

Case 97

Sustainable Development in the Great Bear Rainforest

David and Lucile Packard Foundation, Rockefeller Brothers Fund et al, 2000

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Background. Over the course of the last few centuries, humankind has wrought enormous change on ecosystems of every imaginable kind and in virtually every corner of the world. The so-called “human footprint,” as viewed from space, is enormous, and shows clearly that there remain very few large places where human development has not yet had a major impact. Among the largest of these rare reservoirs of pristine habitat is the Canadian Boreal region, and in particular the Great Bear Rainforest.¹³⁵⁶ Stretching over some 21 million acres, the Great Bear Rainforest is composed largely of huge old growth trees—many of them over 2,000 years of age. Nearly 60 percent of the world’s coastal temperate rainforests have already been logged, and the Great Bear Rainforest composes fully one quarter of all that remains.¹³⁵⁷ With more biomass per acre than any other ecosystem on Earth, the Great Bear Rainforest contains an abundance of natural resources, including vast but diminishing salmon reserves, millions of migratory birds, and the world’s last significant population of white Kermode, or Spirit Bears. It is also home to about 10,000 indigenous peoples, known in Canada as First Nations.

Local Canadian environmental groups began, in the early 1980s, to become concerned, as Merran Smith of ForestEthics recalls, “that our little postage-stamp sized parks were just not protecting wildlife.”¹³⁵⁸ By the early 1990s, this concern had matured into organized resistance to the logging industry’s massive clear-cutting operations in the Boreal. In 1993, an announcement by the provincial government of British Columbia that it planned “to allow logging in two-thirds of the ancient hemlock, fir and cedar forests of Clayoquot Sound, on the western coast of Vancouver Island,” touched off the largest civil disobedience episode in Canadian history—a massive protest in which 800 people were arrested.¹³⁵⁹ According to Merran Smith, the Clayoquot Sound protest convinced local environmental groups that they could “protect an entire ecosystem, rare on the planet, on [a] large enough scale so it wouldn’t be eroded over time.”¹³⁶⁰ The Great Bear Rainforest “became an icon for people in the United States and Europe who don’t have that kind of biodiversity jewel.”¹³⁶¹

Environmentalists soon decided, however, that they could not use the same protest tactics in the far less accessible northern British Columbia as they had further south. To that end, they launched a major consumer awareness campaign to pressure buyers of timber and timber products not to purchase wood from old-growth trees. This aggressive advocacy campaign produced startling results, most notably in December 1999, when Home Depot announced it would phase out purchases of old growth timber. Because fully 10 percent of all wood sold in the United States goes through Home Depot, this decision sent shockwaves through the logging industry. Facing enormous economic pressure from Home Depot and such groups as the European Pulp and Paper Manufacturer’s Association, the six timber companies active in British Columbia soon called for negotiations with the environmentalist groups, the First Nations, and the provincial government.

It must be said that this remarkable development did not result solely from the environmentalists’ advocacy campaign. For years, the First Nations—who were generally skeptical at best of the crusading environmental groups—had contested in court that all the land in question and more was, in fact, theirs by right. In 1997, they won a major court victory holding that the First Nations’ rights and title to this vast region—96 percent of which was claimed by the Crown—had never been extinguished. That ruling threw into flux all development plans, and this uncertainty, combined with the old growth timber boycott described above, combined to bring the logging companies to the negotiating table. In any event, there was in early 2000 an unprecedented opportunity for all the

relevant stakeholders to work together for a broadly acceptable sustainable development plan in the Boreal. Recognizing that the most important work was just about to begin, the environmental groups at this point sought the aid of the David and Lucile Packard Foundation.

Strategy. The Packard Foundation saw in the Cascadia negotiations a chance to think several steps in advance of development, and to help create a sustainable development plan that would enable humans—both the First Nation residents and the interested timber companies—to utilize the region’s abundant resources, while still preserving irreplaceable habitats for salmon, eagles, bears, and the vast host of other organisms sharing the Great Bear Rainforest. The negotiation offered the chance to explore sustainable development on an unprecedented scale, and with more or less willing partners, so the Packard Foundation acted quickly to get involved.

The Foundation’s trustees approved almost immediately an out-of-cycle grant of \$2 million. The environmental groups would put half of this up immediately as capital to show their timber industry counterparts that they were serious about finding a workable solution. The second half would help the Foundation’s grantee organizations—which after all were composed of passionate campaigners, not savvy negotiators—to develop internally. This initial grant was seen by the Foundation as a high-risk, high-reward investment. As the negotiations proceeded—and began to bear fruit—the Foundation continued appropriating funds to facilitate crucial discussions feeding into the larger government-sanctioned negotiation, dubbed the Joint Solutions Project.¹³⁶² In addition, the Packard Foundation has engaged other funders—including the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation—in building a coalition to protect the Great Bear Rainforest.

Outcomes. On April 4, 2001, the timber companies, environmental groups, and First Nations leadership reached an historic compromise. Under the terms of the agreement, forty-two valleys, covering an area of some 1.5 million acres—twice the size of Yosemite National Park—were set aside permanently for conservation, and logging was suspended across another 2 million acres while negotiations continued. Depending on the outcome of those continuing talks, annual logging along the coast of British Columbia will fall by at least 15 percent, and possibly as much as 60 percent. Most importantly, the April 4 agreement declared the Joint Solutions Project’s goal to be “ecosystem-based management.” An explicit commitment to this approach was a major breakthrough. As a Packard Foundation memo explains: “Nowhere else in the world, not even in the threatened Amazon rainforest, is an experiment like this being carried out on such a large scale.”¹³⁶³ With the agreement of three key stakeholder groups a fait accompli, the provincial government was essentially forced to endorse the plan.

Very soon afterward, however, shifting political winds threw a wrench into the ongoing work of the Joint Solutions Project. In May 2001, provincial elections brought to power in British Columbia a new regional government. The newly elected Liberal Party leaders were far more conservative and opposed to regulation of business activities than their predecessors had been. This created a major sticking point, because without the engagement and consent of the provincial authority, no agreement would actually be implemented. In response, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund—which had been making modest grants in the region for several years preceding the formation of the Joint Solutions Project—convened a meeting of eight private foundations, including the Ford, Hewlett, Moore, and Packard Foundations, with Gordon Campbell, the new Premier of British Columbia. In this and subsequent talks, the foundations were able to overcome the new government’s early opposition to the effort, and secure an agreement to continue collaborative negotiations through the Joint Solutions Project.

Those negotiations are still going on. Although the four major groups have not yet reached full consensus, they are continuing to craft a sustainable development plan combining the best international research and theory with the local realities of British Columbia. To ensure that the solution is workable when it is finally reached, the environmental groups—with the aid of their

foundation allies—have embarked on an ambitious fund-raising plan. Their goal is to raise \$100 million, half of which will be committed by the local government. To the small regional NGOs that have up to now led the charge to protect the Great Bear Rainforest, this is an unapproachable sum. Recognizing this, the foundations brought in The Nature Conservancy (TNC) to manage this private fundraising drive. In addition, the foundations have played the key role of broker between TNC and the smaller non-profits, seeking to ensure that the full resources of The Nature Conservancy are brought to bear without TNC trampling the existing coalition of smaller groups that have been working in the region for years. In partnership with these local environmental NGOs, The Nature Conservancy has taken on the Great Bear Rainforest fundraising effort as a project of high global priority.

Impact. What was once an outright battle has now become a collaborative effort to preserve the Great Bear Rainforest. This transition alone is tremendously significant in breaking the traditional cycle of antagonism between environmental and industry groups, and in clearing a path for lasting progress. That it came about at all is a tribute to the tireless efforts of the First Nations, who have refused to give up a land to which they have deep attachment, and to a network of local environmental activists, including ForestEthics, the Rainforest Action Network, and Greenpeace—British Columbia, that brought the threatened Boreal into the public eye and thereby pressured logging companies to accept the necessity of compromise.

Foundations have not been the central actors in this ongoing drama, but their role has been very important. With a timely infusion of funds, the Packard Foundation helped to legitimate the environmental groups working on the Joint Solutions Project. The Rockefeller Brothers Fund built on years of involvement in and understanding of the region, using to full effect its local contacts in brokering the meeting between Premier Campbell and the eight foundations. These efforts cleared a major roadblock—the initial skepticism of the new government—that might otherwise have derailed the larger negotiations ongoing since 2000. These and other foundations secured the support of The Nature Conservancy in a large-scale fundraising effort that none of the smaller nonprofits could have managed, and then worked to ensure that TNC and the local network of NGOs worked as partners, not competitors, in a turf war. In facilitating the Joint Solutions Project, the Packard, Rockefeller Brothers, Moore, Hewlett, Ford, and other foundations have employed a range of resources—from money to convening power to access to the international research community. These resources have served to guide and support a negotiation process that is one of the bright lights of conservation and sustainable development in the history of the environmental movement.

Notes

1356. Much of this case study's substance was gleaned from a phone interview, conducted by the author on 4/19/2005, of Scott Rehmus, Program Officer for the Packard Foundation's Conservation and Science Program.

1357. Available from The Nature Conservancy website at <http://www.tnc.org>.

1358. "Cascadia: Great Bear Rainforest, British Columbia," memo from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation.

1359. *Ibid.*

1360. *Ibid.*

1361. *Ibid.*

1362. To date, the Packard Foundation has spent over \$6 million in support of the Joint Solutions Project. *Ibid.*

1363. *Ibid.*