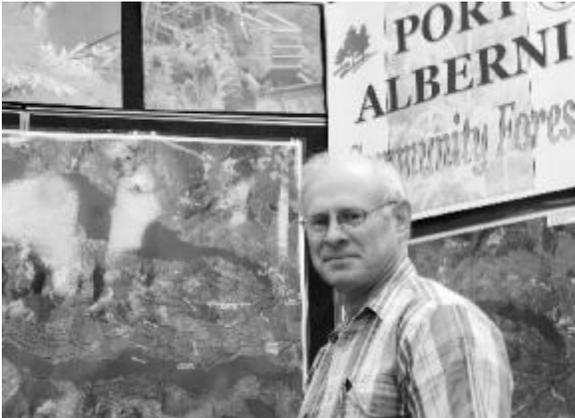


Alberni Valley NEWS

Input wanted on community forest



Heather Reid/Alberni Valley News Don Dowling sits on the Port Alberni Community Forest Advisory Committee. Public consultations were held at City Hall and Sproat Lake Community Hall this week as part of the process of establishing the project.

By Heather Reid
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The Port Alberni Community Forest (PACF) held two open houses this week to encourage the public to contribute to the plan.

Consultation with community stakeholders is required as part of the licence application that the City is in the midst of negotiating with the Ministry of Forest and Range, says Cindy Hutchison of DRH Forest Consulting. DRH has been enlisted to help with the application.

On Monday, members of the PACF advisory committee were on hand with information at City Hall and on Tuesday they set up their display at the Sproat Lake Community Hall.

The committee is made up of 11 people with backgrounds in business, forest management and public service. Both the Tseshaht and Hupacasath First Nations are represented on the committee as the proposed land falls into their traditional territories.

Prior to the face-to-face meetings, a survey was posted on the Port Alberni Community Forest website (www.communityforest.ca) to get feedback from the public.

Hutchison said public input is needed to determine forest management goals which will form the management plan. "That really guides your goals and objectives," she said. The community forest also has to present a business plan to demonstrate the viability of the project.

The proposed area consists of two chunks of land totalling 6366 hectares. One piece, called the Sproat unit is between Sproat and Great Central Lakes and the other, the Taylor unit, is at the west end of Sproat Lake.

The licence will permit the harvesting of a projected 18,000 cubic metres of timber annually, but Hutchison says it won't be a typical logging show.

The intent of the community forest is to benefit the town economically while incorporating local values. "We are accountable to the people of Port Alberni," Hutchison said.

Hutchison said the most common concerns she's heard so far are around trail protection, maintaining water quality and potential effects on the viewscapes around the lake.

Forest technician, Ray Bartram, said the application should be ready to send by next month. The committee expects to have provincial approval early in the new year at which time the forest stewardship plan gets developed. "That's more of a bird's eye view of the community forest," Hutchison explained. The plan is tailored to meet government objectives in terms of soils, water, wildlife and old-growth forests.

After that, the Port Alberni Community Forest can get a cutting permit. Something Bartram says should happen by the middle of next year.

Don Dowling spent many years working in the forest industry and brings that experience to the advisory committee. "There is money to be made while protecting other values," he said, "we need to hear from the public."

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