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ADVISORY GROUP CALLS FOR EDUCATION AND DIALOGUE TO STRENGTHEN COOPERATION IN LOCAL FOREST SECTOR

PORT ALBERNI -- Collaborative processes such as Canadian Standards Association (CSA) forest certification, ongoing in Tree Farm Licence (TFL) 44, can help diminish the distance between the ecological concerns and logging concerns of divergent groups by building trust, respect and an appreciation for differing values. That's the message Tawney Lem, Hupacasth Band representative for the local West Island Woodlands Public Advisory Group (WIWAG) took to a panel discussing the involvement of Aboriginal groups in certification processes at a recent Forest Leadership Forum in Atlanta, Georgia. The Forum brought together age-old rivals for constructive talks about responsible harvesting, selling and growing of wood products. More than 1,000 people from 44 countries attended, including organizations such as Greenpeace, International Paper, the World Wildlife Fund and Home Depot.

"I was pleased to have the opportunity to participate on the panel and present our (WIWAG's) point of view. I found it interesting that the CSA certification standard is not perceived as a vehicle for creating collaboration and respect among the different interests when the experience of our advisory group has been just that," says Lem. "This is not to say that we always agree," she adds, "but we can at least agree enough to keep coming together and working toward common solutions."

Inherent in reaching those common solutions is the need for deep understanding among all parties of the complexities of the issues at hand. Beginning June 5th, the WIWAG will host a series of public seminars on key forest issues over the next several weeks. "The issues we're dealing with are very complex, and we find we often have more questions than we have answers," says Michelle Colussi, WIWAG facilitator. "We invite the public to participate with us as we try to develop a common base of knowledge and a way of beginning to identify local issues and opportunities for future cooperation. Given that there are many issues beyond our control, its important to begin now to build some agreement about possible solutions that we can influence locally," she explains.

As an example of such cooperation, Colussi cites the U.S. Pacific Northwest, where 40 non-profit and business partners have come together as the "Healthy Forests, Healthy Communities Partnership". The group is a collaborative network dedicated to building rural economies based on forest restoration and ecosystem management, and to creating markets for the by-products of these activities (www.hfhcp.org).

“While this may not be the exact kind of network we need in our region, it argues for strengthening communities through co-operation to strengthen the forest sector,” Colussi notes.

The West Island Woodlands Advisory Group was formed nearly two years ago to strengthen sustainable forest management planning and practices in TFL 44. It includes representatives from labour, First Nations, the environment, fisheries, tourism, recreation, small business, forest sector business and local, provincial and federal government. Staff members from Weyerhaeuser, which holds management responsibility for the TFL, act as resources to the Group. The company’s West Island Timberlands Unit Franklin operation and Sproat Lake Operations both achieved CSA certification last year, but must qualify for re-certification annually.

For registration and details on the upcoming public forestry seminars, please contact Ryan at 723-5782. The first session, “Sustainable Forest Management” with Prof. Hamish Kimmins from UBC will be held on June 5th at 7:00 PM in the Dogwood Room at Echo Centre.