

Talk and Log: Wilderness Politics in British Columbia

Jeremy Wilson

Vancouver: UBC Press, 1998. 452 p. Maps. \$85 cloth, \$39.95 paper.

BY BRIONY PENN

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During the Canadian centennial year, school libraries across British Columbia received copies of *This Is British Columbia* and *British Columbia: Challenge in Abundance*—two illustrated tributes, courtesy of the BC government, to the riches of the province where there was ‘Splendour Never Ending.’ Within their pages lay the philosophical explanation for the next thirty years of conflict and paradox in the forests. Imprinted in our formative hearts were the superb photographs of wilderness by *Beautiful BC* photographers, while accompanying text informed our brains that we were assured of an enviable future full of abundance and challenge – that

British Columbia
was a giant that sleeps no longer ... He is pumping up the oil, growing grain and belching gas in the Peace. He is bulging the fish nets along the coast. He is irrigating the dry interior hills and bringing forth the produce. He is cutting the tall timber at the bases of the mountains while baring their tops for the ore inside. He is fattening the beef stock, building fine homes and ... remembering to have some fun. (*British Columbia: Challenge in Abundance*, 10)

As we dutifully sang “Can...a...da, one little two little three Canadians, we love you,” Premier Bennet assured us that between parks and integrated resource management (with sustained yield) we were going to march bravely with the giant that was British Columbia to a future full of moss-dripping trees, salmon-eating grizzlies, healthy exports, and happy smiling schoolchildren in bustling towns. *Talk and Log: Wilderness Politics in British Columbia* is as much a biography for those of us singing away in 1967 as a comprehensive account of wilderness politics over the last three decades. It documents the gradual public awareness of the ecological impossibility of reconciling the two competing visions. It also chronicles the power of those images to motivate thousands to defend them.

The book’s chronological milestones of the wilderness debate, as it grew in sophistication and broadened into economic and social spheres, mirrored my own awareness and increasing involvement in the wilderness movement. I can remember, around 1973, being driven to Tofino in the back of a station wagon, gazing out over the miles of clear-cuts and feeling confident enough to express concern about the logging even with fishing family friends; a decade later, questioning the much-touted concept of “multiple use” after trying very hard to be reasonable;

and, a decade after that, joining the ranks of protesters over Clayoquot and making the pilgrimage to Merv Wilkinson's ecoforestry lot. Now at the brink of the millennium, we realize that we are in "a new era in which the greatest threats to biodiversity may derive not from the provincial economy's dependence on resource extraction but from its dependence on population growth and the promotion of environmentally destructive high-consumption lifestyles" (342). We looked for the giant and discovered it was us. As Wilson correctly chronicles in the conclusion, we are now restoring our backyards with Native species, restoring streams with displaced forest workers, and buying ecocertified wood. He forgot to mention that we occasionally still have fun.

Wilson's book is epic in covering the events, strategies, and personalities that formed the basis of wilderness politics. The appendices alone cover 100 pages. At the same time it is readable enough to provide a comprehensive structure that will fit anyone's experiences with all of the archetypes: the "cappuccino suckers," the "noble savages," the "ragamuffins," the "family-values-first loggers and their dutiful wives," the "bad corporate CEOs," and the "corrupt politicians with their hands under the table." The analysis of the development of these archetypes in the media is also addressed (e.g., the conscious creation of the Share movement and the need to create an archetype that, as Ronald Arnold of the US Centre for the Defense of Free-Enterprise wrote, can "speak as a group of people who live close to nature and have more natural wisdom than city people" [39]). This historical account allows us all to see where we fought in the battle, what armour we

put on, and how we acted out our parts.

The book starts with excellent overviews of the forest industry, environmental organizations, government policy, and the policy process, then moves into a chronology of the ideological battles over the last thirty years, finishing with prospects for the future. Coming from the cappuccino-suckers camp, I found it fascinating to read about what went on behind the scenes in industry and government. It made me weep at all the hours we spent at meetings or writing letters earnestly talking about salamanders, marbled murrelets, community forests, and intrinsic values when we should have just got straight to questioning the giant who "refused to stop long enough to debate its obligations to future generations" (348). It would be equally fascinating for all the other "stakeholders" at the "round tables" to know what was going on behind the scenes in the various camps. Wilson conducted extensive interviews with the key "players" and has succinctly captured the diverse ethics and moods of an era in his analysis. It should be mandatory reading for every budding politician in British Columbia. The rhetoric of politicians with no historical perspective, of politicians who don't realize that we have *all* come a long way since "Can...a...da," is probably the greatest deterrent to "lively debate" (348). As Wilson points out in the end:

A democratic well-being does hinge on the notion that in vibrant political societies, important policy decisions and nondecisions are preceded by lively debate about the costs, risks and benefits of a full range of options. In this and related respects BC democracy

continues to fall short of its potential ... People of the twenty-first century are likely to deliver a negative verdict when they discover that one of the wealthiest societies of the late twentieth century aggressively pushed policies threatening forest ecosystems,

all in the face of varied and compelling doubts about the long term consequences. (348)

This is a compelling read for anyone who was there. For anyone who missed it but wants to enter the debate, it is the definitive history.

The Wealth of Forests: Markets, Regulation, and Sustainable Forestry

Chris Tollefson, editor

Vancouver: UBC Press, 1998. 396 pp. \$85 cloth, \$35.95 paper.

BY MIKE HARCOURT

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The *Wealth of Forests*, edited by Chris Tollefson, is a timely, well presented, but incomplete book. It is timely because over the next three to four years British Columbians will have to absorb the painful changes from the pioneering strip mining of our forests to the sustained yield practices of the last fifty years to the implementation of sustainable forestry. The book is timely for British Columbians who are about six years into a ten-year plan to mitigate Peter Pearse's 1975 Royal Commission prediction of a "fall down" period early in the twenty-first century. With the huge changes commenced by my government in 1991-96 – the Forest Practices Code, the CORE/LRMP land use plans, the Protected Area Strategy, Forest Renewal BC, the Nisga'a Treaty, and the Aboriginal Treaty process now being implemented – a review of the shift from sustainable yield to sustainable forestry is important.

The Wealth of Forests is well presented. As editor Chris Tollefson notes, "Although there is broad agreement on the need to achieve sustainable forestry, there is considerable disagreement over which policy instruments should be displayed to promote that goal" (4). "This book has grappled, from differing disciplinary and philosophical perspectives with the challenge of identifying sustainable policy alternatives that would correct the government failures" (375). Tollefson presents a range of views from Stanbury and Vertinsky's "free market environmentalism" to the ecosystem paradigm advocated by M'Gonigle, Dellert, and Gale.

My critique of *The Wealth of Forests* is that it is incomplete, which Tollefson readily admits (382). We are in a period of rapid change and great political fluidity, moving from sustained yield policies and practices to the uncertain practical realities of defining and im-