

Hello one and all:

To start with:

find in attachments, photos taken from a fly over of TimberWest's Cruikshank River claim back in January 2012

Yesterday, July 28th, five of us with SOFT-CV (Save Our Forests Team - Comox Valley) drove up onto the TimberWest claim up along Comox Lake and then up into the Cruikshank River valley. If you are not aware of it, the Cruikshank is the largest river system that supplies water into Comox Lake, the source of all our drinking water. Well, back when our most serious floods were happening and polluting our water supply with muds, silts, gravel, they RDCS did supply a most disturbing photo to the Record of all this crap flooding into the Lake out of the Cruikshank. (I'm thinking that this was some years ago now, seven? eight? maybe.) Since then, of course, we are all stuck down here in the Valley for a bill of some \$110 million to install pumps and water filtration so we can have good, clean water once again (we hope).

And today what's happening up in the Cruikshank? Well, it's been full out logging with absolutely no slow down so we got to look out over a number of new clearcuts that have gone down all along those steep, unstable slopes of that valley. So, yeah, basically nothing has changed at all and we can look forward to the continuing winter disasters and possibly worse now.

n.b. the members will be posting photos of what we saw today here momentarily our group's - SOFT-CV (Save Our Forests Team - Comox Valley) Facebook...so you can see for yourselves what's gone down last few years.

Rick James
Royston, B.C.



Going Going Gone:

East Vancouver Island Forest Lands

It's been part of living in the Comox Valley here on the mid-Island for the past 10 years, another flood alert sometime during the winter and then in the summer? Well, one has to pay attention to the boil water signs set up on major roads leading into town and check the latest rating to find out whether it's safe to drink our water or not. And as for the floods...

The first major one was of the Tsolum and Courtenay rivers which occurred back in November 2009 and then again in December the following year where it was estimated some 90% of the Tsolum river's returning pink salmon spawn was wiped out. These unexpected weather disasters were quite the news breaker at the time. The 2nd big one not only flooded streets and businesses but what was most alarming was that it flooded out the Maple Pool campground that was home to a large number of our local street people and brought on an evacuation order. (The campground is situated right above of the bank of the Courtenay River just below where the Puntledge and Tsolum rivers meet to form the Courtenay river and only about a mile or so from downtown Courtenay.) But today? Just more of the usual to expect every year now when fall starts to change into winter.

But how did this all come to pass? Well, I will relate a tale passed onto me a few years back by old Comox Logging hand, Jack Ware. I was doing some research at the time and asked Jack about what ever inspired the first railroad logging company in the Valley, the Comox & Campbell Lake Tramway Company, to build a log dump on the lower Tsolum River (on its original channel, just above where the outdoor pool in Lewis Park is located today just a short ways from downtown Courtenay) back in 1909 he replied:

“Well, back in them days the river levels didn't vary much month to month through the year and in the summertime there still would have been enough water in the Tsolum to float them massive first growth Douglas fir logs down to Comox Bay. There was still all the original first growth forest still coverin' the whole Valley. It (with their deep, rich humic and soil layers) acted like a sponge and soaked up the winter rainfall and held it back to be slowly released in the summertime. As for today well, of course, there's little water in the rivers in the summer and they can flood like the bejeez' in the winter...now that most of the forest cover is gone.” So determine what has changed since then we have to go back to the early 2000s.

As it happened, I had been living on Vancouver Island planting trees on north and central Vancouver Island for 25 years when back in the early spring of 2003, I gave Donny Williams, one of our foremen with Timberline Reforestation Company, a call just to double check that there probably wouldn't be any summer work here with TimberWest the local logging outfit who owned all the private forest lands surrounding the Comox Valley. This is their Oyster

River Division claim which happens to encompass all the headwaters of the rivers and creeks flowing into the source of our local drinking water, Comox Lake as well as the Oyster River. But he said no, just the opposite, they were actually looking at a half decent contract this season what with the local logging company having upped their cut to a massive amount. So why was I taken aback with his answer?

Throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s, TimberWest had slowed down its cut locally since it had done with harvesting nearly all the merchantable 1st growth timber throughout all higher elevation forest land along and in behind Comox Lake and Mount Washington. It would appear at the time, the corporate entity was simply following good logging practice where once a 1st growth forest is cut the land is left for many years to lie fallow in order to regenerate 2nd growth. Then sometime in the mid-1990s, when it began planning to resume logging operations, TimberWest signed a sustainability agreement for the mid-island region stating that it was to stick to an annual harvest rate of 400,000 cubic metres of timber for the next ten years. (An average logging truck loads 42 to 45 cubic metres of wood.)

As Donny Williams explained it to me, he said that there had been dramatic change in the company a few years following the signing of this agreement. He said the word out was that the management decided in the late 1990s that it was in the timber company's best interest to morph it into an income trust and that the sustainability agreement consequently ended up tossed into the dumpster once the company was obliged to provide their unit holders a guaranteed return every quarter. Apparently, the forest company had made a grievous error in its initial estimate. It found that it was no way able to harvest the cubic metres of wood per hectare originally projected and still be able to meet the return promised to its unit holders so was forced to increase its harvest rate to a massive degree. As a result, over a period of eight to ten years, the timber giant was required to double then triple its cut up to as much as 1.2 million cubic metres a year on the Oyster River Division claim, to meet its obligations of \$1.08 per unit (an 8% return on average) related many who worked for the company at the time and who witnessed the full scale devastation.

Still since this information was all second hand, I thought it only fair to check directly with TimberWest so emailed the Vice President of Timberland Operations, Dave Whiteley, and maybe get him to explain what was going down. I initiated our conversation by asking how I might access the annual harvest rate for the years between 1994 and 2009 in Timberwest's Oyster River Division? He responded by noting that while they do indeed publicly disclose, in their annual reports, harvest rates by tenure (for all their Vancouver Island private lands, I presume) they don't provide them for the specific operating level i.e. the Oyster River Division. And after asking once again for a direct 'yes' or 'no' as to whether he'd be willing

to provide me with the Oyster River Division figures he never replied and our communication came to an abrupt end.

As it happened, the I.W.A., the International Workers Association, our forest workers union, was also very dismayed by this massive overcut and did step up to the plate with their concerns back in the early 2000s. To start with, Rick Wangler, the president of Local 1-363 at the time, met personally with Stan Hagen, the local M.L.A. for the Comox Valley who also happened to be the Minister of Sustainable Resources for a newly elected Liberal government. Wangler said that they also had foresters and engineers along with them but still the meeting was to no avail. Disappointed with the outcome, The U.S.W. (The I.W.A. merged with the United Steel Workers union in 2004) the union then took the issue of rampant, unsustainable logging going down here along the east side of Vancouver Island onto to a Forestry certification conference being held in Idaho at the time. This only ended up sparking a law suit by TimberWest who responded by trying to sue a number of U.S.W. officials included Rick Wangler himself but it was eventually dropped. Wangler also pointed out in an exchange I had with him some years ago, that he attended a number of meetings with local Comox Valley water board groups and submitted articles to the press and news outlets but no one seemed to be all that interested or bothered by the ongoing disaster.

So I wasn't at all surprised when we started hearing horror stories from local forest workers in the early 2000s about the incredible amount of logging that was stripping the local hills bare up behind us here in the Comox Valley and that the company was no way responsible or answerable to the communities below them since the land was all owned outright by them. As a result, from 2009 onwards the residents of City of Courtenay began having to deal with major flooding of local rivers in the winter and most likely boil water alerts through the summer These privately owned timberlands – the old Comox Logging and Railway Company claim – encompass all the creeks and rivers running into Comox Lake, the entire slope lying below Strathcona Park from Forbidden Plateau to well northwest of Mount Washington as well as the headwaters of the Oyster River in behind the ski hill. Find this all hard to believe?

. What the average citizen may not be aware of was that most of the east side of Vancouver Island, some 2 million acres or just over 20% of the island, was all turned into privately owned land after the federal government granted coal baron Robert Dunsmuir this massive land grant in 1883 in order to help him finance and fund construction of the Esquimalt and Nanaimo Railway Company, the E&N. The southern boundary of the grant ran from Muir Creek northwest of Sooke directly across to the head of Saanich Inlet while the

west side ran on a direct line from Muir Creek up to Crown Mountain at the very top end of Strathcona Park and mid island west of Campbell River. (The east side was bounded by the Strait of Georgia.) Soon afterwards, Dunsmuir started selling most of it off to local logging outfits. Now, try googling University of Maryland Global Forest Change and take a gander at Vancouver Island and note where the bulk of the highlighted red happens to be located.

Now, we need to get to the bottom of all this recent disaster came to pass. Well, as it happened, back in 2003, Bill 88, the Private Managed Forest Land Act, was enacted by the Ministry of Sustainable Resource Management, Honourable Stan Hagen, Minister. It was here (as one of my sources so aptly pointed out) that the province's big timber outfits owning private timber lands in essence became "the foxes in charge of the chicken house." It was here, as B.C. resource policy analyst with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, Ben Parfitt explained in an article in *Narwhal* magazine, it was after the Liberals came into power in British Columbia in 2001 that a new era of regulation was ushered in. The new government scrapped the B.C. Forest Practice Code and replaced it with the Forest and Range Practices Act. This was all confirmed by an old bud who had recently retired from our Ministry of Forests who pointed out that from that day forward there was virtually no government oversight of any kind of privately owned timber lands throughout British Columbia. It was here that "Professional Reliance" was established and a whole new regime was laid down.

So contrary to what many of our local citizenry might continue to think, our provincial Forest Service hasn't been there to ensure sustainable practices and good husbandry of the resource since sometime in the 1990s. Thanks to the political masters of the day, the ministry was to give priority to "enhancing industry competitiveness" and "identifying clear outcomes for investors" while "fulfilling our roles as advocates for the forest industry" according to some internal documents that came into writer and environmental activist, Briony Penn's hands some years ago. It was all left to the forest companies themselves to look after and manage their timber harvest via 'professional reliance.'" As Ben Parfitt so aptly explained it, professional reliance is grounded in a philosophy where government shouldn't be telling forest companies what to do but instead let them set broad objectives for themselves and leave professionals working for the company to decide how to meet them.

Probably the worst outcome of this disastrous policy, was that prior to its enactment, foresters were required to carry out hydrological assessments in community watersheds, and especially those with higher fishery values, but these requirements were all done away with and there has been absolutely no oversight for going on some 20 years or more now. But it's not only local watershed habitat that has been severely damaged, there is also the incredible plant and wildlife habitat provided by the incredible Douglas fir forest lands, one of the most

diverse and unique biogeoclimatic zones on the planet, that once covered the entire lower half of the east side of Vancouver Island. But it wasn't just the costs of a trashed water supply that was passed onto local citizens all along the east coast of Vancouver Island by our corporate overlords.

It was here that all our black-tailed deer were forced down into the settled areas along the coast of the Strait of Georgia. Up until 20 or so years ago they thrived throughout the Beaufort Range and all its watersheds but once the 1st and 2nd growth timber was stripped off this landscape they had to move into town. And why? According to noted zoologist and conservationist, "the father of Canadian ecology" Ian McTaggart Cowan, columbian black-tailed deer have always been reliant on lichen hanging from the trees to get by on through the winter. He examined deer stomachs at all times of the year and throughout the winter months found that they were filled with lichens. These would be the arboreal lichens that flourishes and thrives in old growth forests, but since those are as good as gone, the ungulates had to make their way down into suburbia in order to get by feasting on gardens and fruit trees.

Val Geist, a biologist and a professor emeritus in the Faculty of Environmental Design at the University of Calgary who lives along the Stamp River on the back (west) side of the Beaufort Range is totally disgusted with what's occurred above his property throughout the TimberWest claim. Along with the disappearance of the deer from the hills, he also pointed out that blue grouse that were once so common throughout the southern half of Vancouver Island seemed to have all but vanished. These large birds, which I recall so well growing up in Victoria in the 1950s and '60s, used to be so common throughout the old Hudson's Bay woods in behind today's Camosun College as well as the Uplands golf course. Now, today, those neighbourhoods are home to a deer population. Dr. Geist also wondered about blueberries that thrived in the hillsides above the Comox Valley which gave it its Salishan name Koumuckthay, the Land of Plenty, along with its massive salmon runs, herds of deer and elk.

While the Oyster River Division cut was reduced some ten years ago to approximately half of what was in the early 2000s years, it was still around 40 to 50% higher than what TimberWest had acknowledged as sustainable in the late 1990s. Since this major disaster continues to roll along unabated we need to speak to how our local environmental groups have dealt with it or not. Well, basically they've avoided ever speaking to the absence of any community oversight of what's gone down along the east side of Vancouver Island with the trashing of the headwaters of our watersheds.

Here in the Comox Valley what is probably our largest environmental group, the Project Watershed Society, at no time has ever spoken to all that's gone down up in the headwaters

of all creeks and rivers flowing down into the valley below and ensuring that they are protected and managed in]our community' s best interest. But nope, this local group, has never, ever stepped up to the plate and instead has avoided at all cost ever speaking to the Private Managed Forest Lands Act and Professional Reliance. Instead they keep their heads down and occupy themselves with such things as pulling up invasive species out along the estuary. No, we don' t live in the Comox Valley, it' s more like we reside in the 'Comatose Valley' since our local citizenry continue to roll on being so typically Canadian conflict adverse.

Around 10 years ago, after TimberWest began slowing down logging in their Oyster River Division, they moved most of their logging operation south and jumped into the full out harvesting of their Cowichan claim. It came as no surprise then that soon afterwards, that the Cowichan river began having its water flow problems; flooding in the winter, and drying up through the summer. So much for what once was one of the most rich and productive spawning grounds anywhere on our coast for coho and, more importantly, spring salmon the food of choice for the southern killer whale population. Indeed, many of us who were around in the 1950s and 1960s remember fondly when both Saanich and Cowichan Bay were bustling sports fishing paradises what with large schools of both spring and coho returning to spawn in the highly productive river during the late summer and into the fall. And today how is that community dealing with this ongoing destruction of their watershed?

Well, the Cowichan Watershed Board is pretty well a carbon copy of Project Watershed and have always remained totally conflict adverse and have never ever stepped up to the plate what with TimberWest' s full out blitzing of the headwaters of Cowichan lake and river. Speaking to this, as it happens, a member of the Cowichan environmental group is none other than David Anderson, a former federal cabinet minister of Fisheries and Oceans and later its Minister of Environment. In September 2016, in an opinion piece that ran in the *Vancouver Sun*, Anderson declared that the Cowichan' s ongoing water flow problems as all due to climate change!! No way did he raise the issue, or speak to, how TimberWest has been carrying out a full on blitzing of the Cowichan' s headwaters for a number of years. Find it hard to believe? Well, just check out the loaded trucks coming off TimberWest' s Cowichan claim and entering the weigh station just a little north of Duncan on the Island Highway. Nope, those sticks filling their trailers aren' t just 2nd growth. Now it appears that much of their loads are made up of one foot to two foot in diameter logs? so most likely 3rd growth sticks of wood.

Well, back here in the Comox Valley what with the horrendous amount of silts and muds that continue to flood into Comox Lake most winters now, the Comox Valley Regional

District is working on having to access the local community's water supply from the bottom of the lake which will supposedly will put end to our turbidity related boil water notices. A sophisticated underwater pumping station is to be built near an intake pipe which will run water down through an on shore pump station and into to a treatment plant. Here the raw water will go through direct filtration, chlorination and UV treatment. So in the end, the latest cost estimate suggests that us local taxpayers are going to end up looking at bill somewhere around *125 million dollars!*

For those of us who took a basic economics course, this a perfect example of what is commonly termed cost externalizing, whereby risk is socialized by overloading indirect costs onto a third party in order to maximize corporate profits. So, in essence, TimberWest transferred any moral responsibilities for ensuring good, clean drinking water for all those living downstream from their cut onto local communities. Which brings us to the question who today actually exactly owns this dysfunctional corporate entity?

In June 2011, the publicly traded company was sold off and became the property of two of our pension plans. One was the BCI, the British Columbia Investment Management Corporation, which is in charge of over \$145.6 billion of managed assets and the leading provider of investment management services to British Columbia's public sector, so in other words our provincial government employees. The other firm which invested heavily in this toxic entity is PSP Investments, the Public Sector Pension Investment Board, which happens to be a crown corporation. While BCI is responsible for provincial government employees pensions, PSP investments manages retirement fund benefits for all our federal public service workers along with Canadian armed forces personnel and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. As for Island Timberlands, the other owner of privately owned forest lands here on Vancouver Island, according to its website, its limited partners also happen to be the BCI along with the Alberta Investment Management Corporation which manages that province's pension and government funds.

So, end on a more positive note, there has been a slow forward to finally stand up and fight for the protection of the little that is still left of what is perhaps one of the most unique biogeoclimatic zones on the planet. The coastal Douglas fir forest habitat which at one time in the not too distant past, what with its standing old growth trees, was a massive sequester of carbon which it continued to remove from our atmosphere. One entity that has been actively engaged in trying to protect this invaluable environmental resource, but so far has been mostly engaged with efforts over on the mainland, is the B.C. Coalition for Forestry Reform.

According to its website, BCCFR is “...a grassroots alliance of BC communities advocating for culturally and ecologically sustainable forestry practices. We support data-driven, long term stewardship of the timber and non-timber values of BC’s forests. We advocate for forest management based on long-term landscape-level planning, a mandatory shared decision making process with local communities, careful incorporation of public needs and values, and full recognition of our forests’ non-timber values including water, wildlife, tourism, and recreation.” Fortunately we do have a small group of activists here on the Island who finally came together and formed an alliance with the BCCFR. This is the Vancouver Island Water Watch Coalition which “...seeks to unite, inform and educate communities on Vancouver Island on the status of water and wastewater affecting the environment and our way of life.”

Also, coincidentally, there was a major change in attitude and concern finally shown in the political arena what with the formation of the N.D.P. and Green party coalition back in May 2017. What with the public outcry to the increasing social and economic cost of timber harvesting as BC’s timber supply continues to dwindle, the government finally made a move to address the never ending disaster. This resulted in an ongoing review of how provincial resource management oversight and governance had all but disappeared and how to bring it all back to life again. While it was focussed on the former government’s toxic Professional Reliance model, the provincial government did finally table amendments to the Forest and Range Practices Act (FRPA) in the Legislative Assembly of B.C. on April 1, 2019.

The government said that the recommended changes are intended to strengthen public input into forestry as well as the minister’s ability to manage forest activity. The FRPA bill has passed second reading and will now move to committee. Bob Peart, a spokesperson for The Professional Reliance Working Group of Concerned Citizens, supports these new amendments and hopes that “we certainly hope that future amendments will address the need for appropriate landscape-level planning for non-timber values”.

Regardless of all these well intended efforts, the plunder continues to roll on through the Duncan weigh station and along the Comox Logging mainline while we all remain totally preoccupied with creating more committees; undertaking more reviews and studies while working up countless pages and pages of reports. Meanwhile, down in South America, the inhabitants of the pristine Amazon rainforest don’t bother with all this kind of nonsense and are simply standing up for their ancestral lands and fighting back by standing up toe to toe

and taking on big oil and a complacent government. So, here on the Island it's far past the time where we too should have gotten on with direct action while yelling out:

Cease and Desist!!! Cease and Desist!!!

...all logging on the E&N claim until this never ending government review is completed and a policy has finally been put into action. And it better well be one where local citizens finally have a say in forestry activities that impact their communities and especially their water supply.

Rick James, freelance writer