

Ancient Forest

Socio-economic Benefits of Non-timber Uses of BC's Inland Rainforest
Research Bulletin, November 2008

Why Are We Turning Thousand-year-old Cedars Into Garden Mulch?

To ask why we are turning thousand-year-old trees into garden mulch is to question our basic values. Should we seek immediate benefits or save for future generations? Should we value jobs over conservation? To answer these questions requires us to broaden our view of forests beyond timber values to include non-timber uses such as conservation, recreation, tourism, spirituality, culture, and more.

In September, 2007, Dr. David J. Connell, an Assistant Professor in the School of Environmental Planning at the University of Northern British Columbia, launched a study to explore possible answers to the matter of whether or not we should be harvesting cedars of the inland rainforest of the upper Fraser River valley. The purpose of the study is to examine the community and economic benefits of non-timber uses of this inland wet-temperate rainforest. In other words, the project is trying to assess the value of not cutting down thousand-year-old cedar trees to compare to the value of harvesting these trees.

The inland rainforest is home to a unique forest ecosystem that combines attributes of BC's coastal rainforests and Canada's northern boreal forests. The magnificence of this ancient forest rivals that of the well-known coastal rainforests of BC, yet has not received the same level or kind of attention. One of the reasons for the lack of attention on this inland rainforest

Continued on page 2

The purpose of this research bulletin is to communicate the results of on-going research on the socio-economic benefits of non-timber uses of the inland rainforest of the upper Fraser River valley in British Columbia. The information contained in this bulletin may be distributed freely with proper citation, as follows:

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Photo: David J. Connell

Why Harvest Thousand-year-old Cedars?

Continued from page 1

is its low timber value. In contrast with the high timber-value forests of Clayoquot Sound for example, the low timber-value of the hollow cedars of the upper Fraser River valley, some of which are estimated to be over one thousand years old, and perhaps two thousand years old, does not garner the same attention from industry, government, or the general public. The outcome is lower potential for conflict among alternative uses of the rainforest.

TRC Cedar's operations provide an important measure of the cedar's limited economic contributions. TRC was the primary forestry operator in the area harvesting the ancient cedars of the inland rainforest. In September, 2008, TRC's McBride operation closed indefinitely. TRC Cedar used the cedar to make posts, rails, shakes, and garden mulch. According to the company, at the time of closing TRC employed 34 people and paid \$1.5 million in wages annually. In January 2007, when it received a Northern BC Business and Technology award for forest innovation, TRC Cedar was cited as one of the economic drivers and employers of the McBride area. Notwithstanding its contributions, TRC's closure follows in the footsteps of other companies that tried harvesting the cedar of this inland rainforest. There remains at least one small timber operation in McBride that still harvests cedar.

As the few remaining stands of ancient cedars remain open to harvesting while the demand for other, non-timber uses increases, the need to ask more questions about competing values intensifies. The potential for conflict stands in sharp contrast with the limited knowledge of the rainforest's values. Its remote location, limited access, and low timber value leave the thousand year-old cedars not only under-appreciated, but also relatively unknown.

The two articles in this research bulletin focus on the Ancient Forest Interpretive Trail. The Trail is a visible and accessible portal to the inland rainforest. Understanding present activity on the Trail is a basis for estimating future activity in the valley as a whole. An important next step in the study of non-timber values is to use the data collected about use of the Trail to estimate economic benefits and impacts of future recreation and tourist activity. In addition, dollar values will be estimated for scientific research, conservation values (e.g., carbon sequestration), hunting and trapping, and other non-timber uses.

This study of the economic and community benefits of non-timber uses helps advance practices for the use and conservation of the inland rainforest that enhance the social, economic and environmental well-being of northern communities in BC. The research will advance long-term



Photo: David J. Connell



Photo: David J. Connell



Image source: www.trcedar.com

planning and land development management of the area and will assist people to respond positively to change and growth related to competing interests. Results of the research will be shared through future research bulletins.

Over 6,500 Visits to the Ancient Forest Trail

With contributions from Nowell Senior

The Ancient Forest Interpretive Trail is quickly becoming a day-trip destination for residents of central interior BC. Between June and October 2008, there were over 6,500 visits to the Trail. An estimated sixty percent of these visits were by Prince George residents. This growth of popularity speaks to the increasing awareness of the Trail -- and also to the potential for tourist and recreational uses of the upper Fraser River valley.

On September 1, 2008, which might have been the busiest day of the year, 28 vehicles were parked at the trailhead. This means that about 100 people were on the Trail at that particular moment. On average, nearly 50 people visited the Trail each day during the summer of 2008. This number is two to three times higher for a weekend day compared to a week day.

This information about Trail users is part of the socio-economic benefits study of the inland rainforest. To count visitors, a trail counter was purchased from Carson Electronics, a company located in Valemount, BC. The infrared passive counter 'sees' warm moving objects as they cross the counter's path. This is ideal for measuring trail usage. The counter was installed on May 27, 2008. Readings of the counter were recorded throughout the hiking season, and will continue through the winter and into the future. The data collected will help to estimate the potential economic impacts of tourism and recreation uses of the valley corridor.

To complement the trail counts of visitors, on-site surveys of Trail users were completed in 2007 and 2008. The information collected from Trail users lends insight to who is using the Trail and how often they might use it.

One important piece of information collected about Trail users is whether or not they are recreational users or tourists. This is important to know because tourists contribute 'new' dollars to the local economies of the upper Fraser River valley. The surveys show that about one quarter of visitors were tourists.

We also learn about Trail users by reviewing comments written in the logbook that is installed at the trailhead. Visitors are invited to write their comments on what they think about the Trail, and to give



Photo: David J. Connell

Trail count for 2008 (May 27-Oct. 10)

Summer: 4,900 visits

Fall: 1,611 visits

Total: 6,511 visits

Daily average: 48.6 visits

the name of their hometown. During the summer of 2008, the Trail hosted visitors from nine provinces, 15 U.S. states, Germany, Australia, Brazil, Belgium, Switzerland, Britain, Spain, Austria, Japan, Holland, Denmark, Czech Republic, France, Italy, Ireland, New Zealand, and Trinidad and Tobago.

Websites of interest

www.ancientcedar.ca

www.savethecedarleague.org

<http://wetbelt.unbc.ca>

www.fraserheadwaters.org

www.savespiritbear.org

www.unbc.ca/planning/ancient_cedar/index.html

Evolution of the Ancient Forest Trail

With contributions from Nowell Senior and Marc von der Gonna

The Ancient Forest Interpretive Trail officially opened on September 24, 2006. Awareness of the Trail is attributed to widespread promotion, including articles in local, provincial, and national media, the film *Block 486*, area tourism centres, and on the Internet (YouTube clips; see page 3 for a list of websites). Articles about the Trail also appeared in a Horizon/Alaskan Airlines in-flight magazine and in Milepost, an international magazine for north country travellers. The inland rainforest is also the subject of research by several University of Northern British Columbia scientists. It was also the subject of two international conferences held at UNBC.

For those who were instrumental in making this Trail possible (see sidebar), the growth in the number of visitors is very gratifying. It makes all of the hard work worthwhile. At the same time, many of these same people are responsible for maintaining the Trail. More visitors to the Trail means greater wear and tear.

The socio-economic study includes documenting the evolution of the Trail. This evolution has two components: degradation of the Trail caused by increased use; and on-going maintenance of the Trail. To date, the Caledonia Ramblers Hiking Club reported that 123 volunteers have contributed 1,190 hours (valued at \$11,900) to maintain the Trail. Total contributions to the Trail's maintenance and upgrading, including in-kind contributions, are valued at \$33,654. (An additional \$15,985 and 1,389 volunteer hours have been contributed to maintain the Driscoll Ridge Trail.)



Photos: David J. Connell

The latest round of upgrades to the Ancient Forest Trail began in October, 2008. This effort was spearheaded by McBride Community Forest Corporation (MCFC). The work currently underway is funded by the Community Development Trust, Job Opportunities Program. This program funds projects providing short-term employment for unemployed forest workers. Upgrades focus on constructing and installing boardwalks and bridges to better protect sensitive areas of the trail and make some of the crossings safer. Upgrades also include a protective layer of cedar bark mulch to protect the trail surface and make it less slippery and muddy. This work also included the installation of a toilet at the trailhead.

According to Marc von der Gonna, General Manager of MCFC, the present budget is about \$47,200, of which \$37,200 is labour and \$10,000 materials/equipment. These amounts are in addition to the volunteer contributions listed above. MCFC hopes to supplement this work with additional funds over the next two fiscal years.

The Ancient Forest Trail was established through a partnership agreement between the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, and the Arts and the Caledonia Ramblers Hiking Club. A consortium of groups built the Trail including Prince George Naturalists, The Alpine Club of Canada – Prince George Section, The Dome Creek Forest Information Committee, Prince George Activators Society – Kenneth Creek Camp, Save-The-Cedar-League, Duchess Park School students and staff, and individual outdoor enthusiasts and families. Additional support was provided by:

- Ministry of Forest – Recreation Division
- McBride Chamber of Commerce
- McBride Visitor Centre
- Ministry of Transportation and Highways
- Yellowhead Road and Bridge
- Central Interior Communications
- Prince George Backcountry Recreation Society
- University of Northern British Columbia
- Outdoor Recreation and Tourism Management Students at UNBC - 2006/7
- TD Bank – Friends of the Environment Foundation
- Signtek
- Tourism Prince George
- TRC Cedar Limited – McBride
- McBride Community Forest Corporation
- Northern Construction Special Ties Ltd. (Nor-Spec)