However, the inventory of the diversity of life in coastal rainforests is far from complete. It is therefore important, when developing forest practices, to combine an ecosystem-level approach with single-species approaches that address the needs of species that deserve special attention (e.g., rare or endangered species).

Principle 6

Protect rivers, streams, lakes, and marine shores. Streams and other waterbodies carry the lifeblood of forests - water. Streams and other waterbodies, along with the forests on their shores, are vital for the health of the entire ecosystem and the diversity of all life associated with forests, including salmon. It is in these streamside forests
where the nutrients of the sea, carried by salmon, are transferred onto the land by bears, eagles, and other creatures - a transfer of nutrients that is immensely important for the productivity and diversity of life associated with forests. It is here where spruce and cedar grow to legendary proportions. These areas represent approximately seven per cent of the harvestable land base on British Columbia's central and north coast, and generally the most desired timber. Comprising the rich, flat valley bottoms
and the forests near estuaries, these areas are especially targeted by logging companies for the extraction of timber. Logging and road-building can have extremely negative impacts on these areas, including the loss of fish habitat and water quality.

Principle 7

Focus on what to retain rather than what to remove. What is left behind following forest harvesting is critical for ecological sustainability. Focusing on what to retain ensures what the forest can continue to provide habitat for plants, animals, and other species that depend on the forest for survival. At the landscape level, this means retaining no-harvesting areas to protect important cultural values, streamside areas, unstable slopes, and habitat for endangered and rare species. At the level of a particular site, it means retaining wetlands, wildlife trees, downed wood, and dead standing trees to provide a lifeboat for forest-dependent species while the forest regenerates. A

focus on what to retain must also consider how long to retain structural elements of the forest (e.g., large old trees and downed wood). In particular, it is about
ensuring rotations are based on the ecology of an area, rather than on the economics of harvesting. This means establishing rotations that are long enough to allow the development of old-growth forests.

Principle 8

Restore degraded landscapes, forests, and sites. Forest practices that focus solely on the extraction of timber can lead to the degradation of forests (e.g., deteriorated water quality, lost wildlife habitat, decreased biological diversity). It is therefore important to incorporate ecological restoration into the decision-making processes of forest management, so that forest managers are continually prompted to restore forests and rivers with degraded productivity and diversity. This includes restoring fish habitat, mitigating the impacts of badly constructed roads, and adding complexity to forests simplified by industrial forestry through logging streamside areas and steep or unstable slopes and the creation of monocultures.

Principle 9

Acknowledge uncertainty, act cautiously, and monitor the consequences of forest practices. There is much scientific ignorance about how forests work and the ecological consequences of forest practices. Given this ignorance, it is critical that
forest managers act cautiously when designing and implementing forest practices. This means giving the benefit of the doubt to the ecosystem, especially when forest practices can negatively affect the way the forest ecosystem works, as well as its capacity to support various forms of life and adapt to change. It is vitally important to monitor the ecological consequences of various forest practices to prevent repeating past mistakes and to continually improve forest management.

Conclusion

A choice exists. Logging does not need to be about simply extracting value from the forest, and leaving forests with barely enough or no capacity to sustain their productivity and life in all its forms. Forest management can be respectful and sustainable. These principles outline how to achieve sustainability - for the forests, water, plants, animals and other organisms, as well as for the cultures that depend on functional, productive and diverse forests.