

REGION

Non-timber forest products a growth industry — who gets control?

Submitted by
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Advisory Group

The West Island Woodlands Advisory Group sponsored the second in a series of seminars addressing Sustainable Forest Management issues in June. This seminar dealt with a variety of issues surrounding non-timber forest products such as harvestable mushrooms and salal.

With representatives from local First Nations, the North Island Non-Timber Forest Products Pilot Project, Ministry of Forests, and Weyerhaeuser, the panel set out to explore several questions.

Who actually owns non-timber forest products? Under the law, the non-timber forest products on

Crown lands are the property of the Crown. However, the real issue that arose from this discussion was who manages for non-timber forest products and values. As it turns out no one does. There is no management for NTFPs at a provincial, municipal, or corporate level.

What is the economic potential of these non-timber forest products? What arose from the discussion surrounding the economic potential of this industry is that the harvesting of NTFPs on Vancouver Island is a very substantial business.

The North Island Pilot Project saw the development of four new buying stations as an example of how NTFPs could stimulate employment. One of the primary outcomes of this discussion was

that there is a lot about this industry that is not understood by those outside of it, and that by bringing harvesters, buyers and business people together could provide an incubator for increased growth in the market.

What does Weyerhaeuser want?

As part of Weyerhaeuser's Coastal Competitive Tenure Reform Green Paper, it was suggested that the control of NTFPs in the TFL could be one way of compensating the company for giving up part of their license.

At this point Weyerhaeuser does not have control over NTFPs in T.F.L. #44.

The advisory group learned that this is a very complex issue with no easy solutions to the problems. For example, there were con-

cerns raised about the harvesting of second growth fir as chanterelle mushrooms like to grow at their base. As the fir is harvested, pickers are seeing a reduction in the chanterelle crops.

This is a crop with substantial economic impact on our Valley. Can the advisory group examine this issue through the Sustainable Forest Management plan for the TFL? Not unless there are some details available about locations — and these were not forthcoming from those who attended the seminar. So there are barriers related to the informal and secret nature of the NTFP business.

In summary then, it seems that although there is potential for increased economic benefits from NTFP, the issues of land owner-

ship, NTFP ownership, licensing and sustainable harvesting guidelines seem insurmountable. Our question now is: Are those in the industry (pickers, buyers, exporters) willing to come together to look at what could be done locally to grow this industry — or not? Since the seminar we have had two people call to indicate support for this kind of discussion as a next step — if others step forward — who knows what we might be able to do?

The West Island Woodlands Advisory Group would like to thank all who participated in the panel discussion and the audience for providing their input. The next seminar in this series will address the issue of raw log exports, and will be held later in the fall.