

THREE DIFFERENT ISLANDS, THREE DIFFERENT TALES: TRYING TO LOG ON BC'S SOUTH COAST

By Sandra Bishop

Controversy is not new to BC's forest industry, especially on the coast where cottage dwellers, recreational boaters, tourism, fish farms, marinas and yacht clubs, to name a few, all have a stake in our supernatural British Columbia. But the level of controversy can change depending on where you're operating and how you consult. Three different islands—Maurelle, Gambier and Nelson—tell us three different logging tales.

Currently, BC's coastal working forest makes up 2.5 million hectares, a smaller area than the 3.14 million hectares that has been conserved through the establishment of parks, ecological reserves and protected areas.

"The Crown portion of Gambier Island is part of BC's working forest, along with areas of Maurelle Island and Nelson Island—all located within the Sunshine Coast Forest District," states Dwight

Markvoort compares BC's working forest to the Agricultural Land Reserve which gives priority to farmers by preventing encroachment on farm land by other users.

Recently, timber harvesting has come under fire on islands like Maurelle where a BC Timber Sale was recently logged and Gambier, which is in the process of being awarded two new woodlots to complement the existing woodlot there. Critics are vocally opposing logging on Gambier Island while more and more loggers are saying enough is enough; it's time to stand up and protect the working forest, a timber harvesting land base that has been gradually chipped away at on the coast.

Yochim, a past TLA Executive Director.

Since 1990, the allowable annual cut on the coast has fallen more than 23 per cent. "That's pretty much the equivalent of the Interior's loss from the mountain pine beetle infestation," Yochim points out. "People in the Interior are up in arms over the impact of this, the loss of jobs, the economic fallout. Here on the coast, we're having the same loss and hardly anyone's aware of it."

Photo series: Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations



Past TLA President Bill Markvoort's company, JWM Forestry, was responsible for harvesting Maurelle Island and has a bid in on Gambier's woodlots. He compares BC's working forest to the Agricultural Land Reserve which gives priority to farmers by preventing encroachment on farm land by other users. He says the TLA's objective is to maintain the working forest in British Columbia.

"The working forest is allocated through BC's *Forest Act*. These low elevation forestlands with high quality second growth timber and relatively low harvesting costs that are accessible on Maurelle and Gambier Islands can be compared to the high quality farm land we have in the Fraser Valley. The working forest, much like the ALR, needs this high value land to help balance the very remote and rugged terrain on the coast with lower quality timber and higher cost harvesting."

Even though Gambier Island has been heavily logged since the early 1900s and until Bill 28's take-back in 2004 was part of Canfor's operation, groups like the Gambier Island Conservancy are opposed to the two small-scale woodlots of 6,000 cubic metres

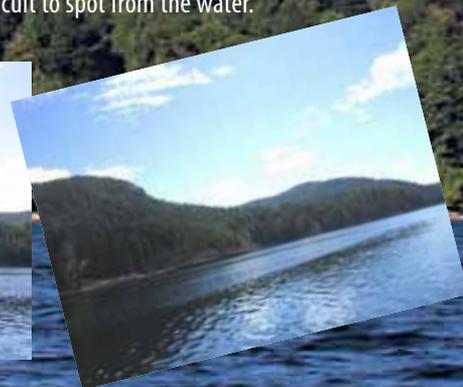
per year combined replacing that long-standing forest licence.

Warren Hansen worked for Canfor as a registered professional forester when the company had harvesting rights on Gambier. An avid mountain biker who still lives and works in the area, Hansen says "the woodlot program is the right tenure for the island because it is naturally tailored to be specific to local issues, is more likely to be locally owned and to operate with local contractors that live in the surrounding community."

Furthermore, woodlots generate a significant amount of full-time, part-time and seasonal employment including jobs in planning, harvesting, road construction and maintenance, reforestation, silviculture and small-scale timber processing.

But once again timber and tourism is at odds. Opponents worry that Gambier Island is located in a prime recreational area where the mostly weekend cottagers enjoy its beaches, trails and lakes. But registered professional foresters like Hansen and BC Timber Sales' Norm Kempe say most often timber harvesting operations improve recreation in these areas.

As you can see from the photos below, the Maurelle Island harvesting is very difficult to spot from the water. The photo in the background is of Gambier Island.



Bill Errico who owns the existing woodlot on Gambier Island agrees. “The people I see and talk to on Gambier support my woodlot. When I build roads I leave them there for the future. People like it because they can walk through the forest. More people are coming over to the Island now because of the openings and the trails the woodlot creates.”

As BC Timber Sales’ Planning Forester for the Sunshine Coast, Kempe has 30 years’ experience in forestry engineering and was the planning forester for the cutblocks on Maurelle Island, which also faced substantial opposition. “The tourism industry, particularly the kayak industry, was using the channel pretty extensively for their business,” he recalls.

Situated on the Okisollo Channel in the Discovery Islands, Maurelle Island is “one of the few areas where you have inland waters that are protected and it attracts a lot of boaters and, more recently, the kayaking industry,” Kempe explains. “There are marine parks and whale watching. Cruise ships pass by and so do BC Ferries. It’s an area that’s heavily

used, no doubt about it, but the area along Okisollo Channel has a history of logging, too, that dates back probably to the late 1800s.”

Kempe’s planning work for the cutblocks on Maurelle Island spanned two years, planning and consulting with stakeholders. Still, harvesting was delayed about six to eight months to improve dialogue and address concerns raised by the tourism industry through the consultation process. In the end, Kempe reflects it was “a bit of an education” for both sectors.

“We didn’t appreciate the extent of the tourism sector in the area. We had a sense of the groups we needed to consult, but we lacked an accurate understanding of who all the participants were. Plus, to complicate matters the sector wasn’t very organized at the start.”

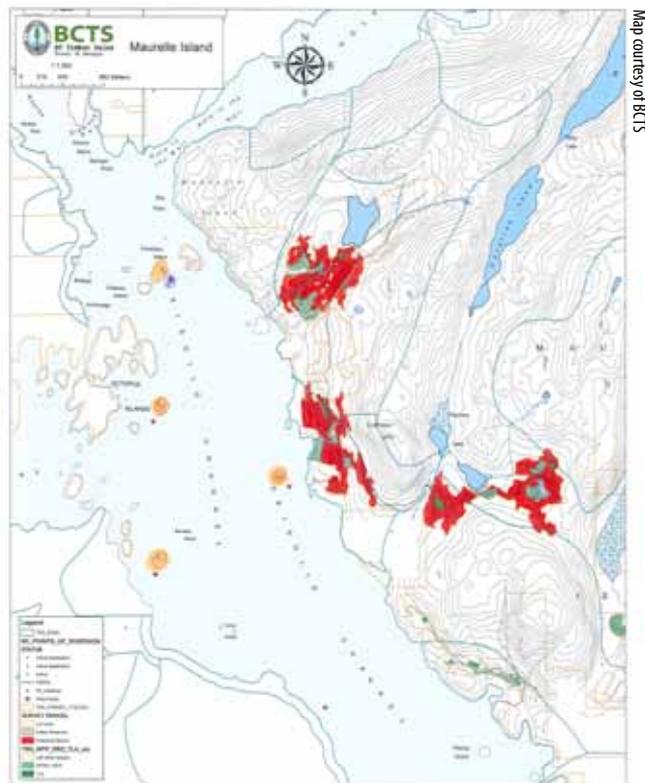
Admittedly, forestry is a complicated business and was not well understood by the other stakeholders. “They weren’t familiar with the planning requirements and regulations that are in place to manage the visual landscape so we wanted to show them

visually through our modeling what the area would look like from the water after harvesting,” explains Kempe.

Along all scenic corridors in BC the visual landscape is managed by visual quality objectives that limit the amount of visible harvesting allowed. Maurelle Island was restricted by a partial retention objective which limited the visible harvesting to between one to seven per cent, which means “there’s recognition that it’s a visually sensitive landscape for tourism stakeholders and the public.”

Consultation was constructive and, in the end, improved the outcome. “When we first started modeling, we worked with the tourism industry to determine key viewpoints along the Okisollo Channel. We had discussions on where their primary kayaks routes were and where they stopped for picnics and camping. Then we incorporated that information into our planning so we would have minimal impact on the views from those locations.”

By both industries working together and communicating concerns, solutions were reached. “There were substantial buffers put along the foreshore, which means you’re leaving more timber behind than we would normally,” said Kempe. “We also incorporated numer-



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ous retention patches into the design of the cutblocks so they would blend in with the natural rock terrain features.”

But of greater significance was the decision to barge the logs off the Island instead of using a log dump, which eliminated the booming ground construction and logging activity near the water. “In addition to the barging, when the tourism season was at its height in July and August we committed to no log barging during those months.” Kempe goes on to say, “I was very happy with the outcome of this project. The post-harvest viewscape closely matched what we had modeled. Both the licensee and the contractor, Alpine Logging, also did an excellent job of road building, harvesting and tidying up the barge loading area and log storage site. I think this will help us build trust with the tourism sector.”

Doug Sladey’s company, Sladey Timber Ltd., has logged Nelson Island for 30 years with little resistance from the community so he struggles to understand the heated controversy over Gambier’s woodlots. Located directly across from Pender Harbour, Nelson Island is

its viewscape and is also home to some high profile cottagers, including some well-known environmentalists.

Sladey harvests up to 35,000 or 40,000 cubic metres annually on Nelson Island. In contrast, over five years Gambier’s woodlots combined will harvest a maximum of 30,000 cubic metres. “Heck, I could take that out in a wheelbarrow!” laughs Sladey. “All it’s going to do is improve things on Gambier.”

In July, the Minister of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations toured the Discovery Islands with the Minister of State for Tourism and Small Business to view tourism and logging operations. Minister Yamamoto commented, “I was pleased to see the economic contributions of both the tourism and forestry sectors in the area. We do understand that for regional economies to thrive both of these sectors need to successfully co-exist. My staff continues to work with the Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations to ensure the concerns of all stakeholders are considered.”

Markvoort concurs, emphasizing the importance of not losing sight of these considerations. Harvesting the 85,000 cubic metres on Maurelle Island alone contributed \$8.75 million to the provincial and local economies. “Broken down, JWM Forestry paid \$3.6 million in stumpage and fee in lieu taxes of \$300,000 to the province, \$2.85 million went to harvesting and road building costs, \$1 million to the marine transportation sector for barging and towing and another \$1 million to the sorting operation on the Sunshine Coast.”

Yochim reiterates, “If we continue to chip away at the size of our sustainable working forest, BC’s coastal communities and the province will give up real jobs and lose millions of dollars of local revenue that pays for schools and hospitals. I keep saying: It’s not tourism or forestry; it’s tourism and forestry.”▲

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