



## Forest jobs vanish, home values sink

Islanders blame uncertainty as Victoria, the Haida negotiate land-use plan

**Gordon Hamilton**

Vancouver Sun

*Thursday, March 02, 2006*

Forestry workers on Haida Gwaii/Queen Charlotte Islands say their jobs have dried up and the value of their homes is plummeting while Victoria and the Haida work out a land-use plan that includes protecting almost half the island archipelago. Property assessments have dropped 50 per cent, the school population is declining, and work is scarce, say people in the town of Sandspit, hardest hit by a steep drop in logging, the primary industry on the islands.

Prolonged land-use uncertainty, coupled with an economic downturn in the coastal forest industry, has led the Teal Jones Group, headquartered at Sandspit on Moresby Island, to shut down operations for an indefinite period.

Cascadia Forest Products, which bought the Weyerhaeuser tenure on Graham Island, is losing money and is harvesting less than half its provincially granted cut, leaving only one of the three islands licensees, Husby Forest Products, still logging its cut.

Non-Haida residents say they feel abandoned by Victoria, which has gone through four different representatives in nine months of talks with the Council of the Haida Nation on an expanding list of issues. The talks are not just about a land-use plan prepared by a community-based forum, but also includes the future of forest tenures. Islanders are preparing for sweeping changes in land management, but are uncertain what Victoria is prepared to negotiate.

"Workers need to know what is happening," Gail Henry, chair of an ad-hoc group called the Moresby Island Management Committee, said in a Feb. 20 letter to Forest and Range Minister Rich Coleman.

With equity in homes collapsing, people cannot afford to move and buy elsewhere, she said.

The Steelworkers Union, which represents unionized loggers on the islands, has called on Victoria for a comprehensive compensation package for people being displaced.

For the Haida, the plan and discussions are the long-overdue key to transferring control of decisions from outside agencies and corporations to the Council of the Haida Nation. The council has been conducting meetings in resource communities

over their plans, and last year gained support from native and non-natives alike in a 40-day blockade against logging.

The talks are the government's attempt to address a deteriorating situation on the islands that has festered for years due to distrust among the Haida, the government, and some of the major forest companies. The land-use planning process, similar to the successful central- and north-coast process, was inconclusive. In the end, stakeholders could only agree to different viewpoints on contentious issues.

The plan calls for:

- Twenty-three per cent of the islands to be protected in parks.
- Twenty per cent of the islands to be placed in 14 Haida protected areas.
- Placing approximately five to eight per cent of land with unique features in smaller "study areas."
- Retaining the integrity of eco-systems, a term that has yet to be defined. To the Haida, it means eco-system-based logging similar to a recent agreement for the central coast rainforest. To forest companies, it means sustainable logging to achieve specific goals.

Also on the table is a permanent Haida-operated tenure of 120,000 cubic metres of timber a year.

The Coast Forest Products Association is counting on Victoria to add a stronger economic component, one that includes the interests of major licensees, to the Haida vision of forestry.

"This has implications for what we are doing everywhere else with first nations and with forestry in B.C. so we should be paying attention to this," said Rick Jeffery, Coast Forest president.

Jeffery said the industry can accept a high percentage of the islands being protected but wants to have access to enough land to harvest 1.4 million cubic metres of timber a year, a 20-per-cent reduction from the current provincially-set target of 1.8 million cubic metres a year.

Council of the Haida Nation president Guujaaw said it will be much less.

"By the time this thing shakes out, it might be around 700,000 cubic metres."

That includes the 120,000 in the Haida tenure, leaving 580,000 cubic metres for the industry.

"We are certainly not waiting for the province to do that. We are going to design how that would occur and we are going to design it with our neighbours."

Such a drastic cutback wouldn't have been necessary if planning had taken place years ago, he said.

"The only planning was the dividing up of the loot."

If the forest industry feels threatened by Haida plans to reduce the cut, it has to look no further than its own past history of over-harvesting for the reason why, Guujaaw said.

He described the decline of Sandspit as directly related to over-harvesting.

Gujaaw accused forest companies of pursuing short-term objectives by taking the best timber while they can and barging it south. He said that as the planning process went ahead and the Haida identified areas for protection, companies continued logging them. He also expressed concerns that the new provincial forest policies remove regulatory oversight from forest companies, allowing them to transfer licences without consultation.

He said the Haida want to work with some of the companies on the island "but on the other hand there are some we would be happy to see the back-side of."

Jeffery agreed the relationship between licensees and the Haida has been poor but that the industry is prepared to change. He said companies are voluntarily staying out of areas that are of interest to the Haida but are not yet protected.

"At the end of the day, we need to be working with the government and with the Haida in a cooperative manner. The relationship hasn't been great. We need to repatriate that relationship and get it on better ground to start developing trust and understanding."

As part of an initiative to include local communities, Guujaaw said the Haida are signing protocols with them to ensure that the interests of local residents receive full consideration from the Haida. In exchange, the communities recognize Haida title.

The Haida also want agreements with loggers that will allow them to keep people working where possible while the land-use issues are settled.

Travis Glasman, regional director for Moresby Island at the Skeena-Queen Charlotte Islands Regional District, said he is aware the planning process is causing hardships. Most people are accepting it, he said, because they understand the logging history of the islands.

Glasman described the current situation as "a necessary step to maintain long-term sustainability."

Others say the logging-dependent town of Sandspit on Moresby Island has been hit too hard.

Henry, who has lived there for 30 years, doesn't blame the Haida. Her anger is directed at the province, which she believes has been negotiating jobs and peoples'

livelihoods in secret.

"The Haida people represent themselves. The government of B.C. and the government of Canada are supposedly representing non-native people. Well they don't come and talk to us. They don't say what is happening to you and what is the impact of our decision going to be on you."

Henry and husband Jim wonder how long they can hang on in the community they love.

Work dried up when Teal Jones ended its logging last summer. Assessment notices show properties valued at less than half of what they were 10 years ago.

"My evaluation on my home is under \$100,000. It's a finished beautiful house on an acre and a half of land with nothing but ocean front. There's only a two-lane road between us and the beach.

"But I can't sell it for that. I couldn't move anywhere."

Except for her and Jim, her own family is already dispersed. One son has left Sandspit to work in the oil fields at Fort Nelson. Another has gone to Vancouver Island where he found work in the forest industry. Her daughter left for New Zealand. Jim, a field engineer whose job is normally laying out cutblocks and logging roads, has found work timber cruising.

The industry's downward spiral is not just because of land-use issues, however. Poor log prices in distant Vancouver and a requirement that 40 per cent of the harvest be from second-growth forests has made logging uneconomical. For one of the three major species on the islands, spruce, there is no market for second-growth as no construction standards have been developed for it.

Sawmills have no place to sell it so loggers don't cut it.

The land-use issues have added to the poor economics by dispersing the accessible timber into small units.

In the 1990s, logging on Teal Jones's tenure provided work for 130 people, including a staff of 16 working out of the Sandspit offices.

Today there are only three doing road work on a government-awarded contract.

Over the same time, Sandspit's school population has dropped from 150 kids to 48.

Loggers and their families are leaving and Henry believes a lot more will go this July once school is out.

Census statistics identify a long-term trend on the islands. The islands have a population of 4,900, split equally between Haida and non-Haida. On Graham Island, from 1995 to 2001, the population dropped 10 per cent. In the Haida communities, the population climbed 4.5 per cent over the same period.

But on Moresby Island, the population dropped 25 per cent.

Henry operates the sole gas station on the island at Sandspit but is open only four hours a day. She has the temperature in the building turned down to just above freezing to save on fuel costs. She is wearing a jacket with long johns underneath to ward off the indoor chill. She wants the waiting to end.

"It's the not-knowing. The Haida say they are going to look out for everybody. There will be work for everybody. That's their intent. But how long are people going to wait? And will there be any one here who can work?"

ghamilton@png.canwest.com

#### PROTECTING HAIDA GWAII:

The Haida Gwaii/Queen Charlottes Land Use Plan would exempt roughly half of the archipelago from outside resource users.

- 1 million hectares

Total land area of Haida Gwaii

- 225,000 hectares

Parks

- 232,000 hectares

Proposed Haida protected areas

- 16,000 hectares

Proposed Haida forest tenure

- 473,000 hectares

Total land exempted,

or roughly 47%

- 161 million cubic metres

Total amount of timber removed from provincial inventory

Source: Haida Gwaii Queen Charlotte Islands Land Use Plan, Ministry of Forests and Range, Vancouver Sun

Ran with fact box "Protecting Haida Gwaii", which has been appended to the end of the story.

© The Vancouver Sun 2006

**CLOSE WINDOW**

---

Copyright © 2006 CanWest Interactive, a division of CanWest MediaWorks Publications, Inc. All rights reserved.