

Convention a perfect way to solicit public input

SHAYNE MORROW AVTIMES

Members of the public took the opportunity to check out the Trade Show at Glenwood Centre on Saturday, as part of the Federation of BC Woodlot Associations annual general meeting.

Visitors were also treated to a pancake breakfast put on by chef Dale Timmons, of Dales Catering, as part of the public phase of the convention. For many, it was a chance to check out the state of the small-forestry industry in BC, which is billed as the way of the future.

For Port Alberni Community Forest advisory committee member Dave Bishop, the convention was the perfect forum to solicit public feedback about the project.

"We've been going about three years now," Bishop said. "This will be one of our last public information/opinion-gathering sessions."

The community forest initiative is moving into the next phase, he explained. All of the public feedback will be gathered and collated, and presented to the province as part of the licensing process.

"Once the clock starts running, we'll have 120 days to get the process through," Bishop said. "We will need to demonstrate that we have the support of the public. It also helps that we have local First Nations on board in an advisory role."

Bishop noted that Hupacasath First Nation operates its own woodlot, and has used the revenues to help fund the Upnit Power Project. Now that Upnit is up and running, those revenues will help develop the next run-of-the-river power initiative, at Coleman Creek. That's how the city could use community forest revenue, he explained.



SOVA members Nancy Czigany (left) and Leslie Walerius (centre) learn about the Port Alberni Community Forest initiative, from advisory committee member Dave Bishop. [SHAYNE MORROW / ALBERNI VALLEY TIMES]

"It's not like a large, outside corporate entity," Bishop said. "We are going to receive the benefit of the revenues, and that will be over and above municipal tax revenues."

Over at another booth, Jeff Hallworth is the guy who tracks down aliens - alien, invasive plant species, for the provincial forest ministry. You think Scotch broom is a nasty devil? Well, it is, but we've got a whole mess of foreign plants that are doing their best to strangle our native species and degrade our environment.

The real Plug-Ugly is giant hogweed. It's an evil brute from the Caucasus that looks like it stepped out of a post-Apocalypse movie - and it's coming our way. This one has a Kill On Sight order. Beat it down, dig up the roots, set fire to it, and, for God's sake, don't let the seeds develop. And, oh yeah, don't touch it with your bare hands, or you'll look like you went one-on-one with a CANDU nuclear reactor.

Like most invasive species, giant hog-

weed came here as a cultivated species (Lord knows why). Many garden favourites have a dark side, Hallworth said.

"Many people have purple loosestrife in their gardens," he said, pointing out a photo of a streamside meadow, in solid purple. "It's beautiful - but nothing will grow there."

Purple loosestrife is already rampant in the Alberni Valley, as are the four varieties of knotweed.

"It is horrible in riparian (streamside) situations," Hallworth said. "It will become the next Scotch broom on Vancouver Island."

The reason? The knotweeds propagate by rhizomes, and do not develop root hairs. The rhizomes they are so invasive, they can send runners under concrete. And when they crowd out native species along stream banks, their lack of root hairs means there is nothing binding the soil together.

"So when you get heavy rains, the flooding washes out the stream banks,"

Hallworth said. But those aren't the only invasive plants. Even the ubiquitous St. John's wort and periwinkle can become invasive if they are introduced into the wild landscape.

"Not all alien plants are invasive," Hallworth said. "What's sold at nurseries is usually alien, but not necessarily invasive."

And just to illustrate the concept of value-added, a number of local crafters were on hand to display their wares, including Charlie and Anne Levesque, of Charlie's Wooden Toys and Gilbert and Judy Dore, with decorative wooden bowls, from a wide range of species, including rare figure maple.

"We really had a great sales night on Friday," Gilbert Dore said. "When all those loggers came in, it really went over big."

Outside Glenwood, Heiko Notdurfter manned a display of Pfanner Tough Gear protective clothing.

"We bring over European gear," Notdurfter said. "It's made in Austria and Denmark, with fabric from Switzerland."

Notdurfter is currently trying to expand the range of dealers for Pfanner, which is a top seller in Europe. The products are used both in industry and recreation, wherever durable clothing is required.

"We have modified some of our gear to suit local regulations," Notdurfter said. Pfanner uses an extremely tough, two-way stretch fabric known as codura, which is not only tear-resistant but also quick-drying. Notdurfter said he currently has one local dealer interested in the Pfanner product line.

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