Forestry has been identified by Indian organizations at all levels as an economic and social development priority. The 1.3 million hectares of productive forest lands on Canada’s Indian Reserves are the base for many renewable resources including forage, wildlife, timber, recreation, water, and fish. However, statistics show these forest lands have been severely mismanaged. For example, the commercial timber harvest from B.C.’s Indian lands diminished by 67% over the period 1977-87, and the forest management plans produced for 53% of B.C.’s Indian Lands under the FRDA call for major rehabilitation work on virtually every hectare of immature forest on the Reserves.


Using two representative Bands as case studies, the Stuart Trembleur Lake Band and the Coldwater Band, both in British Columbia, the study’s objectives were:

1) to evaluate and analyse the social and economic returns from Indian forestry programs
2) to demonstrate the offsetting, rather than incremental, nature of investments in long-term forest management relative to federal and Indian government spending on other economic development, health, and social welfare programs for Indians.

Through a documentation approach, the research plan was to present a benefit/cost analysis referenced to the three involved groups: the particular Bands, the provincial government and the federal government. However, it was impossible to make objective comparisons of the socio-economic situations before and after comprehensive forestry programs due to the limited history of Bands implementing comprehensive integrated forest management programs and the dearth of appropriate socio-economic information on the Bands. This information problem was viewed as significant to the issue of evaluating forestry programs, so the study was continued:

1) to draw attention to these difficulties;
2) to draw such conclusions as were possible;
3) to develop an empirical framework for analysing the returns from Indian forestry programs; and,
4) to develop baseline Information and systems for future reference.

In general, the research showed that, for various reasons, only a fraction of the overall economic and social returns from timber harvested from Indian lands accrued to the Indian People:

- the shortage of trained Indian workers.
- the small number of Indian-owned logging and silvicultural contracting companies.
- the shortage of Indian-owned businesses to take advantage of the economic spin-offs from forestry activities.
- the almost total lack of Indian involvement in the wood products manufacturing sector.

While evidence showed this situation was beginning to change as Indian People became more interested and involved in managing their forest lands and as funding and technical support increased, the research also indicated major constraints to improving the level of forest management on the Reserves and to increasing related socio-economic returns to the Indian People. Five constraints were identified:

- The Indian Act and regulations provide no legislative framework for proper forestry.
- Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) lacks policy, commitment, and adequate staffing to fulfill its trust responsibility to Indian People in the area of forestry.
- The Indian People’s cultural background limits their ability to enforce their resource management perspective in highly technical resource management situations. This in turn can lead to frustration, limited enthusiasm, and reduced commitment of some Bands.
- The amount of forest land per capita on the Reserves is too small to support the necessary employment and economic development for a viable forest industry and this situation will be exacerbated by the current level of growth in the Indian population.
Government job creation and training programs involving Indians in forest management have been inadequate and largely ineffectual due to a lack of continuity, inappropriate stipulations, and inadequate funding for training, wages, supervision, and equipment.

The investigator identified a problem common to all government programs associated with Indian forestry. He identified that the programs are rarely flexible enough to cover or allow support for multiple use of forest lands or non-traditional forestry practices. An example given is the otherwise highly successful Indian Forest Lands component of the Canada-B.C. Forest Resource Agreement which excludes such forest land management practices as Christmas tree farming and range enhancement. This report maintains that this longstanding problem exists because the government's objectives in these programs rarely coincide with the Band's own land-use priorities.

The report concludes that the Bands themselves must initiate, develop, and control their involvements in forestry if such involvements are to be successful. While government can greatly facilitate and speed-up the process, as well as enhance the chances of success, the government cannot parachute comprehensive forestry programs onto the Bands and expect real success.

Nine comprehensive recommendations to facilitate Indian forestry programs and enhance their socio-economic returns to Indian People are suggested:

1) Funding now available to the Indian Bands for the myriad of federal (forestry) job creation programs should be reallocated on an annual lump-sum basis directly to the Bands for self-administering.

2) Forestry job training funding should be made available in 5-year allotments (renewable every two years) to Bands with comprehensive forestry programs/plans. Forestry job training programs should be developed by the Bands themselves (aided by Canada Manpower, INAC, Forestry Canada, training institutions, and/or provincial forestry officials) to provide for the Bands' social and technical forestry requirements and priorities.

3) INAC should be removed from day-to-day involvement. Instead, a bilateral or multilateral agreement should be set up between the Government of Canada and the Indian People, whereby Indian organizations would implement a community-based, comprehensive forest rehabilitation and manpower training program aimed at creating a self-sufficient Indian forestry sector within ten years. Technical support over that period would be provided, at the Bands' discretion, by a combination of Indian expertise, Forestry Canada, provincial forestry departments, and consultants/contractors. This approach is similar to one now operating in the U.S.A. and would require the Indian People to nominate an agency or agencies of their choice to organize and control such a program.

4) The Indian Act and regulations need to be broadened to provide for forest management, not just harvesting.

5) Access to off-Reserve forest resources will be necessary for success due to the small land bases held by most Bands and the growing work forces. This will require provincial government support since the vast majority of forest lands in Canada are controlled by the provinces.

6) There is urgent need to provide for the ongoing collection and analysis of baseline social and economic data to produce statistics for use by the Bands in formulating their development plans.

7) A flexible yet standardized forest data and mapping system (computerized) is needed to provide a basic data manipulation and planning tool for Individual Bands as well as an umbrella data collection and management facility for regional and national planning.

8) There is a need for "life skills", entrepreneurial, and small business management training to be coupled with venture capital for establishing Indian controlled, private sector companies.

9) Organizations such as the B.C. Intertribal Forestry Association should be fully supported and encouraged.

Copies of this 56-page report, The Social and Economic Returns from Investments in Forest Management Programs on Indian Lands - Two Case Studies, by A. Hopwood, are available while supplies last, from:

Forestry Canada
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