

'Enemies' unite for watershed body

Group tries to solve land use problem

By RUSS PARADICE

Environmentalist meet forest company man, meet bureaucrat, meet farmer, meet area resident.

That's one of the principle benefits of the new Oyster River watershed management committee; it brings together people with different interests -- some of them former adversaries in B.C.'s ongoing war in the woods -- and encourages them to seek cooperative solutions to land-use issues.

Formed only a few months ago, the committee's aim, as stated in its mission statement, is to act as a "cooperative organization committed to sustaining a balance among all watershed resources and users."

Committee chairman Harold Macy says the formation of the committee will hopefully mark a new era of co-operation among watershed users.

"The only management we've had before is management by crisis," Macy says.

"If nothing else, the committee should enable us all to keep talking to one another. What we hope to be able to do is manage the watershed through co-operation and not confrontation and crisis."

Macy says some area residents expected the committee to immediately jump down the throats of the two main logging companies in the watershed, Fletcher Challenge Canada and MacMillan Bloedel.

Macy, who rejects a confrontational approach anyway, says the committee has to first build a "firm foundation" of trust among its members before it can tackle some of the big issues facing it, especially the rate of cut in the upper watershed.



TALKING TREES is one of the things that these members of the Oyster River watershed management committee did on a recent field trip through the area. From left are committee chairman Harold

Father Charles Brandt, who was instrumental in having the committee established, says he wants to bring a philosophy of bioregionalism to the committee, beginning with the realization that humans aren't the only ones with a stake in the watershed.

"The Oyster River valley is a single organic community," says Brandt, who lives above the river. "It's made up of the human community and the natural world, so that means the air, the water, the river, the oceans, the soil and all the species."

"The problem is we can't get a consensus from the trees or the birds; they can't speak for themselves. So we have to look at more than just our human concerns.

"We have to realize we all need each other in this bioregion. If one becomes too dominant, then

we all suffer."

Forestry consultant Ron Frank, who wrote a study on the watershed, recently took committee members on a field trip through the area.

According to Brandt, Frank pointed out the importance of replanting as soon as possible after logging and of the need for cutting in blocks rather than large clear-cuts.

After replanting, trees take several years to reach the point where they "hydrologically mimic" an old-growth forest. The branches and boughs of older trees help stop rain from falling on to snow, preventing serious flooding.

"That's why clear cutting is so devastating," Brandt says. "There's nothing to protect the snow when you get a rain-on-snow event."

Brandt says it was "really refreshing" to hear an FCC official say on the trip that the company is looking at reducing its cut in the upper watershed, where there's about 11 years of

old-growth left.

"What they might do is reduce their annual cut from 100,000 to 30,000 cubic metres and then take another 70,000 from some other area. That's really good to hear. They're also considering doing it in blocks."

Another issue raised during the trip is the need for good logging road construction and rehabilitation.

The Burma logging road, built in the watershed in about 1970, is a classic example of how not to build a logging road, Brandt says, explaining it was carved out of a hillside using the old "side casting" method.

MacMillan Bloedel is in the process of putting the road to bed by returning it to its natural slope and planting it with grass, clover and conifers, Brandt says.

Brandt says M & B should be "commended" for its current road rehabilitation program and its future plans.