

Notes from the Salt Spring Community Alliance Meeting
Our Forests: A Community Conversation
January 27, 2020

Approximately 40 people came to discuss the complex issues surrounding our forests and the wide variety of relationships that we have with them. The discussion began with a large circle in which everyone participated by answering ***Why are forests important to you?***

Answers were heartfelt and very personal. Many spoke with awe of the beauty of forests and the rejuvenation and nourishment they offer - both to ourselves and to the plants and animals that thrive in them. Some spoke of their pristine air and their importance to our mental health. Others spoke of the forests' roles as nature's water-retaining sponge as well their glorious shade in warm summers. Many cited the balance our forests give to our island home, expressing that they are essential to our survival, the habitat for ecosystems and complexities in nature beyond our understanding. They reminded us that we are forced by climate change to figure out how to protect our precious forests.

Others spoke of a different close relationship with trees as their livelihood, citing decades of both cutting and planting them. They offered the perspective of logging as a centuries-old and critically-important element of Salt Spring's ecology and economy. We were reminded that agriculture required the clearing of trees and that regeneration is successful on Salt Spring.

A number spoke of their love of forests but also of their recognition that trees were cut to build their homes. They shared their appreciation of lovely wood products that enrich their lives everyday. They wished for a balance of these conflicting feelings.

Some sought solutions by lamenting the disappearance of local wood economies, such as local mills and wood crafting, with so many of our logs going to China. Couldn't we re-establish those businesses to allow a forest economy to continue while still respecting our forests?

With clearly-different perspectives, participants split into three groups to further explore this complex issue by discussing: ***What are the challenges, issues and complexities that are obstacles to achieving or sustaining balance for our forests?***

While the three conversations were markedly different, two very different perspectives emerged:

"Everything must change. It is no longer business as usual."

"Nothing needs to change. Business as usual is just fine."

One group worked to define "clearcutting." The benefits of different, more ecological, methods of logging were mentioned with frequency. Also, our wastefulness as a society was discussed as

well as the impact of this wastefulness on our forests. It was asked: *What compromises and alterations are we willing to make concerning our lifestyles and the way we live?*

A conclusion from the small groups seemed to be that this discussion was the first step toward understanding those with different perspectives. Solutions will require working together and compromise, as do most things in our diverse community.

Just before the end of the meeting, everyone gathered again into one large circle for the opportunity to speak to these three queries:

What surprised you? What did you not hear? and

Do you have a project in mind, & do you need help with that project from folks in the room?

What surprised you?

Some were surprised with the respectful discussion that resulted when so many different strongly-held opinions were expressed.

What did you not hear?

Not enough was said about fire prevention.

One noted that we did not focus on defending private property rights.

There was no plan to protect our forests while also keeping our loggers in business.

Do you have a project or action in mind, and do you need help from folks in the room?

Projects that emerged were:

- An invitation was offered to visit Seven Ravens Eco-Forest to see what is being done there as an alternative to clearcutting.
- A request was made that information from this meeting be shared with landowners to inform them of potential restrictions that may be coming on tree cutting.
- Volunteers were sought to help map our big trees.
- A project to control our deer population through a controlled venison harvesting program was proposed to improve the recovery of clear-cut areas.
- A request was made to assess forests in protected lands (possibly the Conservancy) for a selective logging project.
- A study to look more deeply into the community forest project by a Chekamus and Whistler partnership was proposed.
- An invitation was given to all to attend the Community Alliance meeting next month (February 24) to discuss the Climate Action Plan.

This discussion clearly illustrated that forests are an extremely complex issue. It also revealed the extent of the work needed to bring those with a diverse array of forest perspectives together to address the issue. Listening to others' perspectives was only the first step on a long journey. Some who wanted answers were frustrated, lamenting *We haven't solved anything!*

Despite this frustration, new connections were made among those with different perspectives. These connections were illustrated by the multiple conversations extending long after the end of the meeting. Only at 10:00 when the lights were turned out did these groups disperse.

We are left with the question: *Who will take this to the next level?* Island Forest Watch volunteers will follow-up with individuals to pursue some of the information that emerged at this meeting. But, to successfully address this complex issue, strategic alliances with the multiple groups, such as the Conservancy and Islands Trust, will need to be developed.