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Nuxalk First Nation Community Forest Pilot Agreement Proposal

Executive Summary

The executive summary provides a brief overview of the submission from the Nuxalk Band Council on behalf of the Nuxalk Nation in response to the request from the Ministry of Forests for proposals regarding a community forest pilot agreement. The people of the Nuxalk Nation (Nuxalkmc) see this as an opportunity to begin the transition to a future where they are directly involved in the decision making on their traditional territory. Furthermore it provides the privilege and opportunity to design their own future.

The Nuxalk have a long history that is well documented in detailed ethno-biographies for the region. There were 45 village sites scattered across four large geographic areas, Dean Channel, Burke Channel, the South Bentinck Area, and the Bella Coola River. The Neclleetsconnay and the Skowquiltz River drainages, which are proposed for the community forest, housed three of the 45 village sites. Following the smallpox epidemic in the early 1800's the Nuxalk people moved to larger communities like Bella Coola where they reside today.

Historically the forests were used for ceremonial and spiritual purposes as well as the harvesting of wood, wildlife, berries, shrubs, and herbs for sustenance. The Nuxalkmc extracted wood and tree parts to be used for several purposes including food & tools, fuel & timber, medicine & dyes, and hunting & fishing.

In spite of the alienation and mistreatment of the land and resources by early settlers, the Nuxalkmc adapted. They became well-respected loggers and sawmill employees in the boom years, but now face a staggering 70-80% unemployment rate.

The response from the Nuxalkmc has not been a passive one. They have submitted a tree farm license proposal in conjunction with the Oweekeno-Kitasoo-Nuxalk tribal Council and they have a Nuxalkmc logging crew working with Interfor. A Nuxalk band member has also started a successful silviculture contracting business. There is a Nuxalk-staffed "Integrated Resource Team" that has an office on the reserve and is very active in the Central Coast Land and Coastal Resource Management Plan. In 1998, they also established a community-run post-secondary institution - Nuxalk College. As shown on the cover of the report, the Nuxalk also designed and built their own school, which is one of the educational and spiritual centres of this growing community.

The community forest will provide both direct forestry related employment as well as non-timber opportunities related to fisheries, tourism, education, culture and spiritual endeavours.

While the community forest concepts and principles are well received by most communities, the details of how it will be worked out are not without controversy both within the communities and in dealing with other governmental agencies and stakeholders. For example, the Province of British Columbia and the Nuxalk Nation have conflicting views on the ownership and title to land in Nuxalk traditional territory. Issues regarding stumpage and/or land rent may be construed as prejudicial to this question of ownership. Negotiation of a mutually acceptable alternative fiscal arrangement is deferred to the period after which the province has responded to this submission.

This community forest proposal is an attempt by the Nuxalk to set out in a new direction. The Nuxalk are committed to resolve conflicts that arise from any aspect of the proposal.

The demand for tenure opportunities and the lack of currently available allowable annual cut (AAC) in the Mid Coast Forest District presents another potential conflict with existing licensees. In a letter to the Nuxalk Nation, the District Manager stated that he is willing to offer only a maximum of 20,000m³/year of AAC to any one community. At the present time, our long-term harvest objective is 14,250m³/year. A total of 819,876 m³ of mature timber will be harvested from 3,088 ha. in two drainages. This represents less than 10% of the total land base. In the Skowquiltz, old growth timber predominates. In the Necleetsconnay, logging from the 1950s to the 1970's removed 60% of the timber from the productive land base. The species mix for both areas is quite similar with hemlock and balsam comprising 60% of the volume, western redcedar and Sitka spruce with 15% each, and a minor component of Douglas fir, yellow cedar, and deciduous stands.

Both drainages are in the moister variants of the Coastal Western Hemlock biogeoclimatic subzone. Growing sites have site indices of 18-28 m at 50 years of age, excellent sites for tree growth. Non-timber resources such as botanical forest products, fish and fish habitat, wildlife and wildlife habitat, and eco tourism are additional opportunities that will enhance the economic viability of the community forest.

The long term timber harvest level was estimated to be 14,250 m³/year. This figure is slightly conservative and will be refined with field investigations in the first five years. Spatially-based timber supply analysis will also be completed. While the long-term harvest level of 14,250 m³ will be maintained, the cut levels in the first years exceed the likely long-term average due to high start up investments.

The Nuxalk people welcome the community forest pilot agreement as an opportunity to enhance community prosperity. The community forest will create jobs and be the catalyst for other economic initiatives so greatly needed in this remote community. Timber will be the main product of the community forest; however non-timber forest products initiatives like botanical harvesting and value-added manufacturing will be strongly encouraged and supported. Training and skill upgrading will be an integral part of all initiatives.

The business and management plans for the community forest are technical and socio-economic documents. The following goals and guiding principles provide direction to planning teams and resource managers:

1. Manage lands consistent with the policies and standards outlined in present legislation, higher level plans, in particular the Central Coast Land and Resource Management Plan, and to meet or exceed the standards set out in the Forest Practices Code.
2. Maintain the sustainability of timber and non-timber resources. Integrate timber and non-timber objectives.
3. Recognise regional initiatives. Co-operate and co-ordinate with these initiatives when appropriate.
4. Create an economically self sufficient business built to last that makes a positive difference to Nuxalk society.
5. Consider and attempt to balance environmental, social, cultural, and economic goals.
6. Respect cultural and spiritual values.
7. Systematically monitor the outcome of management strategies. Evaluate and update management goals and objectives to improve strategy effectiveness and to accommodate changes in knowledge, the environment, and social values.
8. Create and promote training and educational opportunities. Co-operate and support existing training and educational and programs and the creation of new ones.
9. Optimising the value of all timber harvested is a primary goal. Two value-added manufacturers have already been approached and have written letters of support. Value will also be optimised by marketing unique Nuxalk craftsmanship to high end markets.

Regrettably, calculations show that payment of full stumpage and land rent equivalent during the start-up phase of the community forest is financially impossible. Revenues are not sufficient to offset high initial infrastructure costs. For the purposes of the business plan, two scenarios, one with no stumpage-equivalent and one with a reduced stumpage-equivalent, have been provided.

At its inception, the community forest will be under the direct control and guidance of the Nuxalk Band Council, the elected representative of the 1,300 Nuxalk people. A Forest Manager and Forest Economic Development Officer will be hired, and a Forest Board of Advisors formed. Input from the Nuxalk community and their neighbours will be continually solicited to ensure a balance of social, economic, and environmental objectives.