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Whistler Question

Editorial Opinion: Buying Local – A Community Commitment

565 words

The Maple Valley Washington based Pacific Logging Congress (PLC) recently held their summer meeting in Whistler. The PLC has a mission to fulfill the need to provide sound technical education about the forest industry. Founded in 1909 and with members from BC and the Pacific North-west, it has sought to educate politicians, educators, their students and the general public on both sides of the border about the need for sound, responsible forestry to supply global needs for wood fibre.

Two interesting aspects of the meeting struck a chord with our members who attended.

The first was the visit to the Whistler Farmers Market. This weekly event showcases the communities best local foods, artisans and entertainers brought together to encourage the “buy local” philosophy that resonates throughout Whistler and with tourists. Local wines, dairy, meat and baked goods are all on offer, not only at the market, but in the shops and restaurants throughout town. It speaks to a growing approach to utilizing local fare and in doing so, triggering positive effects on the local economy and the welfare of those who raise what we eat and produce what we buy. It is hard to argue that this is not a positive example of growing community support for local business, one that is being adopted by more and more communities across BC.

Community support for local production and consumption was not as evident, however, when the group toured the local Cheakamus Community Forest where we learned of the positive achievements, but ongoing challenges local manager’s face in management of their forest for community, recreation, wildlife and yes, forest products.

Our tour guide, Stirling Angus, a professional, consulting forester and Squamish resident, works on a team that manages the forest with direction provided by a tripartite Board of Directors comprised of two local First Nations and Resort Municipality of Whistler. While the forest is managed for many uses including tourism (a number of mountain bikers road past our group while on tour), developing timber for harvest has been a constant struggle since inception. In fact, the allowable harvest on the forest has never been achieved as harvest proposals are typically scrutinized and reduced by residents.

For a community that is so focused on the “buy locally” mantra, it seems odd that the philosophy stutters when it comes to renewable forest products. Wood is used extensively in the area and the sustainable and versatile nature of BC’s wood products was an area of focus for the BC government during the Whistler Olympics.

BC’s forests and in particular, the Cheakamus Community Forest, are managed sustainably, for a variety of natural resource values and the Board of Directors encourages local milling of logs produced from the Community Forest with the rest sold to the domestic BC market. Despite this opportunity, buy locally

does not apply as readily here as some residents shun the notion of local logging, local forest products production and local First Nations employment.

Local food? Yes. Local wines? Yes. Local artisans? Yes. Local wood? Perhaps not in my back yard!

It seems to us, the forest professionals that work across BC to deliver sustainable forest management, that continued support for the Cheakamus Community Forest from all of the residents of Whistler and acknowledgement of the sustainably, the First Nations employment and the contribution to the local community is warranted as it does with other community-based businesses.

Yours sincerely,

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