

Community Participation and the New Forest Economy

**“Recommendations for Public Participation
in the New Forest Economy”**

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Project Abstract

Project Summary:

This research project investigates community dynamics and factors influencing effective participation and decision-making in British Columbia's resource dependent communities. The research will identify defining elements of "community" which are key to effective participation in both community development decision-making and resource planning, allocation, and management. The research findings will be of direct value to managers seeking to maximize returns on community development assistance and those seeking to make effective use of community involvement in the new types of consultation processes now underway within the Province.

Rationale:

A central priority of the Forest Renewal B.C. initiative is with "strengthening communities that rely on the forests". As the Forest Practices Code changes the way our forest resource is managed, harvested and utilized, so too will change the patterns of employment, and the skills needed to gain this employment, in the new forest economy. These changes will have a direct impact upon many of British Columbia's smaller, resource-based, communities where both local workers and businesses rely upon direct participation in the forest industry. At an individual level, workers and residents will be engaged in a 'retooling' of skills to meet new job opportunities. At a broader level, communities will be seeking to participate in resource allocation decisions and to attract investment which keeps the economic benefits of the new forest economy within their community. FRBC recognizes the importance of these changes and the importance of "supporting community development and adjustment".

While achieving successful adjustment to change is a critically important goal, the participation of communities in resource allocation and management, and the positioning of communities to facilitate new economic development, will be hampered without a clear understanding of both the meaning and dynamics of community involvement. This is not simply an isolated academic issue, but rather, how communities function and come together to participate in the new forest economy will have a very real impact upon how successful they are in adjusting to new forest management practices. What defines a community? What aspects of this definition are critical to motivating participation in planning for adjustments to change? What aspects of this definition are important in promoting community economic development? What criteria can local areas employ to help define their geographic territory, especially when they may be in competition with adjacent areas over control of resources? How can the desire for community participation in resource planning be better integrated into models to ensure more effective decision-making? Finally, how can more effective institutions and structures be developed to assist decision-making? Finding clear answers to these questions will be an important part of helping communities adjust to the new forest economy.

Research Goals:

Four Research Goals guide the proposed research:

1. Develop an applied definition of “community” and “community development” in British Columbia, and creation of tools for self-definition of community on a local basis.
2. Develop recommendations to enhance community participation in current resource allocation decision-making models (e.g.: LRMP’s).
3. Application of community definition and participation recommendations to resource planning and management objectives and practices, including assessments of their application to community-based management models.
4. Develop recommendations on appropriate institutional developments to enhance community goal-setting and decision-making in regard to resource management at the local level.

Funding for this research and/or extension was provided by Forest Renewal BC - a partnership of forest companies, workers, environmental groups, First Nations, communities and government. Forest Renewal BC funding - from stumpage fees and royalties that forest companies pay for the right to harvest timber on Crown lands - is reinvested in the forests, forest workers, and forest communities.

Funding assistance by Forest Renewal BC does not imply endorsement of any statements or information contained herein.

Publications

of the “Community Participation in the New Forest Economy” research project

Case Studies

A Case Study of Six British Columbi Communities and Their Participation in Resource Management Decision-Making. Annie Booth and Greg Halseth. Faculty of Natural Resources and Environmental Studies. University of Northern British Columbia. October 31, 1999.

WorkBook

The Natural Resources and Community Workbook. Annie Booth and Greg Halseth. Faculty of Natural Resources and Environmental Studies. University of Northern British Columbia. October 31, 1999.

Discussion Papers

Discussion Paper on Concepts: “Community”. Greg Halseth and Annie Booth. Faculty of Natural Resources and Environmental Studies. University of Northern British Columbia. December 20, 1997.

Discussion Paper on Concepts: “Community Economic Development”. Greg Halseth and Annie Booth. Faculty of Natural Resources and Environmental Studies. University of Northern British Columbia. February 10, 1998.

Discussion Paper on Concepts: “Citizen Participation in Resource Management”. Annie Booth and Greg Halseth. Faculty of Natural Resources and Environmental Studies. University of Northern British Columbia. October 31, 1999.

Reports

“Updated Report and Analysis on a Questionnaire Survey of Residents in Six British Columbia Communities”. Greg Halseth and Annie Booth. Faculty of Natural Resources and Environmental Studies. University of Northern British Columbia. July 30, 1999.

“Recommendations for Public Participation in the New Forest Economy”. Greg Halseth and Annie Booth. Faculty of Natural Resources and Environmental Studies. University of Northern British Columbia. July 30, 1999.

Annotated Bibliographies

First Edition:

- #1. Community Participation and the New Forest Economy - Citizen Participation in Resource Management - An Annotated Bibliography. April 1997.
- #2. Community Participation and the New Forest Economy - Community and Sustainability - An Annotated Bibliography. April 1997.
- #3. Community Participation and the New Forest Economy - British Columbia Models of Community Participation and Examples of Management - An Annotated Bibliography. April 1997.

Second Edition:

- #1. Citizen Participation in Resource Management - Community Participation and the New Forest Economy - An Annotated Bibliography. November 1998.
- #2. Community and Sustainability - Community Participation and the New Forest Economy - An Annotated Bibliography. November 1998.
- #3. British Columbia Models of Community Participation and Examples of Management - Community Participation and the New Forest Economy - An Annotated Bibliography. November 1998.

FURTHER INFORMATION

As part of our intent to make this information as widely available as possible, copies of all research reports, discussion papers and bibliographies were sent to most public library systems in British Columbia. As well, copies were sent to many of the college, university-college, and university libraries systems in the Province.

Copies of project publications are also available online at the following website address:

<http://quarles.unbc.ca/frbc/index.html>

If you would like further information about the research project, please contact:

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Public Participation and the New Forest Economy

"Recommendations for Community Participation in the New Forest Economy"

Introduction

Public consultation is not a new phenomena and our work does not seek to "re-invent the public consultation wheel". Rather, we have spent time listening to those with experience in public participation about what they felt works and does not work. One of the results is this set of core principles to which managers and participants can look for guidance over the course of public consultation exercises.

Part - I Importance of Consultation

The people we talked to were clear about the continuing importance of public consultation in natural resources management and planning processes.

Consultation is Important

There is a strong feeling that there are positive benefits from public involvement and consultation.

Obligation to Consult

The public is coming to expect opportunities for significant input into resource planning processes.

Part - II Clarity of Process

One of the most frustrating aspects of public consultation for those we spoke to concerns the clarity (and their understanding) of the process itself. Critical areas of concern centre upon "who will participate" and who will make the "final" decisions.

Level Playing Field

The involvement of a wide range of participants prompts concern for equity in terms of their ability to participate and influence the process.

Clarity of Mandate

The scope and terms of reference must be clear to all participants.

Clarity of Decision Making Powers

Public involvement often merges with an increased desire for public decision-making power.

Coordinate Resources Planning Processes

Need to be clear on how particular resource planning processes fit within larger Provincial processes.

Part - III Involving the "Public"

One of the most challenging tasks in public consultation is actually engaging with the general public. If the public feel they have a valued role, and they can see tangible outcomes from local involvement, they will be willing to contribute over the long term.

Publicity

How to increase awareness of the issue and its relevance to people within a local area.

Value Public Input

If people expend time to participate, they need to know in very clear ways that their time and input was appreciated, valued, and relevant to the process outcome.

Recognize Public Involvement Problems

There are real problems with respect to involving members of the general public which need to be recognized if they are going to be resolved.

Understanding that Interest Groups are not the "Public"

Deep concerns were raised about sector and interest group models of public participation.

General Public Capacity Building

There was wide recognition that only a knowledgeable and informed public can effectively participate.

Part - IV Information Throughout the Process

Information must be available throughout the process in order to create a level playing field among participants.

Access to Base Information

There is a critical need that all groups and participants start with the same basic information base.

Information Sharing as Process Proceeds

It is important to keep information flow open as the process proceeds.

Broaden Consultation Options

There is a call for more and varied ways by which to increase information flow as people find existing ones limited and outdated.

Part - V Process Management

Concern has been expressed with respect to the functioning and management of natural resources planning and decision-making processes.

Open Process

A need for both a welcoming atmosphere and transparency of process.

Timelines

There is a need for a clear timeline and markers/milestones of progress.

Part - VI Cautions

Despite considerable hard work, and best intentions, public participation processes are replete with pitfalls which can undermine the legitimacy of the process, the confidence of those involved, and the support of the general public. This said, however, public consultation processes can achieve many positive outcomes including new community 'visions', a renewed sense of confidence in the local economy, environment, leaders, and institutions, and the reaffirmation which comes from building on local success.

Most Needed Ingredient

Cooperation and common sense are the most needed ingredient in all successful group activities.

Perceived Dangers

Real or imaged problems can derail public participation processes.

Copies of project publications are also available online at the following website address:
<http://quarles.unbc.ca/frbc/index.html>

If you would like further information about the research project, please contact:

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Community Participation in the New Forest Economy

“Recommendations for Public Participation in the New Forest Economy”

INTRODUCTION

The British Columbia Resource Communities project is interested in the topic of public participation in natural resources planning and decision-making processes. Over the past decade, there has been a tremendous increase in the number and range of public consultation processes within the Province. While some processes have been very visible in the media, and a few very controversial, all are proving to be tremendously important within the regions where they are underway.

Public consultation is not a new phenomena. There have been legislated requirements to hold public hearings or public information meetings on a wide variety of land-use planning issues for many years. As well, many planning and management jurisdictions have gone above and beyond such legislative requirements to develop broad mechanisms for consulting with the public on a range of land and resource management issues. As such, planners, resource managers, and members of the public, have developed considerable experience with what works and does not work in public consultation processes.

This report is one product of our research into the experiences of six British Columbia communities with public consultation. The communities of Quesnel, Smithers, Kaslo, Dawson Creek, Powell River, and Clearwater range in both size and dependence on resource based industries. They also range in their experiences with land-use planning and decision-making processes.

Case Study Communities

Community Name	1996 Pop.	Forest Region	Main Economic Base	Resource Planning Process
Smithers	5,624	Skeena-Bulkley	Forestry-Agr.-Tourism	LRMP-Comm.Res. Bd.
Quesnel	8,468	Cariboo-Chilcotin	Forestry	CORE
Dawson Ck.	11,125	Omineca-Peace	Agriculture-Forestry	LRMP
Clearwater	4,960	Thompson-Okanagan	Forestry-Tourism	LRMP
Powell Riv.	13,130	Pacific	Forestry	Watershed Mgmt.
Kaslo	1,063	Kootenay-Boundary	Forestry-Tourism	CORE-Comm.Forest

This report does not seek to “re-invent the public consultation wheel”. There already exists a wide range of sources (reports, books, video series, and Internet sites) through which resource managers and members of the public may turn for detailed information on how to conduct public hearings, visioning sessions, dispute resolution, and the like. A set of annotated bibliographies

developed during the course of our research is also available and contains hundreds of useful references. Rather, this report presents a set of core principles to which managers and participants can look for guidance over the course of public consultation exercises.

We felt strongly from the start that those with experience in public participation and consultation processes were the best people to evaluate what works and what does not work. The principles described in this report derive directly from their experiences and involvement. Through focus groups, questionnaire surveys, and community open house meetings, people shared with us their experiences and views on public consultation. It is from their lessons that public participation processes can be improved upon and can hopefully in the future avoid some of the pitfalls encountered in the past.

OUTLINE

The set of principles for guiding public consultation processes are divided into six parts.

Part I - The Importance of Consultation	“Consultation is Important” “Obligation to Consult”
Part II - Clarity of Process	“Level Playing Field” “Clarity of Mandate” “Clarity of Decision-making Powers” “Coordinate Resources Planning Processes”
Part III - Involving the “Public”	“Publicity” “Valuing Public Input” “Recognize Public Involvement Problems” “Understanding that Interest Groups are not necessarily the ‘Public’” “General Public Capacity Building”
Part IV - Information Throughout the Process	“Access to base data” “Information Sharing as Process Proceeds” “Broaden Consultation Options”
Part V - Process Management	“Open Process” “Timelines”
Part VI - Cautions	“Most Needed Ingredient” “Perceived Dangers”

PART I

IMPORTANCE OF CONSULTATION

The people we talked to were clear about the continuing importance of public consultation in natural resource management and planning processes. While some felt that improvements were needed, others were pleased for the opportunity to have input into issues so very important for their community. With the move towards increased public involvement, two trends are clear. The first is that the public wants this to continue and to expand. Some of the people and groups we interviewed even called for extending public consultation towards more direct democracy style decision-making such as referendums on plans. There is little question that the public now considers government consultation obligatory. Second, given the momentum of past involvement, it will be very difficult to limit public participation in future land-use planning and decision-making processes.

Within these general trends, the people we talked with and who responded to our questionnaire and open house processes made a number of recurring points concerned with the quality of consultation. Many people made impassioned arguments that consultation must be 'meaningful'. They argued that it must occur early enough in processes to allow input that might shape the process and resultant plans. It must also occur throughout the process to maintain public contact and involvement, and it must be genuine. Many people suggested that one of the best ways to demonstrate that a consultation process has been genuine is that the public input into the consultation process must be clearly evident within the final plans coming out of that process. The first section of this report reinforces that public consultation is considered important by residents and decision-makers in BC's small, resource dependent, communities.

Consultation is Important

GENERAL ISSUE

- There is a strong feeling that there are positive benefits from public involvement and consultation.

TOPICS

- The sharing of information about resources and resource use is very important.
- Dialogue can lead to understanding and progressive ideas.
- Consultation should not be preempted by bureaucratic decision-making.

SOME COMMENTS WE RECEIVED

It allows long term residents who know and respect the land a valuable say in the future of the community they love.

It generally gets all the issues on the table. It creates better understanding among persons or groups that do not work in related fields.

Ideas and options make wider range of public knowledge and understanding.

By attempting to listen to individual concerns which have merit and having more one on one dialogue with the individual(s).

Reputable organizations speaking with one voice.

Consultation is important where there are major/key principles to be agreed upon. The Ministry cannot independently make major resource allocation decisions/policies right in the middle of a consultation process.

Public involvement and consultation are vital. However, after plans have been ratified, participants expect full implementation (have the right to expect given the time and effort they invested).

Change in government direction should not change plans without full participation of the table.

Obligation to Consult

GENERAL ISSUE

- The public is coming to expect opportunities for significant input into resource planning processes.

TOPICS

- The public owners of resources need a forum to voice their concerns.
- Participation is a component part of land and resource stewardship.
- Consultation needs to be regularized and not simply a function of special purpose processes.

SOME COMMENTS WE RECEIVED

Encourage Resource Managers to become more involved in regular discussions with the general public.

The public should be aware of the plans and be able to express opinions.

An attempt to get a better cross-section of opinion before major decisions are made.

Consultation works to a point as it forces some accountability to the community.

Gives a feeling of ownership which is necessary when public resources are in dispute.

PART - II

CLARITY OF PROCESS

One of the most frustrating aspects of participation in public consultation processes for those we spoke to concerns the clarity (and their understanding) of the process itself. People are often not very clear about a number of key issues including their roles in the process, the overall task or mandate of the process, and the decision-making power allocated to those within the process. One critical area of concern centres upon identification of “who will participate”. Many resource planning processes in British Columbia involve “sector representatives” meeting at a roundtable. Members of the public we surveyed wondered who identified these “constituency groups”, what was the relationship between the representative at the table and the constituency they were supposed to represent, and how these individuals were appointed/nominated/or volunteered to these positions.

There were also questions and concerns raised about the coordination of different resource planning processes. For example, there is supposed to be logical linkage between the CORE (Commission On Resources and Environment) and LRMP (Local Resource Management Plans) processes, yet in regions with experience with both, many suggested that they could not follow or see the connectivity. A further area of concern involved the process of reaching “agreement” in these types of processes. The issue of compromise versus consensus was raised many times as was the dilemma created by multiple interpretations of these terms around the same negotiating tables. Finally, questions about who will make the “final” decisions, and where appeal routes and powers exist, are proving very frustrating to participants. After working hard on a land-use or resource plan, a participant often feels betrayed when another decision-making level changes substantive recommendations. Support for both the process and the recommendations can be severely undermined when participants become disillusioned.

Level Playing Field

GENERAL ISSUE

- The involvement of a wide range of participants prompts concern for equity in terms of their ability to participate and influence the process.

TOPICS

- Remuneration and compensation for time spent is considered important.
- General training and education is needed for participants to deal with technical specifics.
- Backup and support resources must be available to all participating individuals or groups.
- Differences in perceived 'power' between groups (ie: government agency vs. group of residents)

SOME COMMENTS WE RECEIVED

Members of the public should be paid the same wage as government and industry representatives and time lines should be enforced for all participants. No deal, no pay.

Persons involved should be paid.

Before public can be involved they need information or education on the issues and then can help determine the best part they can play. Eg. development ... or review and critique a prepared draft.

Education (Only those in the know get involved).

Need to educate public about this involvement role.

More training for all parties; more resources.

The Ministry takes a top down approach; issues are looked at through bureaucratic frameworks. Too much power is given to bureaucratic institutions with disempowerment of community groups.

It may not be possible to bring all concerned public to a level of technical understanding to be able to participate - perhaps a 'steering committee' mechanism of technically knowledgeable perspectives as a bridge to the community at large.

The cost to train public participants to be technical experts will likely be expensive and very time consuming.

Clarity of Mandate

GENERAL ISSUE

- The scope and terms of reference must be clear to all participants.

TOPICS

- The basic framework of the process and the roles of participants must be carefully detailed.
- “Surprises” can undermine participation and the process itself.
- Groundrules and ethics of behaviour must be made clear to participants at start of process.

SOME COMMENTS WE RECEIVED

Clear terms of reference and full understanding of process is required.

Early involvement, one on one discussions, on site discussions; clear terms of reference.

Special guidelines given and deadlines kept.

Control of these functions should not reside with “interested” parties. There should be an independent group of moderators like “judges”.

Ground rules and ethics of behaviour should be clearly spelled out and applicable to all equally. Some interests seemed to ‘get away’ with breaking rules many times while others were asked to leave the process as a result.

Participants should be involved in drawing up terms of reference - too often these are handed down by government - the scope is externally set out and this limits the process.

Independent facilitation of public processes is an imperative to their success, When participants distrust one another to such a degree, the facilitator is the bridge and can interpret without emotion so points of view can be more easily understood.

Clarity of Decision Making Powers

GENERAL ISSUE

- Public involvement often merges with an increased desire for public decision-making power.

TOPICS

- There is a need to clearly delineate levels and extent of power within the process.
- Resentment about “not made locally” decisions can have very harmful effects.
- Resentment about having local decisions changed after a process is completed can also cause considerable harm.

SOME COMMENTS WE RECEIVED

Who makes what decision.

More power or control.

Local boards, local decisions that will stand - not Victoria decisions or Lower Mainland - especially in land decisions.

Any clarity of decision-making powers must show that decisions arrived at through public consensus cannot be thwarted by transient politicians.

The public in the areas affected by this should be able to veto government decisions.

... - all final decisions are politically biased. Sometimes the politicians do not even wait for study or survey results before acting, and usually decisions are already determined subject to change only by extreme political action.

After all the local work, many people call it a “Made in Victoria” plan.

Participants can become disillusioned when recommendations are not implemented.

Coordinate Resources Planning Processes

GENERAL ISSUE

- There is a need to situate any particular resource planning process within the larger set of processes underway within the Province.

TOPICS

- The scope and scale of the current process must clearly be identified.
- The extent of outside decisions which build into the process must also be clearly identified.
- The outcomes or processes which the current consultation exercise will build into must be clear.

SOME COMMENTS WE RECEIVED

There should be an overall plan and regulation format worked out.

Fragmented planning only wears out the people who volunteer - you cannot cope with all the demands as a volunteer.

There is a need to keep the public informed of evolution of processes taking place elsewhere. I am not aware of a general website for ALL LRMP's for example. There should be contact addresses for each LRMP which should not be Ministry officials.

How can we even begin to discuss 'new economies' without coordinated planning processes? The best example perhaps involves the impacts wrought on the fishing industry by the forest industries.

People need to know the framework as a consideration for their involvement.

Decisions being made in a neighbouring region's plan can have a huge impact on your region and this must be coordinated so each does not try to push off 'costs' onto the other.

PART - III

INVOLVING THE “PUBLIC”

One of the most challenging tasks in public consultation and participation processes is actually engaging with the general public. Planners and resource managers know very well the difficulty of both contacting and motivating a wide cross-section of the public to become involved. There are questions about how to motivate people to come to meetings, about how to equip those people so they can participate effectively, and how to maintain interest and participation over the sometimes long time periods planning processes function. The people we interviewed both identified these topics as issues and suggested ways of dealing with them.

More generally, the people we spoke with raised the question of “valuing” public input. This critical issue seems certainly to have coloured the feelings of many with whom we spoke. As well, there was a great deal of concern about just who the “public” was in some of these consultation processes. A commonly raised observation was that special interest groups do not necessarily represent the breadth of views within the general public.

Two practical problems for both communities and resource planning process managers concern 1) representation across major divisions in the local community, and 2) community boundaries. Firstly, if a community is highly divided and unable to decide or come to some general agreement on “what they want” for their community and region, then some other process (such as community visioning) is needed instead of trying to move directly into a resource planning process. Secondly, the area over which a community feels it has collective or common responsibility may or may not coincide with government jurisdictional boundaries. The question of geographic “fit” or “sphere of interest” is very important in questions of public involvement and the practical matter of who should have input.

If public participation processes are to be successful, then engagement with the public is critical. If the public feel they have a valued role, and they can see tangible outcomes from local involvement to “do good” in their communities, they will be more willing to contribute over the long term.

Publicity

GENERAL ISSUE

- How to increase awareness of the issue and its relevance to people within a local area.

TOPICS

- There already exist a wide range of media forums which can be more effectively used.
- There is a need for clear communication of the scope and relevance of the particular issue.
- Early publicity and awareness forms the foundation for an on-going information campaign throughout the life of a resource planning process.
- Must go beyond legal notices of 'open houses' to review already completed plans.

SOME COMMENTS WE RECEIVED

Encourage people to take more interest in public meetings through advertising and other promotions.

A better sell/communication to the public that they have a part in the planning process (not just a brief ad in the legal section of the local newspaper).

More media coverage so that we know what's happening to our natural resources. We need to see both sides of the arguments.

Greater involvement through heightened media coverage to directly involve more members of the public.

Better meeting advertisement; more information.

An interest grabbing campaign to build awareness of one's importance of opinion.

Public hearings advertised well in advance in newspapers or radio.

Maps, etc., showing areas involved so people with interests in area are more informed.

The public display of maps and invitations to comment at least engages people who use the area.

Displays - trade shows, malls, schools - to distribute information on goals and objectives before the process is too far along. This encourages further involvement, and helps balance special interest.

Value Public Input

GENERAL ISSUE

- If people expend time to participate, they need to know in very clear ways that their time and input was appreciated, valued, and relevant to the process outcome.

TOPICS

- The process must be respectful of participants' input.
- Feedback mechanisms during the process can demonstrate value of input.
- There is a need to clearly link plan outcomes to public inputs.

SOME COMMENTS WE RECEIVED

That our contributions are taken seriously and acted upon.

It would be nice if government would listen rather than just pay lip-service.

Help plan - not tell us what they are going to do.

I would like to see those in charge to really "hear" those that voice their opinions.

The process is slow and largely ineffective in regard to "feedback".

People do not pay attention because public input is ignored.

Be sure public involvement is early enough to feel valued. More media (objective) coverage to ensure participation.

Would like to have feedback as to decision regarding planning in relation to public opinion.

I would like some assurance that public involvement resulted in some change - that it was not simply window-dressing.

Give the public a feeling their opinion is important. To have an "engineer" tell you you are stupid is enough to turn anyone off.

Our opinions taken into rightful consideration.

Clear understanding of the uses of input.

Recognize Public Involvement Problems

GENERAL ISSUE

- There are real problems with respect to involving members of the general public which need to be recognized if they are going to be resolved.

TOPICS

- The timing of opportunities for involvement must be carefully developed so as to allow broad participation.

- The greater the openness of a process to the lay-public, the greater the involvement of that public.

- There is a general need to equip the public so they can participate effectively. This includes background information of legislation, technical matters, and issues emerging in local debate.

SOME COMMENTS WE RECEIVED

Parents cannot attend unless there is some support or arrangement for childcare!

Need to have more meetings to fit with people's varied and hectic schedules. If people cannot attend the ONLY background meeting, they will be shut out of the process.

I feel the public gets plenty of opportunities to be involved and in fact, have an impact on decisions made.

Most people have little time for evening meetings, must take the process to the workplace. Don't hold meeting during busy seasonal work times.

Local involvement carries the most weight. Decisions should not be heavily influenced by outside communities/cities which are far removed from the site in question.

As long as the general public takes part in resource planning - not just government employees.

Public involvement before management plans are drafted and implemented.

Easier public access - do not know how to get involved.

When public involved, they should study very carefully before they opened their mouth. I think it is very difficult to make decision if they do not know what to do.

Process only seems to reach general public if there is an issue that effects them right away - hard to get people out to participate. Need to get better representation from women and First Nations.

Understanding that Interest Groups are not necessarily the “Public”

GENERAL ISSUE

- Deep concerns were raised about sector and interest group models of public participation.

TOPICS

- The role of special interest groups was widely acknowledged with the warning that such a role should not overwhelm the process.
- A process cannot be labelled public participation unless the local general public has an opportunity to play a significant role.
- There is a strongly held view that this issue can undermine the legitimacy of a resource planning process.

SOME COMMENTS WE RECEIVED

Would like to see the public leaders pay more attention to the general public.

Ensure narrow special interests do not supersede broad stakeholder consensus.

Remove the special interest groups from the process and listen more to the people directly affected who live and work in the community.

A larger response to resource planning from the “average” person is required to get a true picture of what the public’s true opinions are! How to achieve that is anyone’s guess.

Realizing all the public cannot be involved in groups, but when major decisions are made in a particular area, those members of public should be advised by written material on choices, then a voting process should be included, with the majority kept in mind.

Listen more to people directly affected by planning of resources. Their health, homes and livelihood may be at risk, but often industry doesn’t seem to care.

I’m unfamiliar with process - I’m not sure if public involvement results in representing general population or special interest groups.

Less attention paid to professional lobbyist groups.

I think fragmentation through ‘interest groups’ indicates that we don’t have ‘communities’.

General Public Capacity Building

GENERAL ISSUE

- There was wide recognition that only a knowledgeable public can effectively participate.

TOPICS

- Public education affects the quality of public input.
- Public education also affects the breadth of participation in the process.
- On-going public capacity building must be an integral part of any natural resource planning and decision-making process.
- Must include and recognize the value of different types of knowledge, including folk and indigenous knowledge of local area and resources.

SOME COMMENTS WE RECEIVED

A community must develop values around public involvement whether it is for resource planning or whatever. All too often political will takes over from public input.

More education of the general public. Many are afraid to get involved because they do not understand it.

Many people in these communities are well educated - what they need is to be better informed about the particulars of the issue or process.

The public should be "made" more educated on these matters by TV programs or professional meetings/classes for the younger generation.

More education of the public on the values/interests at stake.

I am quite convinced that the real key to success will be not only a process of public involvement but, rather, the prospect of real public ownership and management. To do this, public education and perceptions need to be developed together.

For small communities it is important to advise when meetings are and generally educate the public.

To invite in advance and ask associations for parts of the community for input on questions before the meeting is to take place so this is well thought out before addressed by planning department.

PART - IV

INFORMATION THROUGHOUT THE PROCESS

As identified by our various respondents, there is a great need for access to relevant and understandable information on a timely basis. Information must be available at the start of the process in order to create a level playing field among participants. It must also be available throughout the course of the process in order to keep participants as up-to-date on deliberations as possible. The concern was also clearly expressed that the type of information accepted into the process not be limited or restricted.

There is a related concern about information availability to the general public. Again, timely, relevant, and readable information is what people are asking for. They have little use for legal notices couched in jargon and legal boundary definitions. They also have little use for publication of highly technical reviews or reports which the educated public is not likely to understand.

Those we interviewed also suggested a wide range of ways by which to increase the flow of information. Suggestions included ways to get information out to participants, out to the general public, and within the process itself. While involvement issues are significant challenges for any consultation process, more effective sharing and openness about the process, the information going into it, and the recommendations coming out of it, would be of great assistance to both participants, managers, and the general public.

Access to Base Information

GENERAL ISSUE

- There is a critical need that all groups and participants start with the same basic information base.

TOPICS

- Information access is vital to process equity.
- There must be clarity about the sources and quality of information which is made available.
- There are a variety of ways by which to communicate basic background information.

SOME COMMENTS WE RECEIVED

Easier access to all relevant information.

Initial information gathering and discussions with those directly affected.

Give the public an unbiased history of the issue so they are better equipped to form their own opinion.

As much hard data as possible presented on the consequences of different options.

Clear uncontradicted information. How do we know who is correct??

More active roles for the public. Maybe a tour of the proposed site by a professional who could answer questions on the spot.

All types of information should be welcomed and included in consideration - not simply that which supports the most powerful 'players' at the table.

Information Sharing as Process Proceeds

GENERAL ISSUE

- It is important to keep information flow open as the process proceeds.

TOPICS

- Information sharing derives from the growth of knowledge within the process itself.
- There must be information flow both within and outside direct process participants.
- The openness of information sharing is generally taken as a sign of good faith cooperation.
- Should develop ways to access broader range of information, including lab or technical reports on specific issues being debated.
- Should also look at examples from other places and jurisdictions to see what has, or has not, worked so the process does not “re-invent the wheel” or repeat some of the same mistakes.

SOME COMMENTS WE RECEIVED

Feedback is essential in order for the process to continue or succeed.

More frequent updates through the media - This would keep “surprises” to the public at a minimum. Unfortunately, limited staff (very limited in “Planning”) and funding preclude the time needed to do this and other “nice-to-do” things.

Make the public more aware of what’s happening - good and bad.

More follow up on the progress to the interested parties.

Decisions to be based on scientific studies (which public have been made aware of) and not withheld for political reasons. Eg. Fisheries.

Flyers to households - announcing plans; Have personnel go to schools - involve young students - it is their future - jobs - or lack of jobs.

Maybe an unbiased reporter to follow the “story” and keep the public up to date in the newspaper, radio, TV, etc. That way if people become interested then they can see for themselves and maybe join the debate at a later time.

Broaden Consultation Options

GENERAL ISSUE

- There is a call for more and varied ways by which to increase information flow as people find existing ones limited and outdated.

TOPICS

- There is a need to increase the breadth of consultation.
- Many ways of soliciting information and providing feedback are now available and should be experimented with to see what is appropriate and what did not work.
- May need to consider a “professional facilitator” to assist local consultation.
- This can create a sense of openness and confidence in the process.

SOME COMMENTS WE RECEIVED

Progress Reports on achievements of goals as process moves beyond primary planning into management and fine tuning, published in simple format like report card or score sheet.

Presentations of clubs and individuals in this community are excellent and informative.

No, may be overdone now. I think there is ample opportunity for anyone to participate in resource planning now.

That before final decisions are made that a questionnaire go out to all householders (public) for final feedback.

Public hearings / more focus groups/ more usable public opinion surveys.

Set up web sites so that a larger number of people will contribute opinions.

MOF open house meetings seem to work well if there is enough interest to bring people out - they provide opportunity for one on one discussions of problems and solutions.

A toll free telephone number to the governing group.

I agree with the requirement for independent facilitation in all processes.

Facilitator can help with obtaining a ‘common’ understanding by all participants prior to information exchange.

PART - V

PROCESS MANAGEMENT

A great deal of frustration has been expressed with respect to the functioning and management of natural resource planning and decision-making processes. Those in charge of administering such processes often struggle against very restrictive legislative requirements and limited budgets. Those coming to participate in the process want more certainty about what is to happen, the time line involved, etc.. While there were contradictory opinions expressed on topics such as openness and time lines (after all, we talked with people in six communities where a range of public participation processes have been underway), all wanted more clarity on these matters.

A good deal of frustration for all parties involved with these processes could be mitigated by setting forth at the outset an outline of expectations connected with the mechanical organization of the processes. Even where there is uncertainty about one or more 'mechanical' issues (such as the exact time lines to be followed, for example), as long as all parties have the same understanding of expectations going into the process they can deal with changes to those expectations as the process evolves. It is when parties have quite different expectations that conflicts most often arise as the various processes have unfolded.

Open Process

GENERAL ISSUE

- A need for both a welcoming atmosphere and a transparency of process.

TOPICS

- Openness is critical to legitimacy.
- Openness is important for bringing people into the process.
- Openness also refers to “broadness of vision” and the ‘mind set’ of participants and the recognized need to work cooperatively towards shared solutions.
- It is important for participants to see what has happened with recommendations after the process was completed.

SOME COMMENTS WE RECEIVED

Since meetings are not always convenient, issues at hand might be submitted, clearly and in-depth, to the local newspaper. Concerns could then be expressed by mail or media for all to see.

Open meetings that are not controlled by appointed bureaucrats.

Make it open - have a transparent decision making process - if companies do not want to participate and open their books, they do not get our resources.

Having all diversified groups participate and have all meetings open to the public.

Bringing people from all backgrounds, join together to give input.

Different people should be from different political parties when decisions are made so it is not just one sided.

Limit the number of groups/people involved in the decision making process to those who have or will be impacted by the local decision.

The problem with people coming to represent ‘sectors’ is that this may be all they end up representing and you lose the capacity to work for the good of the whole rather than simply their own sector.

Having an open question period.

Allowing the public to speak openly with their concerns.

Timelines

GENERAL ISSUE

- There is a need for a clear timeline and markers/milestones of progress.

TOPICS

- There is a need to establish benchmarks so all can evaluate process progress.
- Resource planning process managers sometimes face a “no win” situation in the public’s desire for long vs. short timeframes.
- Timeline clarity is important to avoid situations where decisions to cut short or lengthen discussion seem arbitrary.

SOME COMMENTS WE RECEIVED

Time and information. It takes time for some issues to be fully understood and to cover all possible areas of discussion. And all information should be presented clearly and honestly so as to be able to make a decision.

Only if the time is given to process information and allow for possible change - flexible timetables are needed, not ‘we have to be started by ...’, as this often leaves no time to look at what public has said.

Need more practical, expedient processes.

Reasonably quicker solutions.

Improve time lines to become more deadline oriented.

More time, more resources.

Consensus based processes will require a fall-back decision-making mechanism (eg: two-thirds majority) to meet time frames and avoid participant burnout.

PART - VI

CAUTIONS

Despite considerable hard work, and often the best of intentions, public participation processes are replete with pitfalls. These pitfalls can quickly undermine the legitimacy of the process, the confidence of those involved in the process, and the support of the general public. A number of these pitfalls have been identified thus far in this report. Some additional points are listed in this final section. Again, most will not be of surprise to those with experience in natural resource planning debates but they should not be ignored because the consequences can be damaging.

An addendum to this summary of noted pitfalls is that public consultation processes can achieve many positive outcomes beyond simply the resource plan. Among these are new community 'visions', a renewed sense of confidence in the local economy, environment, leaders, and institutions, and the reaffirmation which comes from building on local success. Such processes can also play a part in recapturing the history and sense of place of small communities as past activities and events are re-told in planning information exercises. In British Columbia, the past twenty years have been marked by considerable disruption and restructuring in resource industries and the communities dependent upon them. Successful resource planning exercises which involve a broad cross-section of the community can also serve to re-generate senses of hope about the future among local residents.

Most Needed Ingredient

GENERAL ISSUE

- Cooperation, trust, and common sense are the most cited ingredients in all successful group activities.

SOME COMMENTS WE RECEIVED

Those in charge use common sense. Some are so “smart they are stupid”.

Cooperation and common sense will not prevail without mutual respect.

Trust!

Numbers - lots of involvement by many

Group or process chair requires specific training in mediation etc., as many of these processes involve emotional debates.

Better co-operation between everyone involved.

Need to be clear from the start that these are slow processes. We can only be involved as public when we have practice with the responsibilities of real resource ownership.

A better understanding of fundamental terms like ‘economics’ - if we substituted ‘good housekeeping’ for economics in our debates the public input processes would be further along.

Forest sector is one part of a holistic economy.

We need a clear understanding of all the benefits and costs of different resource management options.

Geographic scale is also an important factor. Community involvement will be greater and broader when a process is focussed on an area that people relate to and identify with.

User friendly documents!

Good and committed facilitators. Negotiation or conflict resolution training.

Perceived Dangers

GENERAL ISSUE

- Real or imaged problems can derail public participation processes.

TOPICS

- The role of experts and managers must be clear and valued.
- The role of public participation and public input must also be clear and valued.
- Openness at all stages of the process can avoid the pitfall of “hidden decision-making power”.

SOME COMMENTS WE RECEIVED

Local opinion still has little influence ... Not just community token input

What is the use, no one pays any attention to what we say ... Old boy network.

Don't forget that there will be a transition/implementation phase after the consultation - how this is done is critical to the lasting impression of the value of the consultation exercise.

The vested interests seem always to win what they want.

Take it out of the hands of the vested interests. If a company is doing the “process” to get resources it is a conflict of interest.

My biggest concern is the quality of the public input. Too often the extremes are very vocal but the general public is not heard from. Also, lack of knowledge generally prevails.

Unfortunately in the public consultation process, specific interest groups have the ability to stop or stall a decision. I feel this is wrong, however, I do not know how it can be stopped.

Let the experts manage. Too much emphasis is being placed on “mythology” emanating from vocal but uninformed public.

The forest companies must realize that resources belong to the citizens and not to the forest industries.

Unfortunately I do not believe it works well. A very vocal minority will in most cases override a silent majority.

As hard as it is to organize processes that are broadly inclusive, we need to accept that there is really only a component of the community that is interested in “planning”.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

This report is one of several produced by the “Community Participation in the New Forest Economy” research project housed in the Faculty of Natural Resources and Environmental Studies at the University of Northern British Columbia. Public consultation is not a new phenomena in British Columbia and this report draws heavily upon the responses of people with experience in natural resources planning and management processes. By putting forward a set of core principles to which managers and participants alike can look for guidance over the course of public consultation exercises it is our hope that this report will be of very practical use.

In our research and consultations five key sets of issues were identified. These included: the importance of consultation, the need for clarity of process, the need to involve the “public”, the requirement to manage information flow throughout the process, and the need for careful process management. As well, people identified some generic “cautions” for which those involved with public consultation processes may wish to watch.

The people we talked to were clear about the continuing importance of public consultation in natural resources management and planning processes. There is a strong feeling that there are positive benefits from this type of public involvement and that the public now coming to expect opportunities for significant input. One of the most frustrating aspects of public consultation, however, concerns the need for clarity and understanding among participants of the process itself. Critical areas of concern centre upon “who will participate” and who will make the “final” decisions. Building upon this point, one of the more challenging tasks in public consultation is to actually engage the general public in dialogue. If the public feel they have a valued role, and can see tangible outcomes from local involvement, then they will be more willing to contribute over the long term. Yet, to be able to participate throughout a lengthy process, information must be available so as to maintain a “level playing field” among participants. Finally, the research identified a need for both a welcoming atmosphere and transparency of process in the functioning and management of natural resources planning and decision-making processes.

The notes of caution raised by people we interviewed suggest that despite considerable hard work and best intentions, public participation processes are replete with pitfalls which can undermine the legitimacy of the process, the confidence of those involved, and the support of the general public. Cooperation and common sense are cited as some of the most needed ingredients to overcome some of these pitfalls.

If care and attention are given to the points raised in this report, public consultation may be a positive experience. This is important because there are many benefits to successful consultation processes beyond simply “the plan”. When such are positive experiences, they can achieve many outcomes including new community ‘visions’, a renewed sense of confidence in the local economy, environment, leaders, and institutions, and the reaffirmation which comes from building on local success.