

Forest Conservation in British Columbia, 1935-85: Reflections on a Barren Political Debate*

JEREMY WILSON

British Columbians' concern with forest conservation has ebbed and flowed since 1935. The latest flow tide — lasting from about 1970 to the present — helped bring about large-scale changes in thinking about the future of the forest industry. At the same time as industry analysts presented pessimistic accounts centring on problems such as plant obsolescence, the need for new product lines, capital shortages, and unfavourable trends in traditional markets, evidence about the deteriorated forest resource base accumulated.¹ Details about the size of the “not satisfactorily restocked” backlog, the doubtful economic accessibility of much of the remaining old growth timber, and the inferior nature of the second growth forest were all extensively canvassed. British Columbians began to realize that the transition from first growth to second growth logging would be accompanied by a “falldown” in timber supply, a drop made inevitable by the fact that the second growth forests generally do not produce the volumes of timber found in the first growth stands. By 1980, pessimistic projections about the scope of the falldown phenomenon had begun to receive official endorsement and amplification, with the Ministry of Forests predicting that wood supply falldowns would begin within five to twenty years in at least one Timber Supply Area in every region and

* I am indebted to Bob McDonald, Viv Nelles, Ken Drushka, Georgie Wilson, and two anonymous referees for their comments on an earlier draft of this article.

¹ See, for example, B.C., Ministry of Forests, *Forest and Range Resource Analysis: Technical Report* (Victoria: Ministry of Forests, 1980); B.C., Ministry of Forests, *Forest and Range Resource Analysis 1984* (Victoria: Ministry of Forests, 1984); Canada, Canadian Forestry Service, *The Need for Forest Renewal and Management in British Columbia* (Ottawa: Ministry of Supply and Services, 1983); Council of Forest Industries of British Columbia and other associations, *Submission to the Royal Commission on the Economic Union and Development Prospects for Canada* (n.p., 1983); Woodbridge, Reed and Associates, *British Columbia's Forest Products Industry Constraints to Growth* (prepared for the Ministry of State for Economic and Regional Development) (n.p., 1984); and Sten Nilsson, *An Analysis of the British Columbia Forest Sector around the Year 2000* (Volume 1) (Vancouver, 1985).

arguing that "maintenance of present harvest rates over the long term may not be feasible in most regions."²

In fundamental respects the worries expressed after 1970 paralleled those voiced during the previous high tide of conservationist concern. The ten- to fifteen-year period starting in about 1935 saw a similar upsurge of concern about the sustainability of the forest resource. This shift in mood paved the way for major policy changes. It led to the first Sloan Commission (1944-45) and then to the adoption of "sustained yield," a policy which, in Sloan's definition, was designed to ensure "a perpetual yield of wood of commercially usable quality from regional areas in yearly or periodic quantities of equal or increasing volume."³ According to those charged with responsibility for implementing and selling the new policy, it would promote greater reinvestment in forest land and discourage wasteful logging practices.⁴ The perception that sustained yield spelled an end to "devastation" logging gained a solid foothold in the post-war years. After 1950 worries over timber perpetuation receded until a new set of factors combined to bring about the post-1970 resurgence.

This paper examines these ebbs and flows of conservationist sentiment in greater detail. It considers the diagnoses and prescriptions advanced by conservationists in different periods, focusing on whether the perceptions and assumptions dominating debate were challenged by alternative visions of the future and/or alternative conceptions of the public interest. In particular, it seeks to discover whether the case for timber conservation was linked to debate over fundamental political questions. Were concerns about timber perpetuation tied to arguments for a different division of the proceeds from forest liquidation? Were these concerns linked to arguments about better ways of managing forest land?

Since much of the debate that did take place went unrecorded, the paper's conclusions must obviously be somewhat impressionistic. Examination of the province's newspapers, testimony to the three royal commissions on forestry held between 1945 and 1975 (the Sloan commissions of 1944-45 and 1955-56, and the Pearse Commission of 1975), and sundry other sources such as interest group briefs and government reports nonetheless suggests that, in each period, debate was dominated by certain assumptions and perceptions. The issue was defined as problematic in the

² B.C., Ministry of Forests, *Forest and Range Resource Analysis* (Victoria, 1980), 19.

³ Hon. Gordon McG. Sloan, *Report of the Commissioner on the Forest Resource of British Columbia, 1945*, (Victoria: Charles F. Banfield, 1945), Q127. (Hereafter, *Sloan Commission 1945*).

⁴ See interview with Chief Forester C. D. Orchard, *Vancouver Sun*, 26 July 1948.

years between 1935 and about 1950. By the midpoint of this period major opinion leaders coalesced around the view that the province needed a sustained yield policy based on the "private working circle" idea first proposed by Chief Forester C. D. Orchard in 1942. After 1950 the threatening images of the earlier period were replaced by the positive symbolism of tree farming and by the widely held notion that the policies now in place guaranteed a perpetual flow of timber and wealth. After 1970 the forest conservation issue was once again defined as problematic, with diagnoses of the problem dominated by the view that government investment in forest land had been too low.

Assessment of the extent to which these definitions were questioned leads to the conclusion that debate was generally rather barren. Given the reputed vitality of the B.C. political culture and the centrality of the issue, it did not seem unreasonable to expect strong criticism of mainstream assumptions. These expectations were not met. While it would be an exaggeration to say that the dominant definitions of the issue's salience and nature went totally uncontested, the challenges were rather weak. An evaluation based on even modest standards of what would constitute a robust debate turns up telling gaps. Three seem particularly noteworthy.

First, during the 1950-1970 period the notion that forest perpetuation problems had been resolved was not vigorously questioned. Although some actors, notably the CCF-NDP, were suspicious of this view, it was not scrutinized in a concerted way. The mood of concern marking the 1940s did not translate into rigorous analysis of the way sustained yield policy was implemented in the 1950s and 1960s.

Second, fundamental precepts concerning the distribution of decision-making control over the resource were subject to little debate. Arrangements favoured by government and industry were not challenged by populist alternatives. In fact, a system that vested control in the minister, the Forest Service, and the companies holding long-term tenure rights, and allowed these decision-makers to operate relatively free of public scrutiny, was not questioned until the 1970s, when arguments favouring a wider dispersal of control began to have some impact. The absence of populist approaches was especially noteworthy in the period of the first Sloan Commission. The polity of this era not only failed to produce proponents of decentralized models like those presented in the 1970s. It also failed to yield advocates of more modest proposals for democratizing the policy-making process. Sloan's proposal that control should be handed to an unaccountable forest commission was not countered by demands for more democratic methods of protecting the public interest. No one pro-

posed constructing improved mechanisms for holding public and private policy makers more accountable. Even the quite unradical idea that the government should be required, at least periodically, to present the people with comprehensible, "state of the resource" reviews does not seem to have been put forward.

Third, the issue of how wealth generated by forest liquidation should be distributed was not vigorously debated. Although the image of the irresponsible son busily liquidating his inheritance was often advanced as an apt metaphor, concern over forest liquidation generally failed to translate into debate about the division of the proceeds among capital, labour, and the resource owner. Of the arguments surveyed, only those advanced by CCF spokesman Colin Cameron in the 1940s forged a strong link between the need for conservation and the importance of opening fundamental questions about distribution of the proceeds from forest liquidation. Those arguing for greater reinvestment generally accepted that the resource owner should foot the bill. It was rarely suggested that some of the inherited forest wealth getting reincarnated in the mansions, Maui condos, philanthropic gestures or "diversification" strategies of forest industry capitalists (or, for that matter, in the 4 x 4's and power boats of forest industry workers) might be better reinvested in forest perpetuation.

All of these observations about gaps in the debate can be seen as rooted in one central point. The province's citizens have been slow to adopt, or at least assert, a landlord's perspective. British Columbians, it is often suggested, strongly favour continued public ownership of the resource.⁵ Assuming this reading to be accurate, it is ironic that such sentiment has not generated tough questions about the size of the public's share of returns from the resource, or analysis of the structures and policies that have made it difficult for the public to hold accountable those it entrusts to manage, price, and sell the resource.

As this brief introductory outline suggests, the main features of the story to be described are not particularly unique. The power to define societal thinking about any particular policy issue is never widely dispersed; certain groups always control the processes by which the terms and boundaries of debate are defined. In this instance, those interests most intensely involved in exploitation of the resource — forest capital, forest labour, and the government forest bureaucracy — dominated debate, managing

⁵ See, for example, the views expressed by Chief Forester C. D. Orchard to the second Sloan Commission. Hon. Gordon McG. Sloan, *Report of the Commissioner: The Forest Resources of British Columbia 1956* (Victoria: Don McDiarmid, 1957), 66. (Hereafter, *Sloan Commission 1956*).

to define both the salience of the issue and the appropriate means of dealing with it. While these components of what Viv Nelles calls the exploitation axis⁶ certainly did not always see eye-to-eye on all aspects of forest policy, they generally did agree on what priority should be given the conservation problem, on what broad assumptions should guide the response to it, and on what perspective should be excluded from serious consideration.

In a general sense, the limited scope of debate can be seen as resulting from the wide scope of this exploitation axis. The fact that it envelops the capital-labour antagonism which energizes so much political debate in the society is obviously significant. A full explanation of the debate's barrenness must, however, take other factors into account. The explanatory net must be widened if we are to understand why the definitions favoured by the dominant groups were not more vigorously contested.

While a full explanation must consider a number of factors unique to particular periods, two themes are pervasive. First, certain overriding factors operated to limit the capacity of those inclined to question the dominant assumptions. Most importantly, all facets of the story were influenced by the technical complexity of the issue. This complexity contributed significantly to the barriers faced by potential challengers, thereby reinforcing the power of those able to control expertise. These barriers were exacerbated by central features of the provincial government system. For example, given the nature of the legislative system operating in the 1950s and 1960s, it was impossible for the opposition to demand the sort of accounting needed to cast light on whether sustained yield goals were being achieved.

A second general point arises out of the character of the province's political society. To some extent, gaps in the debate must simply be seen as a reflection of gaps in the political group life of the province. At least during the early part of the period surveyed, groups with the inclination and capacity to articulate certain points of view just did not seem to exist. On this front, significant change did take place in the 1970s, when debate was joined by a wider array of groups. This development must be attributed at least in part to the fact that the society became bigger, wealthier, and more diverse.

Forest Conservationism in the 1930s and 1940s

Fears concerning the possibility of timber shortages began to crystallize as British Columbia emerged from the depression. It is difficult to gauge

⁶ Personal communication, 7 November 1986.

the breadth or depth of popular concern, but available evidence suggests that doubts about the future timber supply were widespread by the early 1940s. Editorial criticism of government forest management practice became commonplace after 1935,⁷ and a wide array of groups, including H. H. Stevens' B.C. Natural Resources Conservation League, a number of Boards of Trade, and various youth, religious, and women's organizations directed resolutions to Premiers Pattullo and Hart protesting forest policies.⁸ A pair of somewhat offbeat pamphleteers also joined in. Captain Max Paulik (a former advisor to the South Russian Government and chief forest inspector in the state forests of the Ukraine) penned a series of attacks on government forest management practices under headings such as "Forest Devastation," "The After-Effects of Forest Devastation," "Bluffing the Public," and "The Spoils System," while Francis Turnley (whose other publications included "The Turnley Plan to Insure Prime Rights" and "The Alphabet of Wisdom: Introducing Planetarianism") campaigned against clearcut logging in a magazine called the *Visioneer* and in his pamphlet, "Forests for the Future."⁹

What is most noteworthy about the rise of forest conservationism after 1935 is the role played by government Forest Service officials in stimulating concern and shaping perceptions of causes and solutions. The bible of this campaign was the service's 1937 publication, *The Forest Resources of British Columbia*, prepared under the guidance of F. D. Mulholland.¹⁰ Based on inventory work begun in 1927, the Mulholland report outlined

⁷ See, for example, "Reforestation Failure," *Vancouver Sun*, 13 June 1938; "Repairing Our Forests," *Daily Province*, 23 April 1942; "Conservation: Who Cares," *Daily Province*, 10 February 1941; and "Years Behind the Need," *Daily Province*, 13 January 1943.

⁸ See, for example, Stevens to Hart, 29 November 1943, Premiers' Papers, vol. 41, file 1, Provincial Archives of British Columbia (hereafter PABC); Association of Boards of Trade of Vancouver Island to Pattullo, 27 June 1940; Henry George Club of Victoria to Pattullo, 5 March 1940; Synod of the Anglican Diocese of B.C. to Pattullo, 17 February 1939, Premiers' Papers, vol. 29, file 2, PABC; Young Liberal Association to Pattullo, 6 December 1938; United Church Young People's League to Pattullo, 8 December 1938; South Saanich Farmers' Institute to Pattullo, 25 November 1938; The Imperial Daughters of the Empire to Pattullo, 23 November 1938, Premiers' Papers, vol. 19, file 5, PABC.

⁹ Max Paulik, *The Truth About Our Forests* (Vancouver: Forester Publishers, 1937); *Critical Examination of the Research Work of the Forest Branch of British Columbia* (Vancouver: Forester Publishers, 1937); and *Reforestation Policy of British Columbia: A Critical Analysis* (Vancouver: Forester Publishers, 1948). Francis R. Turnley, "Forests for the Future" (submission to B.C. Commission on Forest Resources, vol. 15, file 13, PABC); "What of the Forest Future," *Visioneer: Engineering for the Future*, August 1943; and "Of These Our Forests," *Visioneer*, July 1943.

¹⁰ B.C., Department of Lands, Forest Service, *The Forest Resources of British Columbia, 1937* (Victoria, Charles F. Banfield, 1937).

serious grounds for concern about the condition of B.C.'s forests. It estimated that in relation to their sustained annual yield capacity, the accessible coast forests were being overcut by 100 per cent and the total forest, accessible and inaccessible, by 20 per cent. Mulholland's summary of the situation was clear:

On the Coast not only is reforestation unsatisfactory, but the rapid expansion of industries is making it apparent that it will be impossible to avoid a conflict between the desire of private interests to utilize all the mature stands as quickly as markets can be found for the timber, and the public interest which requires that great basic industries dependent upon natural resources should be regulated on a permanent basis. Increased effort should be made to conserve the remaining virgin timber by reduction of waste, because the Coast forests are now being overcut in relation to the rate of replacement by growth. In the Interior local regulation of the cut is needed, but the more urgent requirement is better protection from fire and insect damage.¹¹

The time had come for sustained yield management. Change would have to come quickly, for "if it is not introduced before the present large forest revenues have disappeared, it is doubtful if capital will be available for the extensive rebuilding of denuded forests which will then be necessary."¹²

Ernest C. Manning, who was elevated to the position of Chief Forester after the death of C. Z. Caverhill in 1935, was the Forest Service's main propagandist until his death in early 1941. In numerous speeches and articles both before and after publication of the Mulholland report, Manning campaigned against his favourite targets: wasteful logging practices, poor slash disposal, and underspending. His performance before the Forestry Committee of the legislature in 1937 typified his presentations. After showing films to illustrate how once-booming East Kootenay mill towns had been reduced to ghost towns, Manning turned his attention to the lower coast, where "we find history not only repeating itself, but the process of timber liquidation speeded up by a most wasteful system of logging, leaving behind over half the logged-over areas in a barren or semi-productive condition."¹³ The south coast (Vancouver District) region was being overcut: "... at the present rate of cutting, our great Douglas fir lumber industry will be definitely on the downhill grade

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹² *Ibid.*, 12.

¹³ "Address by the Chief Forester to the Forestry Committee of the British Columbia Legislature, Nov. 2, 1937," *Commission on the Forests Resources of British Columbia*, 1945, exhibit 550, vol. 19, file 9, GR 520, PABC, 4.

within 15 years."¹⁴ Too much land was being left in unproductive conditions following logging:

we have already on our hands 1½ million acres of logged-over land in this Coast District, at least half of which we are leaving to our children in a barren or semi-productive condition; meanwhile we are proceeding merrily ahead and helping ourselves to a crop worth \$100 to \$200 per acre.¹⁵

Special criticism was directed at logging practices on the Esquimalt and Nanaimo (E & N) Railway grant land on Vancouver Island.

In general, said Manning, the situation could be traced to persistent disregard for the recommendations of the 1909 royal commission on forest resources. The commission's view that royalties be treated as capital rather than revenue had been ignored; only about 25 per cent of revenue from the forests had been spent on forest protection, research, and enhancement. In addition, little control had been exercised over logging on the coast and even less attention had been paid the fledgling interior industry.

Considering the severity of his criticism, Manning's prescriptions were quite moderate. He was pessimistic about the prospects for wholesale policy change, and ready to accept that "our legislation, with minor amendments, is ample for our present needs."¹⁶ What was needed was a government willing to spend more to implement existing legislation and ready to give the public interest primacy in enforcing it.

C. D. Orchard, who succeeded to the position of Chief Forester following Manning's death, went much further in suggesting solutions, contending that the prescriptions presented to date were inadequate. Whereas Manning had taken the stance of the liberal interventionist, Orchard adopted the *laissez-faire* notion "that private interest can be made to coincide with public interest and that private interest can be substituted for penalties and coercions."¹⁷ Orchard set out his position in a 1942 memo to Minister of Lands Wells Gray. It stressed the seriousness of the situation:

We have nothing like the timber resources we once thought we had. Our production capacity is being reduced alarmingly. . . . Our most valuable areas

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ "Address to Forestry Committee of the Legislature," 15 November 1938, GR 1242, PABC, 7-8.

¹⁷ Orchard, "Forest Working Circles," a memo to the Hon. A. Wells Grey, August 1942, vol. 8, file 15, Orchard Papers, UBC Special Collections, 15.

are being overcut. Our production . . . must of necessity fall off sharply during the next few decades if prompt measures are not taken to forestall it.¹⁸

According to Orchard, the response would have to recognize that the current legislation governing timber sales forces "the licensee or operator into a position where he has no personal interest whatever other than to remove from the land as quickly as possible all existing values."¹⁹ The germ of the tree farm licence idea was plainly evident in Orchard's core recommendation:

the rational solution is to give the operator, wherever possible, an interest in the area he is working that will permit him to make long-term plans in co-operation with the Government, and permit him to see the possibility at some later date of retrieving capital invested and profits delayed in the immediate interest of forest conservation and perpetuation.²⁰

If Orchard's retrospective account is valid,²¹ his memo persuaded the coalition government to adopt sustained yield policies. Premier Hart, however, responded cautiously, arguing that a royal commission on the province's forest resources would have to be set up because "he couldn't hope to get such a radical change of policy through the legislature if it were introduced 'cold'."²² Thus, Mr. Justice Gordon Sloan of the B.C. Court of Appeal was appointed in late 1943 to conduct such an inquiry.

Although it would probably be going too far to suggest that Sloan's recommendations were pre-ordained, he did endorse the main features of Orchard's conservationist case, using a strong metaphor to stress the need for change:

At present our forest resources might be visualized as a slowly descending spiral. That picture must be changed to an ascending spiral. . . . Our forest industries have been living on an expenditure of forest capital that has taken hundreds of years to accumulate at no cost to industry. The time has now come when we have to plan to live on forest interest and maintain our capital unimpaired.²³

In Sloan's mind the range of policy options was limited by the need to maintain the profitability of existing operations and by the need to treat

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

²¹ Note of 21 Sept. 1959 attached to "Forest Working Circles," vol. 8, file 15, and Orchard "Reminiscences," vol. 4, file 20, Orchard Papers, 86.

²² Orchard, "Note."

²³ *Sloan Commission 1945, Q127-28.*

existing timber rights as sacrosanct. Orchard had suggested the only conceivable way of overcoming the inherent weaknesses of the present tenure system: privately owned timber should be augmented with Crown timber to form private working circles.²⁴ Operators with private timber holdings would be induced to practise sustained yield with an offer of guaranteed long-term rights to contiguous or nearby Crown timber. The operator would be able to move on to cut mature Crown timber while waiting for his own land to restock, and the combined private and Crown areas would produce sufficient second-growth timber to allow production levels to be maintained in perpetuity. Public working circles would also be established. These would be managed by the government in accordance with sustained yield principles, with production allocated either to the open log market or to small millers possessing no timber of their own.²⁵

Sloan also recommended major changes to the systems of forest finance and administration. No matter dealt with by the commission occasioned greater consensus than the subject of forest finance. Sloan was reflecting widely accepted perceptions when he denounced past governments for their short-term view of forest finance and spoke of millions of dollars having been "drained from our forests into the general revenue to help pay for governmental activities and services wholly unconnected with the protection and development of the primary source of our Province's wealth."²⁶ To free forest policy from what Professor Drummond of UBC had termed "bondage to the system of Treasury control," a sharp administrative departure was necessary. Full powers to organize, plan, and implement the new sustained yield policy should be vested in a permanent forest commission possessing the degree of independence necessary to allow long-range planning.

The idea of a commission seems to have been taken from an extensive paper on administrative arrangements prepared by Professor Drummond at the royal commission's behest. All forms of direct forest revenue would be credited to the new commission, thus giving it the funds necessary to replenish and perpetuate forest capital. It would be constituted under legislation designed to give it a "free and powerful hand." Its jurisdiction would extend over all aspects of forestry. The composition of such an all-powerful body would obviously be of paramount importance. Rejecting suggestions that it be composed of forestry "experts" or representatives of

²⁴ For details of Sloan's recommendations see *ibid.*, Q143-Q149.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, Q147.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, Q111.

different branches of the forest industry, Sloan proposed a three to five member commission, "composed of reliable men of sound common sense who can accept responsibility and make proper decisions free from any trammelling influences — political or otherwise."²⁷

The limitations of the reformist approach articulated by Sloan and Orchard were evident in the Sloan report's treatment of some specific problems. It did not come to grips with just how much reforestation was needed. It did not question whether the state and industry had the capacity to carry out the levels of reforestation or forest management needed to make the new sustained yield policy effective. It cited disturbing evidence about both the size of the Douglas fir forest base and the decline in the proportion of high grade logs being harvested, but treated both issues with equanimity. The need to avoid a "calamitous" timber supply hiatus was addressed in that the proposed concept of sustained yield called for controlled or rationed liquidation of the remaining old growth. But the possibility that the second growth forests would be smaller or of poorer quality — the possibility later understood to be at the root of "falldown" — was not considered. And, although a general desire to eliminate the possibility of "highgrading" (cutting the most valuable and/or accessible parts of stands first) was evident in the report's rejection of a proposal that the entire coast should be treated as one big working circle, the possibility of highgrading within smaller units was not dealt with.

The difficulties faced by forest policy makers of the Sloan era must, of course, be acknowledged. Given the complexity of the project being undertaken, and given the high level of uncertainty evident in much of the testimony to Sloan, his desire to leave certain problems for the almighty forest commission was understandable. In addition, Sloan and Orchard clearly felt it would be unrealistic to impose additional restrictions on the existing operators. Indeed, if his reminiscences of fifteen years later can be taken to provide an accurate account of his earlier perceptions, Orchard originally doubted whether companies could be induced by the private working circle idea. Commenting later on his surprise at the rush of applicants that followed implementation of the idea in the Forest Management Licence legislation of 1947, Orchard said:

Whereas I had thought that, given the authority, we just might induce some public spirited and far sighted operator to take up a forest management licence with all its attendant responsibilities, the fact turned out to be that almost at once we were deluged with applications. Industry saw in an assured

²⁷ *Ibid.*, Q152.

timber supply a chance for capital gain that I had quite overlooked, and which no one in Government or Civil Service detected.²⁸

While this story does seem rather difficult to credit, it should perhaps be taken as an indication of how ill prepared forest policy makers were for the post-war boom.

The Orchard-Sloan approach reflected the political-economic dispositions they brought to the task. Neither questioned the prevailing distribution of economic power and rewards. Under their reform brand of conservationism, existing operators would be given every opportunity to consolidate and extend their timber holdings. Sloan did part company with Orchard and other government elites by challenging the existing management system. If anything, though, his Forest Commission would have been less accountable to the public than the existing cabinet-forest service structure. Sloan's approach to protecting the public interest was what one might have expected from a member of the judicial elite.

The main alternative to the reform conservationist model was put forward by the CCF. In the 1940s the CCF's position was largely articulated by Colin Cameron, MLA for Comox from 1937-1945 and later a Member of Parliament. If we leave aside the 1930s efforts of a fringe group known as the CCF Economic Planning Commission,²⁹ it was Cameron who first set down in comprehensive terms the case for CCF-style state forestry.

Cameron's wartime pamphlet, "Forestry . . . B.C.'s Devastated Industry," outlined the CCF alternative.³⁰ In it, Cameron linked concerns about forest depletion to a vision of a more self-sufficient B.C. economy:

There is no gain to us tearing our forests to pieces to exchange them for things we could produce just as easily at home. . . . If we can rid our minds of the idea that the primary purpose of industry is to provide jobs for the workers and profits for the operators, and grasp the idea that the sole function of all industry, as far as the ordinary citizen is concerned, is to produce, directly or indirectly, consumer goods and services, then we shall be able to plan the use of our natural wealth along sane and commonsense lines. It will lay the foundation of a much more secure economy for B.C. if we begin now to develop a socially-owned industry to supply our domestic requirements of every commodity that can be economically produced here, rather than to continue to rely on the forests of the province to buy for us the cups and

²⁸ Orchard, "Reminiscences," 98.

²⁹ See the commission's series of colourful posters extolling the virtues of state logging, box 40-6f, MacInnis Collection, UBC Special Collections. See also box 55a-29 (Ernest Winch papers). The aforementioned Captain Paulik was probably the driving force.

³⁰ Colin Cameron, *Forestry . . . B.C.'s Devastated Industry* (Vancouver: CCF, n.d.).

saucers, glass, boots and clothing we require. . . . British Columbia has been conducting her affairs like an exiled Russian Grand Duchess who sells her jewels bit by bit to get the more prosaic but more useful necessities of life. And like the Grand Duchess we are rapidly getting down to the last necklace. No matter what we do now — no matter how drastic a policy for forest economy we introduce, we have to face the fact that within ten or fifteen years our major industry will be reduced to a fraction of its present size.³¹

In order to deal with the problem, the “sacred cow of private property” would have to be dealt with. Cameron recommended tough measures:

There is no solution possible to the problem of preserving our major resources and industry unless private ownership of forest lands is abolished or unless the private owners are prepared to operate under the complete control and supervision of public officials in a comprehensive and integrated scheme.³²

Cameron’s brief to Sloan, presented in September 1944, carried the case further. It focused directly on questions about how the province’s forests could be refurbished, laying down a strong challenge to the way wealth drawn from the province’s forests was distributed. Cameron rejected the reform conservationist view that the state should foot the bill for rebuilding the forests:

The truth is that the people of British Columbia, through their government, do not have the decision as to the disposal and allocation of revenues from the forests except to a very minor extent. Only a small proportion of what must be regarded as revenues from the forests reaches the public treasury . . . [It] is clear that the overwhelming bulk of the net returns from the exploitation of the forests of the province is drawn off into private hands and only a small fraction reaches the public treasury. . . . I submit that [the reinvestment needed] cannot be accomplished effectively by the government out of the small proportion of forest revenues which comes to the public treasury but must in large measure come from the revenues which now accrue to private corporations.³³

Cameron believed private industry had sufficient financial resources to refurbish the forests. In order to assess this financial capability there would have to be an examination of the industry’s capital structure similar to the one carried out in the 1934-37 investigation of the coal and petroleum industries by Mr. Justice M. A. Macdonald.

Whether the industry would be prepared to reinvest in forest perpetuation was, Cameron acknowledged, another matter. Testimony to Sloan

³¹ *Ibid.*, 11-13.

³² *Ibid.*, 15.

³³ Colin Cameron, “Brief submitted to Royal Commission on Forestry,” 7 September 1944, exhibit 316, vol. 14, GR 520, PABC, 2-3.

left little doubt that the industry thought that responsibility for forest conservation belonged to the public, the owner of the resource. The private sector would be induced to accept greater responsibility under the Orchard scheme. But Cameron had doubts about the equity and workability of this plan, particularly the part ceding long-term rights to private companies. In a passage anticipating what later came to be known as the "exodus theory," he said:

Having surrendered the mature timber in these working-circles to private interests, have we any guarantee that the other part of the bargain will be carried out and a sufficient proportion of the returns from the mature timber be re-invested in the care and management of new forest? Is there not a danger that we might find the immature new forest thrown back on our hands when the mature timber which must be the source of funds for its care has been dissipated?³⁴

These concerns persuaded Cameron that the province needed to take a hard look at whether private ownership was compatible with the necessary program of forest conservation and rehabilitation. Cameron believed it was not. The alternative — a provincially owned and operated industry — had to be considered. This could not be attempted overnight through nationalization. It would have to be brought about gradually through a series of steps: greatly increased charges on the industry, the development of the Forest Branch into an operating entity, and the use of this new state capability to establish the first units of a public logging enterprise.

Cameron, then, identified a set of issues which were ignored or glossed over by the reform conservationists, enunciating a much more radical conception of how the public interest should be safeguarded. Underlying Cameron's views was an argument on behalf of the landlord, the people of the province who owned Crown timber. In Cameron's view they were being asked to shoulder too large a share of the costs of husbanding the resource and receiving too little in return. Capital — those renting the resource — were getting off too cheaply.

This perspective was brushed aside along with Cameron's solutions. In the debates of the period one finds little to contradict the view that most British Columbians found Cameron's proposals both alien and extreme. By 1945, Sloan, Orchard, H. R. MacMillan and other major operators had managed to convince the public that there were easier, less upsetting ways of ending worries about forest devastation. While Cameron's lonely contribution did broaden the scope of discussion, it was a straw in the wind, insufficient to generate a really vigorous debate.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

Whether more populist alternatives would have been better received is a moot point. What stands out, however, is the fact that no such alternatives were articulated. The big operator-small operator tensions which became so significant after 1950 did have an impact on debate in the years considered here. And this tension did manifest itself in disagreement over control. But these differences were limited in scope. They were differences within the capital owning camp. No "outsiders" came forward to question the way power over the forests would be distributed under the regime designed by Orchard and Sloan. At this critical juncture in the development of B.C. forest policy, the society seemed incapable of imagining institutional arrangements premised on more dispersed, community based forms of control. It must be surmised that proposals in this vein would have been seen to be every bit as alien as the ones proposed by Cameron.

The second thing which stands out in this early period is the power of the government forest bureaucracy. It played a major role in defining the salience of the conservation problem and in structuring perceptions regarding solutions. Moreover, the only alternative advanced in opposition to those solutions fed on information provided by the Forest Service. Cameron could not have developed his critique had it not been for the foundation laid by Mulholland and Manning.

The Era of Complacency — the 1950s and 1960s

Before it was defeated in 1952, the coalition government implemented the core of Sloan's programme. It adopted the private working circle idea in its Forest Management Licence (FML) legislation of 1947, and set in motion the process for establishing government-managed public working circles.³⁵ Not unexpectedly, the forest commission proposal was rejected.

On at least one level, the implementation of sustained yield seemed to proceed quickly after 1947. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, government officials were able to claim rapid growth in the acreage incorporated into either FMLs (later Tree Farm Licences or TFLs) or public circles (later Public Sustained Yield Units). By the mid-1960s the area being "managed and operated under approved working plans" had grown to over eighty million acres from about two million acres in 1950.³⁶ But these figures told only part of the story. What kind of forestry was actually being practised in the managed areas was another matter.

³⁵ For Orchard's recollections on this period see "Some more detail from diaries," box 8-15, Orchard Papers.

³⁶ B.C., *Report of Forest Service*, 1960, 91, and *Report of the Forest Service*, 1970, 95.

During the 1950s and 1960s, reforestation performance lagged far behind the goals talked of in the 1940s, and even further behind goals that might reasonably have evolved given the increase in the rate of cut after 1945. The information available here is problematic on several counts, but Forest Service figures show combined planting by companies and the service growing from under 10,000 acres per year in the 1945-55 period to about 18,000 acres per year by 1960.³⁷ Almost all of this was on the coast. Although Sloan's 1945 report had not set a specific replanting goal, the consensus among those testifying on the issue was that a minimum of 50,000 acres per year would be required to clear the coastal backlog.³⁸ And with the area being clearcut each year on the coast having risen to about 100,000 acres by 1960, a more ambitious standard would not have been out of line. Reforestation performance did improve markedly after 1960. By 1970 about 85,000 acres per year were being replanted. But by this point over 300,000 acres of provincial forest land were being clearcut each year. Even supposing 50 per cent natural regeneration, the backlog of "not satisfactorily restocked" land must be assumed to have grown rapidly throughout the period between 1950 and 1970.

Underlying this poor reforestation performance was an inadequate rate of reinvestment in forest land. Data on company reinvestment are not available, but the government's performance can be assessed. Forest Service data show that between 1950 and 1970 only about 45 per cent of government forest revenue was used to support Forest Service programmes.³⁹ Sloan's advice had not been heeded.

This section argues that these and other weaknesses in the way sustained yield was implemented were largely overlooked by B.C. society in the 1950-70 period. Considerable discussion of forest policy did take place, but there were major blanks in the debate. Tensions between big and small operators over tenure and ancillary matters fuelled much of the debate, including that generated by the Sommers controversy, which of course was a major preoccupation for several years. In addition, there was considerable argument over the rate at which old growth timber should be logged — those operating with optimistic assumptions about

³⁷ Figures from B.C., Department of Lands and Forests (or Department of Lands, Forests, and Water Resources), annual reports.

³⁸ See *Sloan Commission 1945*, Q25-26 and Q143; exhibit 500 presented to Sloan, box 18, file 7, GR 520, PABC; and H. R. MacMillan, *Forests for the Future: Conditions Essential to a Sustained Yield Policy for Management of British Columbia Coast Forests* (Vancouver: H. R. MacMillan Export Co., 1945). MacMillan called for planting of 1.1 million acres of denuded coast land within fifteen years.

³⁹ Calculated from data presented in annual reports of the Department of Lands and Forests (Lands, Forests, and Water Resources).

forest volumes, growth rates, future prices, and technological change argued with those less sanguine, while economists debated foresters over what factors should be considered in setting the allowable cut.⁴⁰

These debates touched only marginally on the question of whether forest land was being left in a productive state. During a period when huge amounts of old growth forest capital were being liquidated and dissipated, there was little critical examination of where the wealth was going or of whether enough was being reinvested. Nor was the state's capacity to implement sustained yield seriously questioned.

Concerns like these did receive some attention in the report of the second Sloan Commission, presented in 1956. After listening to confusing testimony from the Forest Service, Sloan opined that "its estimates of areas to be planted are far too conservative and require drastic revision upward."⁴¹ The report also noted that regulation for sustained yield in the public working circles so far established was only nominal. Management plans of the standard required for FMLs had not been developed for the public circles. As a result, decisions about what to cut in these government-managed areas were being made in a haphazard way.⁴² Perhaps most significant was Chief Forester Orchard's deep pessimism about the Forest Service's ability to implement sustained yield in these areas. Orchard maintained that the service could not do as good a management job as the FML holder, suggesting this discrepancy was not simply due to a lack of funds and manpower.⁴³

Reservations like these, however, received little amplification in Sloan's 1956 report. He gave priority not to conservation issues but to questions raised by squabbles within the capital-owning family. The overall message concerning forest perpetuation was that the corner had been turned — liquidation forestry had been ended and the province was making a successful transition to sustained yield management. In order to ensure continued progress, care had to be taken to construct and maintain "an atmosphere of fair and equitable consideration for all interests, large and small."⁴⁴

Sloan's view of priorities seems to have reflected the perception of most opinion leaders. Concern with issues like reforestation did not disappear

⁴⁰ For a good summary see Peter H. Pearse, "Conflicting Objectives in Forest Policy: The Case of British Columbia," *The Forestry Chronicle* (Aug. 1970).

⁴¹ *Sloan Commission 1956*, 293.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 159, 133.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 64-67.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 194.

altogether. The B.C. Wildlife Federation, the main conservation group active during the period, did begin to publicize instances of bad forest management after winning a long battle to obtain recreational access to TFL land.⁴⁵ In the 1960s a few faculty members at UBC's School of Forestry produced technical analyses of poor reforestation performance.⁴⁶ These concerns were mirrored in occasional newspaper editorials or speeches by professional foresters.⁴⁷ Such expressions of concern became more common as the 1960s progressed. But overall, for most of the 1950-70 period, forest conservation issues were not high on the society's agenda.

The CCF-NDP was unable to mount a compelling challenge to this complacent outlook. The evolution of CCF-NDP forest policy after 1947 suggests it was groping for a position. Forced to operate without the benefit of the sort of expert critical commentary used to support its position prior to 1950, the party found its own analytic resources inadequate. It was unable, at least in a persuasive way, to follow up on Cameron's predictions about weaknesses in the sustained yield model. Cameron's hard-edged arguments about forest devastation and the distribution of forest wealth were superseded after 1953 by more diffuse statements on such topics as the evils of concentration, and equality of opportunity for small operators. This shift coincided with a series of debates within the CCF on the question of state forestry, the most bitter of which occurred in 1956 when members of the party's research committee wrangled over the position to be advanced in a brief to the second Sloan Commission.⁴⁸ The debate came to a head at the 1956 convention.⁴⁹ A moderate faction,

⁴⁵ See John Gordon Terpenning, "The B.C. Wildlife Federation and Government: A Comparative Study of Pressure Group and Government Interaction for Two Periods, 1947 to 1957, and 1958 to 1975" (M.A. thesis, University of Victoria, 1982).

⁴⁶ See, for example, John W. Ker, J. Harry G. Smith, and David B. Little, *Reforestation Needs in the Vancouver Forest District* (Vancouver: UBC Faculty of Forestry, 1960).

⁴⁷ See, for example, "Not enough reforesting," *Province*, 17 January 1964; "More Staff, Money Needed for Perpetual Yield," *Victoria Daily Times*, 24 March 1964; "B.C.'s Forests are Being Whittled Away," *Vancouver Sun*, 14 Sept. 1970; and "Lack of forest programs 'costing B.C. millions' — Brief by Institute," *Province*, 13 March 1968.

⁴⁸ See material in CCF leader Webster's Forest file, MacInnis Collection, box 28-5, UBC Special Collections.

⁴⁹ "CCF Splits on Lumber," *Vancouver Herald*, 7 April 1956; CCF, *Provincial Executive Report on Forestry* (Prepared by the Research Committee for submission to the 1956 Provincial Convention), box 40-6a, and handwritten notes on the disposition of resolutions in box 49-11, MacInnis Collection, UBC Special Collections. For Commentary from the left see Dorothy Gretchen Steeves to Colin Cameron, 12 January 1955, 1 February 1956, and 16 April 1956, Colin Cameron Collection, UBC Special Collections.

aligned with the IWA, managed to defeat both a proposal that all forest land should be controlled by a tree farming Crown corporation, and a mild amendment dictating that a CCF government would direct the Forest Service to explore the viability of a cutting, milling, and marketing Crown corporation. At the same time, the party softened the wording of a clause calling on any future CCF-government to "revoke all forest management licences and equitably adjust accounts between the Crown and Licencees."⁵⁰

Thus, during the crucial early years of sustained yield, the agency in the strongest position to challenge government implementation of the policy was unable to do so in an effective way. The official opposition awkwardly tried to express support for small operators, workers, and the taxpayer, while arguing against concentration and monopolies. Incapable of generating the kind of analysis that would have allowed it to play a part in shaping the agenda, it was swept along by events. It was unable to articulate a clear, alternative vision of the public interest.

The situation began to change after the election of Bob Williams in 1966. Finding the NDP caucus deficient in the forest policy field, Williams took on the critic's job and began a process of self-education. Applying the rent-collector perspective that guided all of his analyses of land issues, Williams soon began to produce cogent critiques of Social Credit forest policy. Although he did not make issues like reforestation a primary concern, Williams did begin to present a case from the landlord's perspective. Too much economic rent was being creamed out of the forests by large, inefficient corporations enjoying the dual advantages of government-granted regional monopoly positions and low stumpage prices.⁵¹

An interpretation of the decline in concern about forest perpetuation after 1950 must begin with the obvious point that this trend was part and parcel of a general shift towards a more optimistic mood. To a large extent, this shift reflected economic and technological developments. The 1950-70 period witnessed rapid expansion of markets, long periods of buoyant prices, large private sector investment in manufacturing capacity, major public investment in infrastructure, and rapid advances in the technologies of logging, transportation, and utilization. These factors helped to open vast new areas of the province to large-scale industrial forestry while transforming the perception of timber previously thought

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ See, for example, Bob Williams, "British Columbia Timber. Ripping off B.C.'s Forests," *Canadian Dimension*, Jan.-Feb. 1971.

unusable. Sharp increases in inventories, allowable cuts, and allocations followed, bringing step-by-step reductions in public worries about perpetuation of the resource. The problems of the coastal industry, the main focus of Sloan's first report, were rendered less significant by the industry's rapid advance into the interior. The assumptions underlying the pessimistic accounts of the 1930s and 1940s were undermined by each successive increase in utilization standards and inventory.

This upbeat atmosphere obviously made it difficult for those who were suspicious about whether a scheme guaranteeing genuine forest perpetuation really had been achieved. The difficulties faced by anyone so inclined were compounded by two additional factors. First, the powerful positive symbolism associated with sustained yield contributed to the drift into complacency. That is, in accordance with Murray Edelman's writings on symbolic politics, this drift can be seen as illustrating a progression of events occurring regularly in all polities.⁵² An aroused public is placated by a symbol-laden policy response. Taking advantage of the subsequent mood of quiescence, the authorities proceed, largely unnoticed by the public, to reverse or neutralize the putative intent of the policy. This interpretation would stress the importance of the reassuring symbols — such as “tree farming” — associated with the sustained yield policy. In large part because of these symbols, sustained yield became a kind of security blanket for British Columbians of the 1950s and 1960s, a seeming guarantee that the province's forests would produce a perpetual even-flow (or perhaps even a perpetually increasing flow) of timber wealth.

Second, those disposed to question policy were confronted by flux, uncertainty, and complexity — by a picture, that is, well designed to overwhelm all but the most skilful and persistent potential critics. The economic and technological changes noted earlier cast into doubt key assumptions accepted as certain in the 1930s and 1940s. Continued change made it difficult to know what new assumptions should be substituted, leaving those trying to assess developments on unstable ground. In addition, policies and procedures changed continually throughout the 1950s and 1960s. A stumpage system based on complex and shifting rules became the main revenue gathering device; new means of conveying rights were grafted onto the tenure system; a “quota” system understood by few other than the minister who operated it became the main means of distributing rights to timber; and the procedures and assumptions used in calculating timber inventories underwent continual change. In short,

⁵² Murray Edelman, *The Symbolic Uses of Politics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1967).

by the mid-1960s the complexity and fluidity of forest policy represented real advantages to those wishing to exclude non-experts from the forest policy debate. The obstacles facing anyone trying to fathom how the province's forests were being managed were exacerbated by the fact that large amounts of discretionary policy-making power accumulated in the hands of the minister during Ray Williston's long tenure. As a result, policy tended to be made behind closed doors.

What is again perhaps most noteworthy is the apparent absence of any challenge to institutional arrangements which robbed the public of meaningful opportunities to scrutinize or participate in decisions on how the forests were being managed.

Forest Conservation after 1970

The post-1970 resurgence of concern over the timber supply was partially rooted in a weakening of the economic and technological developments that had fuelled the optimistic mood of the 1950-70 period. The evaporation of this mood coincided with growing doubts about the continuation of favourable trends in investments, markets, and technology. On one hand, there were clear signs that accessible timber was being rapidly depleted; on the other, there were real doubts about whether technological and economic developments would continue to transform the remote or worthless timber of today into the economically accessible timber of tomorrow. But the resurgence of conservationist concern was not simply a reflection of changes in material conditions. Two political developments — the arrival of the NDP government in 1972, and the growth of the environmental movement from the late 1960s onwards — also had important effects, both direct and indirect.

The election of the NDP government, and, more specifically, the arrival of Bob Williams as Minister of Lands, Forests and Water Resources (L.F.&W.R.) ushered in a period of rapid institutional changes. These changes had a major indirect impact on thinking about the forest economy.

One set of influences can be traced to Williams' decision to establish the Environment and Land Use Committee Secretariat (ELUCS).⁵³ This small, expert bureaucracy was a significant source of countervailing

⁵³ See Jeremy Wilson, "Integrated Resource Planning and the Management of Forest Land: The Response to Environmentalism," paper to Canadian Political Science Meetings, Ottawa, 1982, 4-6; and "Environmentalism and B.C. Natural Resources Policy: 1972-83," paper to Canadian Political Science Meetings, Vancouver, 1983, 3-9.

advice. Although not extensively involved in the forest policy field, it played an important early role in challenging the orthodox assumptions and approaches of the Forests Branch of the Department of L.F.&W.R. The negative consequences of past forest management policies began to be documented, both in studies undertaken by ELUCS staff, such as that on northwest development,⁵⁴ and in reports commissioned by ELUCS, such as those on the Purcell range and the Mica reservoir areas.⁵⁵ These studies were sceptical about the sustainability of the prevailing harvest levels. In their view, overly optimistic technological assumptions had resulted in exaggerated inventories. As a result, harvest levels premised on these inventories would be difficult to sustain. The reports also contained some of the earliest references to the inevitability of timber supply falldown.

Although worries over forest conservation do not seem to have figured prominently in Williams' 1975 decision to set up the Pearse Royal Commission on Timber Rights and Forest Policy,⁵⁶ this inquiry did galvanize numerous groups into articulating positions about the future of the resource. While Pearse's commentary on issues such as falldown and high-grading suggested that he viewed some of the concern over these matters to be overly alarmist,⁵⁷ participation in the exercise did contribute to a growing technical sophistication in the conservationist camp. And the Pearse Royal Commission report, along with a series of reports on the stumpage system done earlier by Pearse and others,⁵⁸ contributed significantly to the quality of debate by explaining the complex network of policies which had evolved after 1947.

The NDP years were also important, albeit indirectly, in that reactive institutional developments after the NDP's defeat in 1975 contributed to growing unease about the timber supply. Here as in other policy areas the waves created during the NDP years were felt throughout the remain-

⁵⁴ B.C., Ministry of the Environment, Resource Planning Unit, Environment and Land Use Committee Secretariat, *Terrace-Hazelton Regional Forest Resources Study* (Victoria, 1976).

⁵⁵ Alan D. Chambers (Study Co-ordinator), *Purcell Range Study: Integrated Resource Management for British Columbia's Purcell Mountains* (Vancouver, 1974); and B.C. Environment and Land Use Committee, (K. G. Farquharson), *Final Report: Mica Reservoir Region Resource Study* (Victoria, 1974).

⁵⁶ B.C., Royal Commission on Forest Resources, *Timber Rights and Forest Policy in British Columbia* (Victoria: Queen's Printer, 1976).

⁵⁷ See Wilson, "Integrated Resource Planning . . ." 9-14.

⁵⁸ B.C., Task Force on Crown Timber Disposal, *Crown Charges For Early Timber Rights* (Victoria, 1974); *Timber Appraisal* (Victoria, 1974); and *Forest Tenures in British Columbia* (Policy Background Paper) (Victoria, 1974).

der of the decade. Most important were changes affecting the Forests Branch of L.F.&W.R. During the NDP years, the branch's procedures and prerogatives were challenged and undermined. After 1975, it reasserted its dominance.⁵⁹ Following its metamorphosis into the new Ministry of Forests (MOF), it moved to solidify its control over the forest land base and the forest use decision making process. What is noteworthy is the role the ministry's revelations concerning timber supply problems played in this campaign for ascendancy. Since such revelations implied some criticism of past management, the ministry might have been expected to play them down. In fact, however, it took the opposite tack. It recited its *mea culpas*, added its voice to the chorus of concern, and then used growing worries over the timber supply as one of the cornerstones of its campaign. These worries, it argued, indicated the need for increased spending on forest management and for strong moves by the ministry to protect the forest land base. By 1980 the ministry was taking a lead role in disseminating gloomy prognoses concerning the timber supply, suggesting the effects of falldown would shortly begin to be felt in every region of the province.⁶⁰

The rise of a new environmental movement, and particularly the emergence of groups devoted to preserving wilderness areas like the Nitinat Triangle, the Valhalla, South Moresby and the Purcell, also contributed to the upsurge of concern.⁶¹ Building on the work of their predecessors in the wildlife conservation movement, preservationist groups did much to publicize bad logging practices and poor reforestation performance. Such groups came to appreciate quite quickly the central equation shaping response to their demands. Wasteful logging and underutilization of good forest land meant increased industry pressure on the remaining stocks of old growth timber and greater industry resistance to preservation proposals. While the preservation movement knew the switch from a mood of superabundance to one of scarcity did not bode well for its prospects, it recognized that the reality of poor timber supply prospects had to be confronted and used to generate pressure for better forest management practice. Public sympathy for wilderness preservation might be increased if it could be shown that timber volumes forgone when tracts were preserved could be more than made up for through better standards of forest management.

Pessimistic accounts of timber supply problems continued to be dis-

⁵⁹ See Wilson, "Integrated Resource Planning . . .," esp. 7-8, 14-19, 31-35.

⁶⁰ See *Forest and Range Resource analysis, 1980*.

⁶¹ See Wilson, "Integrated Resource Planning . . ."

seminated after 1980.⁶² A brief spell of optimism followed the government's 1980 and 1981 announcements of ambitious "Five Year Plans" for increased spending on reforestation and intensive management, but gloom returned after government restraint undermined the planned initiatives.⁶³ The Ministry of Forests' second *Forest and Range Resource Analysis*, submitted in late 1984, acknowledged a sharp increase in the backlog of "not satisfactorily restocked" forest land.⁶⁴ Reforestation, it said, was not meeting the standards "necessary to achieve the level of resource stewardship demanded by the *Forest Act*," and levels of intensive management were falling short of the goals upon which present harvest levels had been premised.⁶⁵ In the report's words,

the present forest resource cannot, without significant changes in management policies and programs, continue to support current harvest levels and still meet the long-term objectives of sustained yield . . . [L]ong-term harvests will fall below projections and thereby aggravate the decline of fall-down from present harvest levels.⁶⁶

The report also presented a worrisome picture of timber quality, noting that

the long-established trend to take the best first has been accelerated, leaving lower quality wood to be addressed when the price of forest products increases or when new technology allows cheaper logging and manufacturing. But whether either factor will materialize is unknown.⁶⁷

Most expressions of forest conservationism from 1970 to 1985 were basically reformist. The forest companies, the IWA, professional foresters, and the major newspapers all put most of the blame for worrisome timber supply prospects on inadequate government spending. Greater reinvestment by the state was usually put forward as an all-encompassing panacea. Such interests showed little inclination to challenge existing management structures or the prevailing distribution of the proceeds from forest liquidation among capital, labour, and the resource owner.

⁶² See note 1 above.

⁶³ For an analysis of the divergence between actual and projected expenditures, see Association of British Columbia Professional Foresters, letter to M.L.A.s "Re: B.C.s Declining Forestry Investment," 31 January 1984. See also W. Young, "The Restraint One-Step," an address to the Vancouver Section of the Canadian Institute of Forestry, 10 January 1984.

⁶⁴ *Forest and Range Resource Analysis*, 1984, p. C10.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, I8-I9.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, I8.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, I10.

Critiques of a more fundamental nature ranged from those advocating greater private ownership of forest land to those calling for decentralized, locally controlled management structures and/or a greater role for small-scale tree farmers practising a "landed" forestry. Debate over greater private ownership remained largely academic,⁶⁸ with most commentators simply dismissing the idea as politically impossible given the supposed antagonism of the province's residents. The decentralist vision was championed energetically by a number of groups and became the most common basis for fundamental challenges to the status quo.

The strongest arguments for decentralization came from groups based in hinterland communities such as the Slocan Valley and Smithers-Telkwa. In 1975, a team of lay analysts from the Slocan produced what has remained the most comprehensive and influential manifesto for decentralization.⁶⁹ Their blueprint for a different kind of regional forest-based economy centred on the recommendation that management of the area's resources should be assumed by a resource committee made up of six representatives from the local community and six from provincial government resource agencies. The 250-page report also called for greater reinvestment of locally generated forest wealth, more intensive utilization and planning, closer integration of economic and environmental goals, an end to inventory practices that had led to overcommitment of the area's timber, and greater opportunities for small operators. A system of rural woodlots was also recommended as a way of diversifying control and promoting intensive forest management. These would range in size from 10 to 1,500 acres and would be available to individuals.

These themes were elaborated in a number of briefs presented to the Pearce Royal Commission in 1975. Perhaps the fullest statement of a radical conservationist view was that contained in the brief presented by the SPEC (Scientific Pollution and Environmental Control Society) branch from Smithers.⁷⁰ The brief sketched a vision of a sustainable local economy designed to promote community stability, worker satisfaction,

⁶⁸ See, for example, David Haley, "The Forest Tenure System as a Constraint on Efficient Timber Management: Problems and Solutions," *Canadian Public Policy* XI:supplement (1985), 315-20.

⁶⁹ Slocan Valley Community Forest Management Project, *Final Report* and *A Report to the People* (n.p., n.d.).

⁷⁰ SPEC-Smithers, "Brief to be presented to the Royal Commission on Forest Resources," December 1975. For a parallel brief see *Victims of Industry Changing Environment*, "Retracking British Columbia: A Brief to the Royal Commission on Forest Resources," November 1975. Note that at other points in SPEC's history the acronym also stood for "Society for Pollution and Environmental Control" and "Society Promoting Environmental Conservation."

long-term economic vitality, and environmental integrity. It criticized sustained yield policy and enumerated the negative effects of an economic development model based on control of forest land by large foreign-controlled companies. Reliance on such companies had led to highgrading and left the region in a vulnerable situation. Alternative approaches could bring about a more productive forest economy. Tenure forms should be diversified, sustained yield units of various sizes should be encouraged, and management of the public forest units should be vested in the hands of a locally controlled resource management board.

In closing, the SPEC-Smithers brief asked the commissioner to consider its vision of a province living

within its means in a qualitative as well as quantitative sense. Instead of trying to buy a rubber stamp North American standard-of-living with non-renewable resource exports perhaps we would be more at ease developing the renewable resources to meet our everyday needs. These resources are the lumber forests, farmland, fisheries together with already developed hydro-electric power and small, low impact, sustainable energy sources. If used in a 'conservator' society instead of a 'consumer' society, a Wood-Electricity based intermediate technology would provide a stable, self-reliant and British Columbia controlled economy that would provide satisfying, meaningful work in balance with the natural environment.⁷¹

Although visions like those articulated by the Slocan and Smithers groups have continued to be regarded as whimsical by people in positions of authority, many of the ideas advanced have been echoed in other analyses⁷² and embraced by members of the province's left-wing community. The NDP has adopted the view that "decentralization of political and economic power is the only way to regain public control of public resources and guarantee balanced regional development."⁷³

The radical approach of the 1970s and 1980s was, it is clear, very different from that of the 1940s. As a comparison of passages quoted from Cameron and SPEC-Smithers indicates, both positions were marked by an attachment to a utopian vision of a very different sort of B.C.

⁷¹ SPEC-Smithers, "Brief . . .," 44.

⁷² See, for example, Michael McGonigle, *The Stein River Valley: New Directions from an Old Source*. See also Ken Drushka, *Stumped: The Forest Industry in Transition* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1985), esp. 250-64. Drushka argues for a "landed forestry" in which people would be encouraged "to form long-term associations with specific tracts of forest . . . [P]eople must be able to form a cultural attachment to the forests, in contrast to the transient, exploitive relationship presently characteristic of harvesting." (259)

⁷³ See NDP Caucus, "Background Paper: Alternative Throne Speech," March 1985, 10-11.

society. But Cameron's case revolved around arguments for strong state control, while the proposals of the later period centred on local, community control. Few echoes of Cameron's approach were heard in the 1970s; no forerunners of the decentralist approach were advanced in the 1940s. It is also noteworthy that Cameron's muckraking tone and arguments in favour of drawing more wealth from capital's share do not appear to have been incorporated into the radical programme of the later era. Thanks in large part to stimulation provided by the countervailing duty lobby in the U.S.A., however, debate over the stumpage system has become considerably more lively and better informed since 1983. For example, there has been considerable discussion of the contention that through "dissipation of rent," companies may enjoy the benefits of low stumpage charges without showing excessive profits.⁷⁴

The 1970s saw renewed concern over forest perpetuation and some debate over alternative approaches. These developments reflected both institutional and societal transformation. The NDP years brought important changes in bureaucratic structure. These, in turn, set the stage for dissemination of considerable information about the state of the forests. As in the pre-World War II period, state employed experts played an integral role in bringing about the surge of concern. But the 1970s resurgence would not have come about had it not been for fundamental societal changes. Most importantly, a constellation of developments including increases in affluence, mobility, and leisure time brought the rise of a new environmental movement, which drew many of its principal actors from the young, well-educated sectors of society. The growth of this movement meant that, for the first time, debate over the future of the forests was joined by outsiders, by people not aligned with what we called the exploitation axis. For the first time, there were groups with both the motivation and capacity to articulate the view that the public interest was not necessarily synonymous with the industry's interest.

Societal developments were also critical determinants of the nature of debate over solutions to timber perpetuation worries. The main alternatives to mainstream, reform conservationism came out of hinterland communities whose political cultures had been influenced by the arrival of newcomers carrying "sixties" values. These individuals were ready and able to apply ideas about such things as appropriate technology and participatory democracy to local problems.

⁷⁴ For an excellent review of the ideas that have begun to achieve currency, see Drushka, *Stumped*, chap. 5, esp. 111-14.

Conclusion

This paper has examined fifty years of public debate over the future of the forest resource in B.C., giving particular consideration to whether competing perceptions of the public interest were vigorously represented. During the years surveyed, the conservation issue moved on and off the political agenda or, in Anthony Downs' phrase, up and down the "issue attention cycle."⁷⁵ The fifty year span can be divided into three periods. The timber perpetuation issue was defined as problematic in the 1935-50 and 1970-85 periods. But the years in between were ones of relative complacency; the consensus was that the sustained yield policies of the late 1940s had taken care of the problem.

The conclusions tendered here are very impressionistic, dependent as they are on judgements about the strength of challenges to dominant assumptions. Some criticism of the prevailing orthodoxy existed in the bookend periods, but neither the strength nor the scope of these challenges should be exaggerated. The range of perspectives advanced was disappointingly limited.

Three gaps seem noteworthy. First, the complacent outlook of the 1950s and 1960s was not contested. The symbolism surrounding the new sustained yield policy seemed to protect those implementing this policy from scrutiny. Second, management structures which denied the public access to both information and the decision-making process were not questioned until the 1970s, when some conservationists began to argue in favour of decentralized, community controlled structures. Third, the distribution of the proceeds from forest liquidation was not the subject of much debate. It is significant and unfortunate that during a period when so much of the province's inherited forest wealth was being liquidated, so little pressure was put on public and private decision makers to justify how this wealth was being dispersed. All of these observations lead us back to the same overriding theme. The landlord's point of view has not been strongly and consistently asserted.

The debate's deficiencies reflect the extent to which discourse has been dominated by those most intensely involved in forest exploitation, by the interests on the exploitation axis — forest capital, forest labour, and the government forest bureaucracy. It has also been argued that in order to account for the debate's deficiencies it is necessary to consider the obstacles faced by those inclined to challenge consensus positions. Some of these obstacles were unique to particular periods. It was noted, for example,

⁷⁵ Anthony Downs, "Up and down with ecology — the issue-attention cycle," *Public Interest* 28 (Summer 1972), 38-50.

that the buoyant economic outlook of the 1950s and 1960s created an atmosphere discouraging to questions about the implementation of sustained yield. Other obstacles were rooted in more enduring features of the political society and its institutions. Consideration of the difficulties faced by the CCF-NDP in the 1950s and 1960s helps to illuminate some of the key impediments.

The range of policy solutions the CCF-NDP was prepared to offer was of course constrained by the party's ideological traditions and its links to organized labour, particularly the I.W.A. The party could not have been expected to fill all the gaps noted above. Nonetheless, the CCF-NDP was suspicious of the new sustained yield policy and of the way the benefits of forest liquidation were being distributed. Its inability to translate these suspicions into a compelling critique was linked to its lack of analytic capacity. During Cameron's time, the party relied heavily on evidence documented by the Forest Service. When this source of critical information dried up, the party began to flounder. By the mid-1950s one of the party's more acute MLAs was acknowledging privately that "the last session of the Legislature has brought it home to us that we do not really know anything about provincial matters, particularly forestry and finance."⁷⁶ In the same period, party records show the leader anxiously casting about for help with the party's brief to the second Sloan commission, noting that "we are especially in need of definite illustrations of the damaging effects of the present system of issuing FML's."⁷⁷

The CCF-NDP's problems in generating critical analysis and alternative policies were exacerbated by certain features of the political system. Most importantly, up until 1972 the party was in a weak position in a weak legislative system. The small size of the opposition caucus, the brevity of legislative sessions, the absence of an oral question period, and the paltry research funding provided MLAs and parties handicapped an opposition trying to uncover and publicize government policy weaknesses.

The difficulties faced by the CCF-NDP and other potential critics in the 1950s and 1960s were also directly connected to the technical complexity of the policy field. In an area more easily mastered by the intelligent layperson, the lack of sympathetic expertise would have been less critical. As it was, however, those suspicious of forest policy developments were hamstrung by government and industry monopolization of expertise.

⁷⁶ D. G. Steeves to Colin Cameron, 5 November 1953, Colin Cameron Collection, UBC Special Collections.

⁷⁷ Arnold Webster to Harding, Herridge, Howard, and others, 23 September 1955, box 28, file 5, MacInnis Collection, UBC Special Collections.

In the 1950s and 1960s this monopoly was unassailable. Government and industry were naturally not inclined to encourage iconoclastic thinking, either within the bureaucracies they directly controlled or within agencies they strongly influenced, like UBC's School of Forestry. One party dominance also had an impact. A society's opportunities to learn about the costs and benefits of government policy are enhanced where parties alternate in power. Generally speaking, a new government will be more likely than a continuing one to use the state's capabilities to test the validity or utility of existing policy. A turnover of power can lead to the importation or development of competing pools of expertise, or to expanded opportunities for those who, under the previous regime, had found it difficult to advance dogma-challenging arguments. The fact, then, that B.C. experienced little in the way of changes in government in the period surveyed has much to do with the character of the debate.

There are, to be sure, signs that some longstanding obstacles to healthy debate have begun to disintegrate. The rise of the environmental movement after 1970, along with concomitant increases in the size, diversity, and education level of the population, helped increase the number of voices ready to contribute to the forest policy debate.⁷⁸ Taken as a whole, however, the period surveyed featured far too little discussion of alternative conceptions of the public interest. In the final analysis, the story of this period describes a fairly typical slice of liberal-capitalist political life. Those with political-economic power controlled the agenda. Bias was mobilized against those who might have been expected to challenge this control. In Schattschneider's phrase, some issues were organized into politics while others were organized out.⁷⁹ The collective political imagination was not very fertile; consciousness of costs, benefits, risks, and alternatives remained rather low. As a result, matrices of crucial decisions and non-decisions were constructed against a backdrop of weak public debate.

⁷⁸ If we examine debate in the 1980s, for example, we find an assortment of contributors, including the professional foresters' association, a number of skilled lay commentators (for example, Ken Drushka and Trevor Jones), a "community forestry magazine" (*Forest Planning Canada*), other periodicals stressing community control and environmental integrity (the *Telkwa Foundation Newsletter* and *The New Catalyst*), a similarly disposed "think-tank" (Michael McGonigle's Institute for New Economics), various preservation groups, several academic experts with bases other than the UBC School of Forestry (for example, Patricia Marchak and SFU's Natural Resources Management Programme), a number of private consultants (such as Woodbridge-Reed and Silva Ecosystems Consultants), and the Forest Economics and Policy Analysis Project. Few of these actors had vocal counterparts prior to 1970.

⁷⁹ E. E. Schattschneider, *The Semisovereign People* (Hinsdale, Ill.: Dryden Press, 1960), 71.