



SHARING THE RESOURCE: LOGGERS AND MOUNTAIN BIKERS WORK TOGETHER

By Pieta Woolley

Meet Yer Maker. Nemesis. Crouching Squirrel Hidden Monkey. 4Play.

These terrifyingly-named mountain bike trails are just a few of Squamish's best assets. The region is a global destination for single-track cycling—an attraction which has helped make it British Columbia's fastest-growing city, and among the youngest and wealthiest.

You'll often find Alistair McCrone in the woods on his 2014 bright orange Norco Range. The Recreation Sites and Trails officer working for the Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resources, has lived here since 2011, in part to take advantage of the world-class bike infrastructure. That same forest where he rides has an allowable annual harvest or cut (AAC) of 665,000 cubic metres a year—that's 16,625 full logging trucks each year. His job is to ensure that in Sea to Sky country and on the lower Sunshine Coast, both riders and forestry operations can happily coexist.

"It's getting difficult here," McCrone acknowledged, noting that enthusiastic trail builders both with and without permits have created a dense network through the working forest. "You can't drop a cutblock just about anywhere without impacting mountain biking or climbing or a lake."

So you'd expect constant conflict. But

actually, McCrone revealed, it's pretty minimal.

Back in 2006, he explained, tensions mounted as recreation and forestry faced off. BC Timber Sales planned to log a favourite trail: The Powerhouse Plunge. Built in 1996 for the Test of Metal race, one online review warns that "the steep technical switchbacks of the Plunge will have your eyeballs a popping. Stop at a shelter at the trail's end and check your shorts."

Disappointed with the proposed 25-metre buffer, local politicians and the cycling community went to the media. In *The Vancouver Sun*, then-mayor Ian Sutherland complained, "We're concerned because this is a high-value economic area... There's been no meaningful consultation." And, in Whistler's *Pique Newsmagazine*, the Squamish Off-Road Cycling Association's then-president Cliff Miller declared, "The time has come for the province to truly recognize that the backcountry is highly valuable as recreation land."

A decade later, the story has a happy ending. The Powerhouse Plunge incident forced cyclists and forestry planners to come together under McCrone's predecessor, acknowledge that recreation and forestry can coexist with

compromise, and make a deal. The immediate result was the buffer extended to 50 metres. In the long term, though, it cracked open dialogue between recreation and forestry, leading to a decade of real conversation.

"Everyone has got to be able to operate on the land," said McCrone. "Harvesting, recreation and wildlife. You've got to make it work."

Where recreation and forestry collide, making it work and getting to that happy ending is a skill we all need to develop. From McCrone's story it's clear it happens more often than we think already. But happy endings between recreation and forestry don't make for good headlines.

As you already know, though, the on-the-ground relationships between logging companies and recreation groups are far more complex than what's often presented in newspapers and on TV. It's never a black and white issue.

If you, like McCrone, are also a mountain biker—or skier, or ATVer, or camper or horseback rider—you likely already have a solid individual relationship with other backwoods users in your town. And if you, like McCrone, work in the forest industry in areas

heavily used by outdoorsy types, you've probably already had a taste of negotiating around trails.

Was your experience good or bad?

At January's annual Truck Loggers Association convention in Vancouver, the executive director of BC's Wilderness Tourism Association (WTA) was on hand to offer some advice to logging contractors, on a panel called "Not In My Backyard."

"There are some excellent examples of cooperation and working together and some not-so-good experiences....We're hoping to build good relationships," said Scott Benton, mentioning that he represents 2,200 small and medium-sized businesses across BC. "We're not interested in having forestry not happen... we want to work with you. We want you to help us succeed."

With more people enjoying the working forest, Benton said, "it's starting to get crowded."

Communication helps head off conflicts before they begin, he said. Let other users know ahead of time what your plans are and how it might impact them—and work on mitigating the im-



Photo: Gibson Pictures

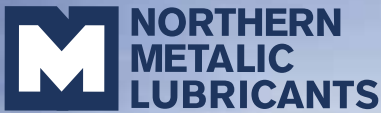
The Half Nelson is the most famous trail in Squamish and one of the most famous downhill bike trails in the world. It's built within the working forest.

pacts. For licensees, the best scenario is a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with your local tourism businesses, outlining how both organizations will behave in good faith. In the Bulkley Valley, for example, there is an MOU between the Wetzin'Kwa Community Forest and the local ski club. When licensees and local communities are on the same page,

life is much simpler for the timber harvesting contractor who can get caught in the middle of disagreements.

"Can this be done everywhere? Probably not. I'm a realist," said Benton. "But can it be done in more places? Yes. It makes conversations easier to have."

Politically, Benton noted, the association is pursuing the same kind of



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legislative framework that forestry now enjoys—a way for conflicts to be managed with clarity.

In the meantime, the WTA's website lays out what the industry expects from forestry: "Tourism operators should be automatically notified when harvesting plans are being prepared, and forest licensees should be responsible for taking the interests of tourism operators into consideration when developing harvesting plans. This should include such considerations as access road development and deactivation, harvesting timelines, as well as how licensees will manage such tourism attributes as trails, viewscapes, and other site-specific amenities."

On the same panel, the chair of the United Steelworkers Wood Council, Bob Matters, patiently explained why BC welcomes a forest industry. Forestry jobs, he said, pay mortgages, raise families and build communities. The working forest is governed by among the strictest regulations in the world, and it's sustainable. The industry is worth preserving and shouldn't be shunted aside.

"For many decades, the public understood the importance of the working forest," he said. "We can no longer take this for granted... We do not need more tree museums. We need security for timber access."

Shrugging off tourism's importance is tempting. The average tour guide salary is just \$13.50 an hour—whereas among forestry professionals it's \$31.25 (both according to livingin-canada.com.) Forestry greatly exceeds BC's living wage, which is between \$16.52 and \$20.64 an hour according to the Living Wage for Families Campaign. The gap should make anyone who is interested in eliminating family poverty in the province think twice about replacing forestry with tourism.

However, that simple analysis does a disservice to the bigger picture. Tourism has become a contender. The number of people employed in the forest sector has shrunk to about 65,500 direct jobs. Whereas the Wilderness Tourism Association alone represents 16,000 workers—a relatively small number, but it's growing. Plus, outdoor recreation is a key amenity credited with retaining workers in smaller communities. All together, having both forestry and tourism diversifies economic activities and helps create more stability within communities.

Why is forestry important? How is the working forest managed? Answering those questions for recreational users is critically important to conflict resolution in the woods.

In northern BC, for example, conflict is minimal because "if you don't work in resources, one of your friends or family does," explained Ben Heemskerck, Northern Region Manager for Recreation Sites and Trails BC. "Maybe it's closer to home. They just have a better understanding of it."

Also, people who live in the north tend to recreate outdoors, whether they work in industry or not. So the dynamic that you often find in Squamish and the Sunshine Coast—where city people head into the woods on a bike and encounter logging for the first time—is pretty rare in more rural regions.

Heemskerck understands this dynamic personally. An avid backcountry skier and trail runner, he grew up in the Okanagan without much connection to the resource sector. He credits his work as a researcher for the Ministry of Forests with his "aha" moment regarding the sustainability of the forest sector.

"I realized forests were not a static thing. Having a picture of a forest as a thing that doesn't change is not realistic. There's fire (Continued to page 53)

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intervals, wind events, landslides. Forests have never been static.”

Helping those that are unfamiliar understand forest science is one solid strategy. So is working together. On Boer Mountain, for example, a truly diverse group has helped develop a bike park in the Burns Lake Community Forest: Recreations and Trails BC, the Smithers Mountain Biking Association, Burns Lake Automotive Supply Ltd., Burns Lake Mountain Bike Association, Burns Lake Community Forest Ltd., Burnt Bikes, Free Growing Forestry, the Ministry of Forests, School District No. 91 and more. The project won the 2010 Premier’s Award for Innovation.

“A lot of companies here work proactively with recreation groups,” said Heemskerk. “There are always challenges, but facilitating good communication is key.”

Indeed, in Squamish, the recreation contributions of logging companies and government make a significant impact on relationships, said McCrone. Squamish Forestry, for example, replaced an entire trail when it had to shut another.



Photo: Gibson Pictures

Mountain biking and logging really came together when Dylan Ponzi rode on a loaded logging truck during the Squamish Days Loggers Sports Festival.

er. BC Timber Sales has posted several signs that say, “You’re recreating in the working forest.” Using local media to let hikers and bikers know what’s happening which areas will be off-limits far ahead of time has been effective, McCrone noted.

He gets it, because he does it.

“I bike a lot, more than most people walk,” said McCrone. “So maybe I’m more aware of what industry is doing [for recreation] than most people. I come across things on trails all the

time—bridges, signage—and I know, oh yeah, this is industry-built.”

It’s not a new idea. But communication—drawing that knowledge out of the heads of forest workers like McCrone and into the public sphere—is how the forest industry can make sure recreation and forestry continue to share the woods.▲

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