

# REVELSTOKE COMMUNITY FOREST CORPORATION

## A Community Venture Repatriates Benefits from Local Public Forests

DOUG WEIR & CINDY PEARCE

In 1993, the City of Revelstoke, British Columbia, became the sole shareholder in the Revelstoke Community Forestry Corporation (RCFC), a private corporation established to purchase and manage an area of public forestland now known as Tree Farm License 56. This tree farm license is now the largest community forest in B.C., where forestry is a pillar of the provincial economy.

RCFC is one part of a CED strategy which Revelstoke residents have developed in the past decade in response to an economic crisis. Government and private sector decisions taken irregardless of the town's interests severely threatened its way of life. Rather than die on the vine, Revelstoke sought both to restore and diversify its economic base. Between the creation of RCFC, downtown revitalization, development and diversification of small businesses, and the encouragement of tourism, the community's economy has come to feature four primary components, each of almost equal importance: the forest industry, transportation (primarily rail), tourism, and government.

Other communities are starting to take a keen interest in this historic endeavour. This article documents the context, history, and challenges of one aspect of this accomplishment: the establishment of Revelstoke Community Forest Corporation.

### BACKGROUND

Revelstoke is nestled in the rugged and picturesque mountains of British Columbia's Kootenay region (see map, page 5). The city is situated near the sharp, north-

ernmost bend of the Columbia River where its waters begin the long journey south. Revelstoke's economic history has long been tied to the natural resources of the area through the mining, transportation, hydroelectric, and forest industries.

Like many communities in the Kootenay area, Revelstoke began in the late 1880s as a transportation and supply centre for the mining industry. A major station and maintenance yard for the new Canadian Pacific Railway soon followed. Both mining and railway construction required substantial amounts of timber, prompting the early growth of a timber industry.

For many years only one tree farm license (TFL) existed in the region. In 1955 the Province granted TFL 23 to Celgar Ltd. primarily to supply a pulpmill and sawmill complex in the city of Castlegar. These rights and properties were later bought by Westar Timber with pro-

vincial approval, but with local input neither elicited nor offered. The remainder of the region's forests fell under the jurisdiction of a Timber Supply Area (TSA). The timber harvested from the TSA was processed in Revelstoke by one large sawmill owned by a Saskatchewan firm (Federated Co-operatives) and several smaller, locally-owned mills. (For a glossary of forest industry terms, see page 5.)

Beginning in 1965, three hydroelectric dams were built in the area. These megaprojects boosted Revelstoke's economy for a generation.

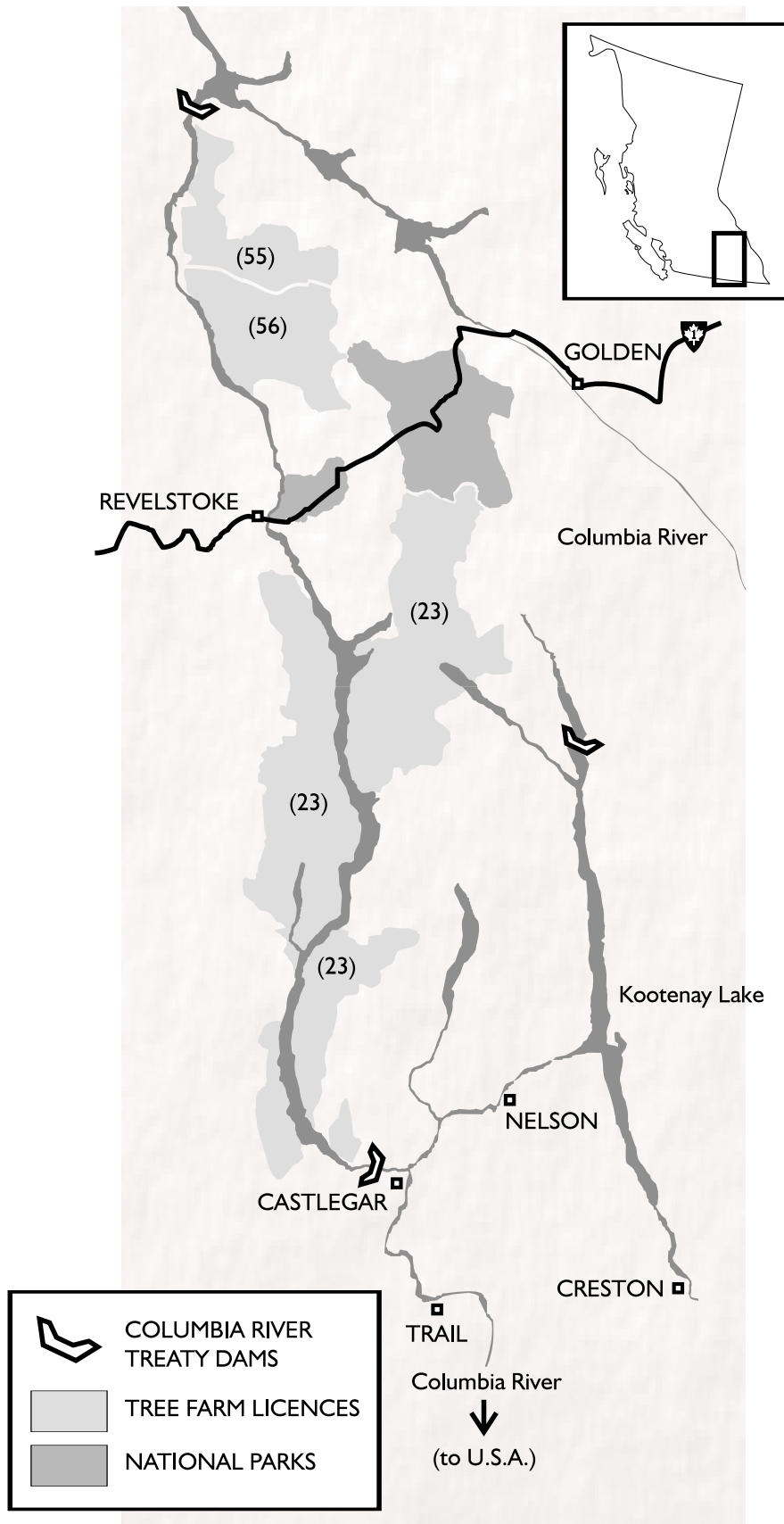
They also flooded vast expanses of prime agricultural and forest land.

The mid-1980s brought the crunch. In 1985 the end of the era of the megaproject came as a severe blow to the town. The following year, the major sawmill closed. In the space of two years, the town's population fell from 11,000 to 7,500. At one point, 450 houses

were up for sale. There was 25% unemployment in a place where formerly there had always been another high-paying job to go to. A small amount of harvesting continued in the timber supply area, but these logs were trucked to processing facilities outside Revelstoke.

This left three small sawmills and a pole yard operating locally, processing a tiny fraction of the timber harvested from

*Hard work,  
sound advice,  
and an innovative  
partnership with local  
forest companies  
have brought about  
a unique community  
corporation.*



### B.C. FORESTRY TERMINOLOGY

Almost all commercial forest lands in British Columbia remain public property (96%) - more than any other province and almost every other country. Rather than sell off its forest lands to private industry, B.C. has allocated licenses that assure access to a timber supply for a specific term.

The greater part of the timber annually felled in B.C. comes from **Timber Supply Areas (TSAs)**. There, forest companies are licensed to operate in accordance with a management plan approved by the provincial Forest Service. These licenses vary widely in their terms and conditions, but common to all is the right to harvest some portion of the **Allowable Annual Cut (AAC)** designated for those lands.

**Tree Farm Licenses (TFLs)** secure far more independence for the license holder. They convey to forest companies long-term rights to the AAC in specific (often vast) tracts of forest land, as well as stewardship responsibility. TFL 23 originally encompassed about 500,000 hectares, stretching from Mica Dam in the north to Castlegar in the south (see map).

To set province-wide standards for operations in the woods, a new **Forest Practices Code** was issued in B.C. in 1995. For the first time, environmentally-sound practice has become subject to a legal relationship between Province and licensee, rather than a contractual relationship between local official and licensee. RCFC and many other forest companies have been obliged to reconsider harvesting and road building plans in order to meet the new requirements.

The **Small Business Forest Enterprise Program** reserves about 15% of the province's annual timber harvest for licenses sold to small operators.

the area's public lands - 28,000 of a total annual harvest of 700,000 cubic metres.

### **GROWING COMMUNITY CAPACITY**

This situation was not acceptable to the community. Between 1987 and 1990, the City of Revelstoke and community groups worked together to crystallize a different vision of regional forestry, one would ensure that more of the local timber would be processed in the community.

In 1987, with the public support of the Revelstoke Chamber of Commerce, the

provincial government reduced the northern block of TFL 23 because of inadequate harvesting levels. The City, meanwhile, convinced the Ministry of Forests to cancel the TSA cutting rights of Federated Co-operatives due to lack of local processing.

Come 1988, the City made sure it had a voice in the award of the new TSA license. The City demanded that the decision be made with reference to an assessment of community, social, and economic benefits. It also recommended that community-based processors receive

cutting rights. The Minister of Forests agreed, and awarded tenures to two local mills, Joe Kozek Sawmills Ltd. and Downie Timber Ltd.

Having inserted itself into the forestry decision-making process, the community continued to make its presence and authority felt. In the years 1988-1990, the City of Revelstoke and the Economic Development Commission (a body funded by the City and Regional District) reviewed in detail the management and working plans for TFL 23. Serious underlying problems regarding TFL management and utilization of timber resources were identified and submitted to the Forest Service. Substantial changes to the plans followed, confirming the growing expertise of city staff in this realm.

The City and the Economic Development Commission then worked together to submit additional briefs highlighting concerns about the management of TFL 23 and the alienation of cutting rights from community-based processors. In a submission to the Forest Resources Commission, the City made the following recommendations:

- Communities should have more input on management plans for licenses.
- Local processing would improve utilization and management.
- Improved forest management would increase benefits and reduce potential reductions in the allowable annual cut.
- Utilization standards should be improved.
- Better recreational and tourism use of the forest should be encouraged.
- Consistent application of the Forest Act was needed.

### **HALTING THE SLIDE**

The magnitude of the community's determination was made still more clear in 1992. In March of that year, Westar made ready to sell the southern reaches of TFL 23 and its Castlegar sawmill to a U.S. lumber firm. The government created a

**DOUG WEIR**, who describes himself as a combination of an economic developer and a community advocate, has lived most of his life in B.C.'s mountainous central interior. As a resident of the Okanagan Valley, he played a role in the establishment of a ground-breaking real estate development by the Westbank Indian Band. During the recession of the early 1980s, he came face to face with the human costs of weak local economies: he was kept busy appraising the homes confiscated through mortgage foreclosures. Around the same time he also served as a key member of the board of a social service agency - and as chair of the Chamber of Commerce.

Hired in 1986 to implement Revelstoke's economic strategy, the last ten years have impressed upon him how small communities can and must grow more entrepreneurial. They must unlearn the habit of entrusting their well-being wholly to decisions made in corporate board rooms, major urban centres, and senior government levels. By "doing the doable" in collaborative partnership with these power centres, he has seen Revelstoke acquire capacity, pride, and repute that can feed into still more challenging and rewarding endeavors.

**CINDY PEARCE** is a professional forester with a varied background in industry, government, and academia.

Daughter of a logger, Cindy grew up in one of the many small, forest-dependent towns of B.C.'s Kootenays, and witnessed its difficult transition into a time of finite resources. This experience as well as formal training in forest management, policy analysis, and community planning form the basis for her current work as an independent forestry consultant.

Her recent work has included assisting Forest Renewal B.C. to implement its community-based programs in the Kootenays and co-ordinating the Forest Service's review of the provincial timber supply. Her appointment to the Forest Practices Board, the public's new watchdog on provincial forest practices, is indicative of her commitment to the and the people of the province.

Keeping the wood in the region for primary breakdown was stage one of Revelstoke's economic development strategy. Stage two involves encouraging the remanufacturing processes that add exponentially to the value of the wood and the jobs created per cubic meter harvested. The student at right won provincial recognition for his work in the construction of log homes. Photo courtesy of Times Review, Revelstoke.



review panel to make recommendations on the proposed transfer of harvesting rights.

At the public meeting which followed, over 500 Revelstoke residents insisted that the review panel recognize the need for greater local control of local resources. Specifically, they demanded that 35,000 cubic metres of the forestland up for sale were a critical source of supply for local mills and were not to be alienated. The Province agreed. The timber from this area was instead allocated to the Small Business Forest Enterprise Program so it would remain available to local processors.

That fall, Westar Timber proceeded to negotiate the sale of its remaining TFL area (renamed TFL 55) as well as a nearby sawmill and other cutting rights to Evans Forest Products Ltd., a plywood and sawmilling firm based in Golden, B.C. A new review panel was struck to examine the transfer of harvesting rights, and a second public meeting was held.

Almost 500 people packed the community centre auditorium to hear repre-

sentatives for the city, the local forest industry, environmental groups, the business community, and the recreation sector tell the review panel why the ministry had to reject the proposed transfer. Most of the criticism echoed the message from the previous meeting: it was not acceptable to give control of a large amount of local forestland to an outside company with no guarantees for local processing of the timber harvested.

In December 1992, the government rejected Westar's proposal. Such a transfer would not meet the economic and social needs of the communities involved. For the first time in B.C.'s history, the government had denied a proposal to transfer cutting rights between private companies because economic and social needs would not be met.

### **TURNING OPPORTUNITY INTO REALITY**

In its report, the review panel recommended the Ministry consider alternatives to Westar's proposal. One significant option was to create a community-con-

trolled forest as per a suggestion from residents of Revelstoke. In such an instance, the timber license and the profits from timber sales would be owned by a corporate representative of the community. In addition, local people could require forest practices higher than the provincial standard. "We could do a better job of forest management, protect local forestry and processing employment and ensure security for the future," it was asserted. The panel further recommended allocating at least half the allowable annual cut from TFL 55 to this community forest to make it viable.

This presented a unique opportunity for the City to act on its commitment to local control of local resources and become actively involved in the timber industry. The question was: could the community pull together sufficient resources to purchase and viably manage a significant portion of the timber rights that were up for sale? If it could not, Westar's original deal would go forward.

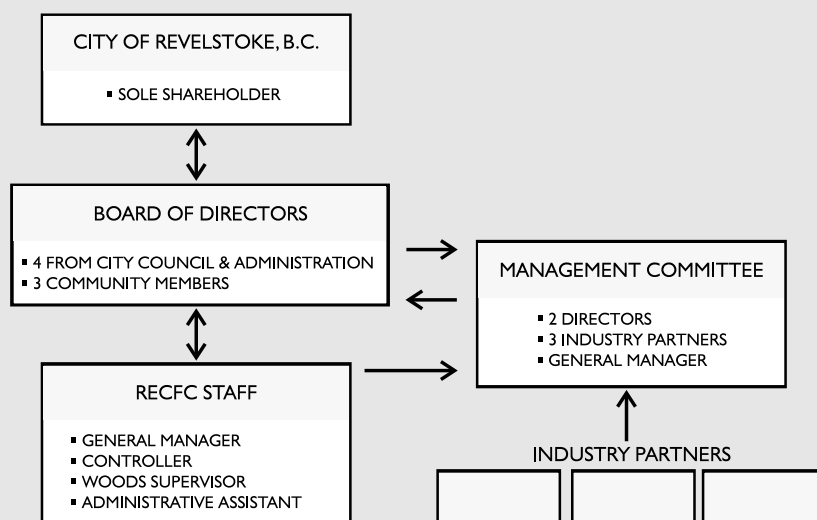
The City had to move quickly. December 17, City Council approved the

## CORPORATE MISSION & STRUCTURE

The operations of the Corporation are guided by its mission statement:

The Revelstoke Community Forest Corporation will manage and operate its Tree Farm License in a manner that will enhance the forest resource while respecting the principles of integrated use, environmental stewardship and public consultation; providing the following community benefits on a sustainable basis:

- revenue to sustain the Corporation and support the community.
- local control of resources.
- local processing.
- local employment.
- forestry training and education.
- outdoor recreational activities.
- a lasting relationship with the lands that comprise TFL 56.



RCFC's board of directors is appointed by city council and includes four appointees from a combination of city council and city management staff and three members from the community at large. The board is responsible for the overall operation and direction of the corporation. The management committee, which includes three representatives of the industry partners, two RCFC directors and the general manager of the corporation, provides advice on the operation and management of the TFL by reviewing management and operational plans and making recommendations to the board. This committee enables the board to access local forest industry knowledge and experience to ensure the corporation's operating costs and policies are in keeping with industry standards.

Corporate staff are minimal. During the initial four months of operation, the economic development officer filled the role of the general manager. This position was then filled by a registered professional forester. The only other full-time staff positions are those of controller, woodlands supervisor, and administrative assistant.

concept of creating a consortium with local timber industry partners. Twelve days later, representatives from the provincial government, Westar Timber, Evans Forest Products, and the City met to seek an agreement. The Minister of Forests allowed the City until January 21, 1993 to demonstrate progress on a proposal.

The City recognized the need to bring in knowledgeable and innovative advisors to develop their proposal. Advisors with three areas of expertise were retained:

- operations and financial advice and experience specific to the timber industry.
- forest resource expertise to assess the timber resources and liabilities.
- legal advice on incorporation and for an industry partnership agreement.

These services alone cost the City approximately \$200,000, and the forest corporation was only at the proposal stage. On the other hand, those involved recognized that the expertise was critical to the success of the venture.

During these weeks, three local milling operations proposed to the City a unique partnership. They would provide financing and industry expertise and assume some share of risk in return for a secure timber supply from the proposed community forest.

Based on the work of the advisors, and with the support of local timber companies, the City was able to show substantial progress by January 21. The Minister of Forests agreed to consider a proposal from the City. On February 1, the following terms of acquisition were reached between Westar Timber, Evans Forests Products Ltd., the City, and the Province:

- TFL 55 and its allowable annual cut (less 5% allocated to the Small Business Forest Enterprise Program) would be divided 50-50 into two tree farm licenses. Evans Forest Products would purchase the northernmost portion. The southern portion would be purchased and managed by a new cor-

poration on behalf of the City of Revelstoke. Each party thereby secured cutting rights of approximately 98,500 cubic metres per year.

- the new corporation would have representatives from the City and the community on its board and an advisory committee which included partners from local industry. It would be required to sell 50% of the timber harvested to its industry partners. The remainder would be sold on the open market through sealed tenders to the highest bidder, with the income accruing to the corporation.
- the purchase price of the southern portion would be raised from the industry partners, the City treasury, and a bank loan.

**SECURING PUBLIC SUPPORT**

The City next required a seal of approval for its proposed investment from municipal residents. An indication of community support was also required by the Inspector of Municipalities who must approve the creation of such corporations by municipalities.

On February 8, City Council passed a resolution authorizing a referendum to secure citizen approval. An extensive public information program was launched to ensure that citizens had accurate information and that they understood the nature of the venture.

Revelstoke displayed in their votes the same commitment to local control of local resources as they had shown at the public meetings. Over 60% of eligible voters turned out for the referendum vote on February 20, 1993; 78% voted yes.

**LEGAL & FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS**

The legal and financial arrangements for the corporation remained to be finalized. With the approval of the Inspector of Municipalities, the City created the Revelstoke Community Forestry Corporation

(RCFC) in April 1993. The City of Revelstoke is the sole shareholder with one common share. The \$3.5 million purchase price that RCFC paid to Westar Timber was financed as follows:

- \$1 million investment from the City’s Electrical Utilities Reserve Fund. This investment currently receives a dividend of the average of prime for the fiscal year plus 1% on the amount invested, subject to board approval at the end of each fiscal year.
- \$1 million cash paid up front by the three local forest industry partners (\$600,000 from Downie Timber Ltd., \$200,000 from Joe Kozek Sawmills Ltd., and \$200,000 from Cascade Cedar Products Ltd.) as well as \$500,000 to be repaid through the cost of logs delivered to the industry partners.
- \$1 million loan from the Royal Bank at an interest rate of 9.04%, secured by a registered general security agreement and repayable monthly. This loan has a 5-year term and a 15-year amortization period.

In addition, a \$1 million short-term loan for start-up and initial operating funds was secured.

Three separate agreements were required to implement the corporation’s operations. One documented the terms for the transfer of harvesting rights from Westar Timber. A second divided the TFL between Evans and RCFC.

A third document, the Timber Re-

moval Agreement, specified arrangements for the industry partners to receive their share of the new TFL’s timber harvest at a price based on the corporation’s 6-month average operating cost. This cost includes all business expenses, e.g., road development, harvesting, silviculture obligations, debt retirement and administration. The proportion of the harvest supplied to each partner is based on their respective contribution to the total original investment in RCFC: 30% of the total

harvest to Downie, and 10% each to Joe Kozek Sawmills and to Cascade Cedar Products. If any of this timber is traded to processors outside the community, the agreement obliges the signatory to process an equivalent amount of wood in the community. Were the TFL ever sold, the agreement also stipulates that the industry partners are to receive 50% of the proceeds in excess of the net book value.

With the corporation, financing, and agreements in place, the transfer of cutting rights to RCFC proceeded. It was completed in June

1993, creating a new Tree Farm License 56. It had taken only six months for the community to take the venture from an opportunity to a reality. In contrast to 1986, it was now possible for the bulk of the timber harvested from public forest land in the Revelstoke Forest District (418,100 of 553,100 cubic metres) to be processed in the Revelstoke area.

*Since its inception in 1993, RCFC has implemented policies & procedures to ensure the original commitments to the community are fulfilled in day-to-day operations: hiring timber processing, suppliers, training, financial risk, return on investment, & public information.*



**Table 1. Summary of financial accomplishments to date**

Year-End Statements (as of April 30, 1995)

	1994	1995
Revenue (inc. interest income)	\$5,976,995	\$7,227,105
Operating costs	5,630,212	6,232,774
Profit	346,783	994,331
Dividend to City	74,166	90,600

**Table 2. Summary of forestry accomplishments to date**

Activity	1994	1995
Road construction (kilometres)	0	20
Harvesting (cubic metres)	103,434	84,314
Site preparation by burning (hectares)	59	266
Planting (hectares)	133	95
Manual brushing (hectares)	154	165
Herbicide brushing (hectares)	0	18
Reforestation surveys (hectares)	1,463	1,996
Pruning (hectares)	0	30

**A RECORD OF COMMITMENT TO COMMUNITY**

The first two years of operations have focused on the essential tasks of getting a forestry corporation up and running. High log prices, particularly for quality spruce sawlogs, produced unexpected revenues for the corporation in its first years of operations. Table 1 (see above) provides a summary of financial performance to date. Table 2 details forestry accomplishments in the same period.

In the two years since its inception, RCFC has implemented several policies and procedures to ensure the original commitments to the community are fulfilled in day-to-day operations.

**Local Employment**

As much as possible, local contractors rather than full-time staff carry out planning, road building, logging, hauling, and silviculture. Where feasible, the corporation co-ordinates operations with its industry partners to provide employment stability for local contractors.

**Timber Available to Local Processors**

The unique partnership between RCFC and its industry partners ensures that at

least half the timber harvested from TFL 56 is processed in Revelstoke. In addition, RCFC operates a log sort yard to sell the remaining timber to the highest bidder on the open market. During the 1993-94 operating year, 27% of the timber sold at this yard went to local processors. In 1994-95, this figure rose to 55% of sales.

**Local Suppliers**

As much as possible, the corporation purchases supplies from local sources. In the 1993-94 fiscal year an estimated \$1.3 million was spent locally and another \$4.6 million during the 1994-95 year.

**Minimize Financial Risk**

The corporation has a commitment to reserve \$1-1.25 million which will be available to stabilize operations in the event of a prolonged economic downturn or to maintain operations in case of fire, natural disaster, or other major disruption. Once the reserve is established, it is intended that the revenue in excess of operating expenses will accrue directly to the City.

**Return on Investment**

The City realizes a minimum annual dividend at the average of the prime interest rate for the fiscal year plus 1% for its \$1

million investment. This ensures that, at a minimum, the City receives a reasonable return on its investment.

**Training**

Supporting the development of a skilled forestry labour force locally is an important goal of RCFC. Initially the corporation considered a Forestry Training Centre to improve citizen's forestry skills and knowledge. This concept has been advanced through the establishment of a Community Skills Centre in Revelstoke in partnership with the Province.

During the past year, RCFC also sponsored a Forestry Worker Development Program in conjunction with the Ministry of Social Services and the Ministry of Forests. This project resulted in the establishment of a local silviculture contracting business, financed in part by the Community Loan Fund operated by Revelstoke Community Futures.

**Public Information**

During the 1980s, the City of Revelstoke repeatedly advocated increased involvement of local citizens in the planning and management of local forests. RCFC has begun to encourage increased involvement through regular newspaper articles and advertisements about its operations. It also issues an annual report to citizens and holds an annual general meeting in the community. Now that the organization of the corporation and its finances are more secure, the board will involve the community in a strategic planning process that is to commence this year.

**CHALLENGES**

Nevertheless, implementing the community's vision of a profitable, environmentally-sensitive community forest corporation has been more challenging than anticipated, particularly on account of the realities of road building in the TFL and the environmental standards of the '90s.

**Road Building**

Substantial road construction is essential

to reach timber for harvesting. TFL 56 is in a very rugged, mountainous area with steep, forested valley walls rising to rocky peaks, snowfields and glaciers. The main valley bottoms were developed and logged by Westar in recent years, so a good main road system exists.

However, a substantial network of branch roads had to be built in steep country with sensitive soils, necessitating extensive and costly engineering and construction. Heavy rains and deep snowfalls add to the physical difficulties of road construction and maintenance in the area. Abnormally wet weather during the summer of 1995 made the work more difficult still. Development and implementation of new road requirements consistent with the Forest Practices Code also delayed construction approvals and completion.

The result has been restricted road access that has constrained harvesting at times. Another 50 kilometres of road is planned for the 1995-96 season to harvest 125,000 cubic metres of timber. Reductions in this building program will limit harvesting, although the current decline in log prices offset this by reducing harvesting targets.

#### Forest Practices

Like other forest companies, RCFC has been adjusting its operations to bring them into line with B.C.'s new Forest Practices Code. The Code spells out a legal definition of "environmentally-sound practice" for forest work across the province, overriding previous local agreements and customs.

But as a community-owned corporation, RCFC's forest management practices come under a third type of scrutiny. RCFC has to balance the need to operate a profitable business while respecting the natural capabilities of the land - and the needs and desires of the public who own the land. As a result, the corporation is reconsidering the continued use of herbicides as a brushing treatment on planta-

tions. It is also drawing up a funding proposal to assist the development of harvesting techniques for environmentally sensitive sites with multiple resource values.

#### TFL Management Plan Approval

The development of techniques such as these may lead to a reconsideration of RCFC's financial projections. They were based on an anticipated decline in the TFL's allowable annual cut. But the possibility of selective harvesting on steep, remote slopes could significantly alter estimates of the TFL's timber supply. TFL 56's second Management and Working Plan, including a review of the allowable annual cut, must be approved by the Chief Forester before the end of 1995.

#### Land-Use Planning

The real-life implications of new environmental standards have also become apparent in the provincial land-use planning process.

In developing the agreement with Evans Forest Products Ltd. to split the old TFL 55, the City deliberately chose to purchase harvesting rights to the area with the widest range of forest values. In addition to its timber values, the area within TFL 56 is used by the residents of Revelstoke and tourists for hunting, trapping, fishing, guiding, and other forms of outdoor recreation, including heli-skiing and hiking. (A premier backcountry lodge is located in the area). The TFL also includes important wildlife habitat for grizzly bears and mountain caribou. Its close proximity

to two national parks further increases expectations for sensitive timber management practices.

Since the corporation was created, RCFC staff and directors have participated in regional land-use planning under the provincial Commission on Resources and Environment. In November 1994 the Commission issued a report based on these regional plans. It recommended the classification of a substantial amount of

the operable timber harvesting land base in TFL 56 as a "special management area" in which only limited timber harvesting is permissible. (During the planning process, a substantial portion of the TFL had actually been considered for "protected area status" in which timber harvesting would be prohibited.)

The community of Revelstoke loudly rejected the report and demanded an opportunity to develop a "made in Revelstoke" plan. To accomplish this task, the City created a negotiating committee including representatives from

the RCFC board and city council. The committee developed an alternative plan which restricted special management status to a smaller portion of the land base. This plan was accepted by government in its land use plan for the Kootenay-Boundary area announced in March 1995. RCFC directors, city council, and city staff expect to continue to be heavily involved in the implementation of this plan.

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changes in forest prac-  
tices & land use & a  
possible contraction of  
the timber industry  
notwithstanding.*



## LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

RCFC has seen higher profits than originally forecast in its first two years of operations, leading some to proclaim it a resounding success. Others caution that the timber industry has historically been highly cyclical, with approximately five years between troughs. In recent months, lumber prices have declined substantially, but the impact of this downturn has been buffered by continuing high pulp prices which have kept log prices comparatively high.

Is the normal business downturn beginning? Or will reductions in timber supply from some public forest lands and the decline of mature private forest land maintain high log prices?

RCFC was cautioned about the cyclical nature of the industry by its early advisors, prompting the creation of a reserve fund to weather expected downturns. This fund is well underway, with a current balance of \$1.176 million at the 1995 fiscal year-end.

Early in 1994, the board of directors defined preliminary strategies for the corporation. With the corporation now successfully functioning as a forestry business with respectable profits in its early years, the board intends to refocus on a long-term strategic plan. Topics to be examined in this plan include:

- establishing a fund for enhanced silviculture, innovative projects, and research and development.
- improving access to timber for local value-added operators.
- improving public information and education through community initiatives led by the corporation.

Creation of Revelstoke Community Forestry Corporation began with the commitment of the City of Revelstoke, community groups, and individual citizens to establish local control of local forest resources. The sale of the original TFL 23 and the community's strong opposition to proposals which would lead to external processing of the local timber

resource created the opportunity for the community to take action on this commitment. An innovative partnership with local timber companies, available financing, sound advice and a lot of hard work brought about a unique community corporation. During its first two years of operation, this corporation has become a functioning forestry business yielding higher than expected profits and providing substantial benefits to the community. The corporation is in an excellent position to succeed over the next few years, even with the challenges of changes in forest practices and land use and a possible contraction of the timber industry. ❧

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For more information about Revelstoke's efforts to create a community forest corporation, contact Doug Weir at the Economic Development Commission, Tel (604) 837-5345 Fax (604) 837-4223.

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# Revelstoke's Entrepreneurial Community

DON McNAIR

The mobilization of the Revelstoke community may not be unprecedented, but it certainly is extraordinary. Not only did the community vehemently challenge a private sector sales decision; it formulated a response agreeable to the major players and was willing to pay for it.

This was in part achieved by presenting the public with an array of opportunities to get and exchange information. For example, an extensive public information campaign preceded the community's 1993 referendum on establishing the corporation. The campaign included:

- a meeting of community leaders.
- 11 presentations to community groups and agencies.
- workshops with specific groups.
- an open house.
- a public meeting.
- an information pamphlet distributed to every mailbox in town.
- a radio open-line program.
- newspaper articles and advertisements by the City and its industry partners.
- cable television coverage of the public meeting in conjunction with an open-line program.

But this is only part of the story. Many an elaborate public information campaign has mobilized more suspicion than confi-

dence. More important than this list of events and media is the fact that an inspired, well-informed community leadership secured the trust and support of most residents by facilitating (and resolving) an open discussion of real options. Contributing to the residents' readiness for decisive action was a recent history of local economic crisis and competent response on the part of City Hall. On several occasions in the space of a generation, "the imminence of hanging had concentrated minds wonderfully." What looks like eccentric behaviour relative to other Canadian municipalities was for Revelstoke the latest and largest of a number of strategic initiatives.

The implications of Westar's an-



The long, hard slog of community consultation & discussion is obviously beginning to tell on some of these Revelstoke forum participants. Dedication to this process has nevertheless been critical to the success of RCFC. (Mayor Geoff Battersby is fourth from the right; Doug Weir sits immediately behind him.) Photo courtesy of Times Review, Revelstoke.

nounced intention to sell TFL 55 to Evans was not lost on Revelstoke's public. In the 1960s they had watched the finest agricultural and forest lands in the area flooded as a result of the Columbia River Treaty (see article, pp. 14-17). They had also seen the area's timber shipped 200 kilometres south to Castlegar for milling. The economic crisis of the mid-1980s again made it abundantly clear how vulnerable the city economy was to external decisions, and how little sense it made to expect outsiders to really "look after" Revelstoke's interests.

The residents' awareness of their need and ability to take control of their own future was enhanced at that time by a strategic planning process which engaged wide participation. People had the satisfaction of having their brains picked, and then recognizing their contributions in print. The downtown revitalization and railway museum projects that issued from that plan honed the local capacity for research, and organizing and implementing in collaboration with partners. Bit by bit, civic

ability and pride grew.

So mayor Geoff Battersby and city council had an enlightened and alert public with whom to discuss the Westar situation, what could be done about it, and the risks and benefits of each option. These options they determined with the assistance of a tried and capable city staff, professional advisors, and forest industry experts.

Here too, the city was not starting cold. It had established a track record in the monitoring of regional forestry practices, particularly on account of the efforts of Doug Weir, the Economic Development Commissioner. The City knew what was occurring in the forest industry, and had made sure the Ministry of Forests as well as timber license applicants knew they knew. (Local research and critical analysis had led to the cancellation of one firm's timber license in 1987 and threatened Westar with similar action in 1992.)

These factors, combined with a commitment to consult and a singular clarity of understanding and communication,

captured an ever widening circle of supporters for the vision of a community forest corporation. The confidence of local business people, and in particular the future industrial partners, was secured. A Minister of Forests open to the concept of community involvement in forestry gave the city time to develop its proposal. Westar was kept fully informed about the alternative the community was creating for the sale of the southern half of TFL 55. In the referendum of February 1993 the public at large affirmed the wisdom of City Council's proposal, and enthusiasm since then has not waned.

Timing and luck played a role in the establishment of RCFC; the right people were in the right place at the right time. But this good fortune would not have made the transition to economic reality without the community's gradual accumulation of both the will and the ability to recognize necessity, perceive opportunity, and then act decisively.