

NEWS RELEASE

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The Vital Signs of Forestry

Professional panel provided forest industry food for fodder

(Golden, BC) – On April 4th, forest professionals and the concerned citizens assembled at the Golden Seniors Centre to hear from regional forest and economic experts. The evening, sponsored by the Golden & District Community Foundation's Vital Signs initiative, was designed to engage local residents concerned about the present and future of the local forest industry.

A complete cross-section of the community's citizenry attended the panel speaker event, some with a lifetime spent in the woods and others who had never planted or harvested a tree. With the full continuum of experience present, the speakers approached the subject with a language that was understandable to everyone.

Registered Professional Forester & Vital Signs Committee Chair, Denise English assembled the expert guest speakers in order to bring their knowledge to the citizens of Golden & Area A. Her Committee, supported by the Golden & District Community Foundation, has been researching and engaging the community since July 2010 and is working toward an issue area and indicator report to be released in October 2011.

The first speaker of the evening, Darcy Monchak, is a recently retired Natural Resource Planner with the Ministry of Forests. Mr. Monchak explained the challenges of managing the forest land base, the changing values, the process and outcomes. Timber management is a multi-faceted discipline, involving planting, economics, road access, mill requirements, trading, wildfire threats, insects and disease, tenure and the annual allowable cut. Other impacts to management include wildlife, public and commercial recreation, private lands, parks, water and ecological process, other resource developments, independent power projects (IPPs) and resorts.

The creation of the Golden Backcountry Recreation Access Plan (GBRAP) was proudly noted by Mr. Monchak, which allocates activities over the shared backcountry land base, and set the patterns of recreational use in the backcountry to manage and avoid conflicts by recreation users and to protect wildlife habitat.

Next up, Kurt Huettmeyer, who is based out of Revelstoke as a Resource Manager for Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations, outlined the merging of the Columbia, West Kootenay and Selkirk Forest Districts. Mr. Huettmeyer noted that the Golden Timber Supply Area (TSA) is part of the Southern Interior Forest Region and is administered by the Columbia Forest District. The current Allowable Annual Cut (AAC) in the Golden Timber Supply Area (TSA) is 485,000 cubic meters and is reviewed every ten years (due again in 2020).

According to Mr. Huettmeyer, there have been lots of changes that affect the public. The BC Government is trying to streamline the process to expedite projects. Years ago, the ministry set aside 20,000 cubic meters for a Community Forest project, but the interest waned and the initiative was not pursued. With respect to

current activity, presently no one is logging at 100%, although indicators show that things are picking up with the exports to China, while the US market is not up yet. Overall, in the long term, Mr. Huettmeyer sees things looking up for Golden and Southern BC forest industry.

The story of the evening then headed south, down the Columbia Valley to hear from Paul Frasca, Timber Farm License (TFL) #14, from Tembec. Mr. Frasca stated that pulp prices are strong, the China softwood lumber sales are up, and Tembec is not relying on the US housing starts. Tembec has a total of 11.5 million hectares, 1.8 million cubic feet of log deliveries, but mostly fibre to pulp mills, which is advantageous in light of the strong pulp prices. The Allowable Annual Cut (AAC) for TFL #14 is 180,000 cubic meters, 60% of which is lodge pole pine and 15% of sales are to Louisiana Pacific Building Products in Golden. Tembec's TFL will be impacted by the Columbia Valley Transmission Line, now under construction, as a 41 km swath will be cut through the TFL. The contract for certified pulp has helped the company during the recession, and overall the long term forecast is looking good.

In a change of pace, the audience then heard from Diana Brooks, Regional Manager with the RuralBC Secretariat. Dedicated to the health of rural communities, Ms. Brooks presented forest industry opportunities for energy and fibre, for self-sustainability and revenue generation, using examples of other small communities that have harnessed alternative uses for fibre through bioenergy, biomass fuels (organic material) for heat or exportable projects. Attendees heard about funding available for energy systems using biofuel (wood pellets, etc.) using forest fuel, which will help reduce forest fire risk.

To close the evening and bring the discussion back home, MLA for Columbia River Revelstoke and Opposition Critic for Forestry, Norm MacDonald, summarized the state of and opportunities for the local forest industry. Informal discussions among participants suggested that the Vital Signs Steering Committee's hopes of engaging and energizing the community again around the forest industry were met.

While the full slate of speakers meant there was limited time for questions, attendees were invited to complete a brief survey. After collecting the feedback, the Vital Signs Steering Committee analyzed and summarized the data. Of the 26 attending respondents, 11 (or 43%) currently work in the forest industry, while another 5 (or 19%) have left the industry, leaving 10 respondents who have never worked directly or indirectly in the industry.

Key Survey Findings:

In the last five & ten years, the industry has benefited from increased efficiencies, in some cases better pay, less controversy, less government and expedited permitting. Implementation of woodlot license plans, improved logging practices, realistic-sized cuts and a "greater public awareness of forestry issues" were also been seen as positive.

1. However the improvements have been tempered by the reduction in ministry staff in Golden, meaning deregulation has led to having little staff to monitor compliance. While the pine beetle epidemic and economic downturn have reduced the demand for locally grown wood, the centralization of the BC Government has meant that "decisions [are] made outside of the Golden TSA [Timber Supply Area]." One respondent even called the changes, the "complete government forfeiture of forest management to industry" and suggested that there are "no public opportunities to review or comment on any forest industry plans." Other recent changes have reduced opportunities for steady employment, continuing environmental damage and impacts to our water supply.
2. Potential opportunities for Golden's forest industry: 1) Fibre & waste products (chosen by 17 or 65% respondents), 2) composite wood products (16 or 62%) and 3) finished products (8 or 31%).

3. Although the industry has and continues to play a pivotal role in the community's development, 2:1 of the attendees surveyed (17:8 respondents) would not recommend a career in the forest industry to today's youth.
4. Fifty local citizens listened to and asked questions of the expert panel. Attendees heeded the call to participate for a number of reasons – because they cared about the community (16 or 62%), wanted to hear from the expert guest speakers (14 or 54%) and wanted to learn more about forestry (13 or 50%).
5. As the evening was intended to show the existing systems and concerns, much work remains to be done to ensure that Golden & Area A remains prosperous. Attendees thought the forest industry should be led by some of its own, the forest professionals, rather than local government. However, community economic organizations like Golden Area Initiatives, industry employers and the Ministry of Land, Forests and Natural Resource Operations were understood to be part of the solution as well.
6. The group selected Work (18 or 69%) and the Environment (11 or 42%) were the most important issue areas for our community now and in the foreseeable future.
7. In the future, the attendees noted that they would be interested in attending community information sessions on Alternative Energy (19 or 73%), Power (16 or 62%) and the Aging Population (10 or 38%).

If the energy of the participants was any indication, the forest industry will continue to be a pillar of the community for years to come. However, what the industry looks like is still up for debate for all of its residents.

About the Golden & District Community Foundation

The Golden & District Community Foundation's mission is to attract and effectively grow permanent funds; provide leadership and administration that helps in addressing significant community needs; and help donors fulfill their philanthropic interests.

To learn more about your community foundation and the ongoing Vital Signs project, please bookmark www.goldencommunityfoundation.ca.

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