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Ministry of  
Forests

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B.C. MINISTRY OF FORESTS.  
LOWER WALBRAN VALLEY  
BACKGROUND, JULY 1991  
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**Lower Walbran Valley Backgrounder**

July, 1991

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**Background**

The Walbran Valley, on southwest Vancouver Island, covers about 10,000 hectares and is adjacent to the southern border of the Carmanah Valley.

The valley has a wet, coastal, maritime climate and can be subject to heavy rainfall.

The main tree species in the valley are coastal western hemlock, balsam, and western redcedar. There are also minor amounts of Sitka spruce and cypress.

Timber harvesting rights and forest management responsibilities in the valley are held by:

- MacMillan Bloedel Co. Ltd. under a tree farm licence (#44); and,
- Fletcher Challenge Canada Ltd. under a tree farm licence (#46).

This backgrounder deals with the lower portion of the Walbran Valley -- about 6,500 hectares -- managed by Fletcher Challenge Canada.

**History**

- A tree farm licence (#46) was awarded to Fletcher Challenge Canada in 1983. It was formerly part of a tree farm licence (#27) that was held by British Columbia Forest Products Ltd.
- In 1985, 'Management and Working Plan I' was approved.
- On June 1, 1985, the company was authorized to start constructing a road into the lower Walbran.
- In 1989, the initial harvesting of 107.1 hectares was completed. It involved three blocks of 41 hectares, 39 hectares and 27.1 hectares.

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- In June 1990, Fletcher Challenge Canada established a 13-member local advisory committee.
- By the end of 1990, a fourth block of 23.7 hectares had been harvested, bringing the total to 130.8 hectares. All the blocks have now been reforested.
- In May 1991, the Minister of Forests announced that the Walbran was not accepted for short-term, old-growth deferral because there was a significant amount of preserved old-growth forests immediately adjacent to the Walbran in the Carmanah Pacific Provincial Park and the Pacific Rim National Park (about 54,000 hectares).
- On June 25, 1991, the Forest Service approved the Five-Year Development Plan for the Walbran portion of Fletcher Challenge Canada's tree farm licence (#46) under its 'Management and Working Plan #1.'
- On July 4, 1991, the Forest Service approved road and cutting permits for the lower Walbran Valley. This included up to eight potential blocks -- to be harvested over the next two years -- for a total of 167 hectares and 12.1 kilometres of new road.

#### Public comment

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Before the Five-Year Development Plan was prepared, approved, and subsequent cutting permits were issued, comment was solicited from the public:

- In January 1990, Fletcher Challenge Canada invited Greater Victoria area residents to tour the lower Walbran Valley. The company provided buses and registered professional foresters to provide a commentary and to answer questions. Some 600 people took the tours and provided comments on how development should progress in the valley.
- Fletcher Challenge Canada formed the Walbran Local Advisory Committee composed of 13 representatives from local communities and organizations. The committee proposed a plan and management strategies for the Walbran Valley. The company incorporated these strategies in its Five-Year Development Plan.
- After the Five-Year Development Plan was prepared, it was reviewed by various government agencies, including the Ministry of Environment and the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans. Public information sessions were then held in Lake Cowichan and Duncan.

## Discussion of major issues

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There are some forest resource and management issues which relate to the Walbran valley. Background information is included below on:

- the Walbran Local Resource Advisory Group;
- the forest management planning process;
- marbled murrelets and their nesting habitat;
- timber harvesting history;
- integrated resource management plan; and,
- wilderness and recreation.

## Walbran Local Resource Advisory Group

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The Walbran Local Resource Advisory Group was formed in March 1990 and included representatives of the:

- Municipality of North Cowichan;
- City of Duncan;
- Village of Lake Cowichan;
- Cowichan Valley Regional District;
- Valley Fish and Game Club;
- Lake Cowichan Economic Development Commission;
- B. C. Wildlife Federation;
- IWA Local 1-80 (Duncan);
- Nuw-Chah-Nulth Tribal Council;
- Share our Forests;
- Western Canada Wilderness Committee;
- Carmanah Forestry Society; and,
- Sierra Club Cowichan Group.

Fletcher Challenge Canada's representative acted as facilitator. There were no Ministry of Forests representatives.

On October 2, 1990, the Walbran Local Resource Advisory Group submitted a plan to the Duncan forest district manager identifying cut blocks proposed for harvesting in 1991 and 1992 and a conceptual plan for 1993, 1994 and 1995.

The Western Canada Wilderness Committee, the Carmanah Forestry Society and the Sierra Club Cowichan Group did not sign the plans and one organization recommended the complete deferral of the lower Walbran from any further harvesting.

Western Canada Wilderness Committee and the Sierra Club withdrew from the group in October.

The harvesting plan provided for small blocks, from eight to 35 hectares and widely dispersed, compared to an earlier pattern of continuous clear-cut logging along the roads being developed into the lower Walbran.

### Planning process

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There are three planning levels of forest management for tree farm licences.

1. Management and Working Plan:

This plan covers a five-year period. It outlines, in general terms, how a licensee intends to manage the various resources within the licence area, according to legislation and policies.

An allowable annual cut is recommended for approval by the chief forester.

Management issues and strategies are identified and the public is invited to comment and identify issues. All the issues are reviewed and addressed before the chief forester approves the plan.

2. Five-Year Development Plans:

These detail the operational methods, prescriptions, schedules and responsibilities for resource development and protection and enable site-specific operations to proceed.

The plans are submitted by the licensee and referred to the Ministry of Environment, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and other licenced users in the planning area. Public input is required before final approval by the district manager. These plans are normally updated annually.

Pre-harvest silvicultural prescriptions, as required by legislation, are generally submitted with this plan.

3. Cutting permits and road permits:

These are site-specific documents. They authorize timber harvesting and road building according to the Five-Year Development Plan. They contain the clauses, terms, and conditions that must be complied with during harvesting and road construction.

### Marbled murrelets

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Marbled murrelets are robin-sized seabirds that spend most of the year at sea, where they feed on small fish and invertebrates. Their nesting period occurs between May and late July.

Marbled murrelets are currently classified as a 'threatened species' in Canada partly because it appears that they may be dependent on old-growth forests for nesting habitat.

There are approximately 160,000 marbled murrelets in the world, of which 30 per cent, or about 50,000, live along British Columbia's coast. This means approximately 15,000 pairs nest in the province every year. There are about 100,000 marbled murrelets in Alaska.

A murrelet's nest was discovered on a branch of a large conifer tree in the upper Walbran in 1990. This resulted in a 70-hectare reserve being established around the nest site even though it was not used in 1991.

A Marbled Murrelet Recovery Team was established to recommend and prepare plans for maintaining the marbled murrelet habitat and thus maintain viable populations of the murrelet.

The 10-member team represents the Ministry of Environment, the Forest Service, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Forestry Canada, National Parks, the Western Canada Wilderness Committee, MacMillan Bloedel, Fletcher Challenge Canada, the Canadian Wildlife Service, and the University of Victoria.

Surveys are being conducted on the B.C. coast to determine nesting areas and nesting activity. Birds are being radio tagged and monitored. This year, methodology is being developed. More detailed study is expected next year.

Research in Oregon has detected nesting activity in stands ranging from 10 to 400 hectares.

In February 1991, the chief forester issued interim recommendations to protect marbled murrelet nesting habitat. The recommendations were prepared by a sub-group of the Recovery Team composed of representatives from the Forest Service, the Ministry of Environment and the Canadian Wildlife Service.

In watersheds where murrelet nesting habitat is of concern, these guidelines suggest that we:

1. retain corridors 400 to 600 metres wide from valley bottom to the height of land between cut blocks;
2. retain streamside corridors in the valley bottom of 300-metre width;
3. encourage mid- and upper-elevation timber harvesting rather than in valley bottoms, where possible;
4. consider the deferral of new harvesting in watersheds with limited old-growth remaining in the valley bottom.

It is expected that these recommendations will ensure that a substantial amount of old-growth forest remains available over the entire range of elevations to provide nesting habitat during the next five years, during which time research will continue to improve our understanding of nesting habitat requirements.

Experts say that evidence shows that marbled murrelets are not deterred by human activity. If the 8 to 35-hectare dispersed cut blocks in the lower Walbran are removed as planned, and the interim marbled murrelet nesting habitat guidelines are followed, there should be no disruption of nesting activity.

### **Integrated Resource Management Plan**

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Fletcher Challenge Canada completed an Integrated Resource Management Plan for the Walbran Valley in 1990. It considered such things as terrain stability, recreation, visual landscape, fisheries and black-tailed deer.

As with any such plan, the company's plan is 'adaptive' in nature and will be modified to include strategies for the consideration of marbled murrelet nesting habitat and ethnological (coastal Indian heritage) values.

The plan will also identify areas that will be included in future harvesting plans and propose an allowable annual cut for the lower Walbran Valley.

The updated plan will be reviewed by various resource agencies, including the Forest Service and the ministries of Environment and Lands and Parks, and the federal departments of Fisheries and Oceans, and Environment.

### **Park and wilderness**

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Approximately 10 per cent of Vancouver Island is currently protected as park or wilderness. For Vancouver Island this includes:

	<b>Approximate area</b>
Strathcona Provincial Park	222 600 hectares
Pacific Rim National Park	49 960 hectares
Brooks Peninsula Recreation Area	28 780 hectares
Cape Scott Provincial Park	15 070 hectares
Schoen Lake Provincial Park	8 170 hectares
Carmanah Pacific Provincial Park	3 600 hectares

In addition, there are a number of ecological reserves on Vancouver Island.