

Stumped: The Forest Industry in Transition, by Ken Drushka. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1985. \$14.95 paperback.

This is a controversial book which undoubtedly will ruffle some feathers. Nevertheless, it should be on the reading list of anyone who wishes to understand the complexities — and the realities — of forestry and the forest industry of British Columbia.

Ken Drushka is a writer (author of *Against the Wind and Weather: A History of Tugboating in British Columbia*) and former journalist who operates a custom sawmilling business on Vancouver Island. An Albertan who has lived and worked in B.C. since 1967, Drushka has been a logger, tree planter, firewatcher, silvicultural worker, fisherman and operator of the smallest commercial logging operation in British Columbia. From this down-to-earth perspective, he has written a provocative analysis of the British Columbia forest resource, which he portrays as a battlefield of competing interests where the real losers are future generations of British Columbians whose heritage is being squandered by an alliance of government, unions and business.

Clearly Drushka feels passionately about the state of B.C. forestry, but this book is far from being a mere exercise in polemics. In a comprehensive analysis he examines the history, theory, economics and institutional framework of contemporary forest management policy. His critique of the forest industry, of the provincial forest bureaucracy and of “intensive management” theory and practice and his scathing attack of successive generations of provincial politicians for the misuse of their political and economic stewardship will alarm both critics and supporters.

In successive chapters he asks: What kind of forests do we want? How did it all begin? What’s wrong with sustained yield? Who owns the trees? What is our timber worth? Will the supply last? Do we have a plan? Can silviculture solve our problems? What will the managed forest cost? Who runs the forests? What do we want from our forests? Do we have the answers? His answers will shock and dismay.

In his preface he asks the basic question, “What is the proper use of publicly owned forest?” With 94 percent of British Columbia forest land in the hands of the provincial government this is clearly a matter for public concern and is the reason why tenure is the most volatile issue in provincial resource politics.

He identifies, defines and discusses the problems of the transition from an era of forest liquidation to a future of conservative forest management

in the absence of a tradition of forest husbandry, noting that traditional silvicultural knowledge is lacking and that Pacific Northwest silviculture is an infant craft of which we know less than we do about the basic principles of horticulture. He remarks caustically that "we know less about the Douglas fir than we do about the chrysanthemum." He says that intensive forest management compares to traditional North American forestry as the growing of vegetables by modern agri-business compares to the activities of the casual weekend gardener, and he examines and attacks the policies and theories of B.C. forest management, arguing that while intensive management can yield incredible benefits, in its B.C. manifestation it is unpredictable and serves only to mollify the various political groups, the timber companies, the public, the environmentalists and the bureaucrats. The bureaucracy, he states, operates under a system whereby no one at an operational level is required to make a decision, and in both public and private sectors the nature of the organizational structure isolates everyone from the consequences of their actions. Decisions evolve out of process. The result is a system in which no one is quite responsible. Multiple land use is unworkable where valid concerns are lost in a bureaucratic morass of overlapping jurisdictions by ministries, branches and agencies. He sets out to show sustained yield, the keystone of forest policy, to be weak in theory and abused in practice. The "timber famine," to Drushka, is a myth: he points out that between 40 and 50 percent of the productive commercial forests have never been touched by loggers.

The point is not that intensive silviculture should not be practised, but that the entire question of silvicultural response should be treated with a great deal of scepticism until the results of treatments on specific sites are known. The danger is that convenient numbers may be dropped into convenient slots and everyone involved will pretend they know what they are doing. An example is the so-called allowable cut effect, whereby present-day yields are increased in expectation of future growth responses to cultural treatments. Drushka points out that consequent on our lack of a tradition of forest culture we have no experiential evidence for the supposed relationship between treatment and response. British Columbians have been cutters rather than growers.

The contrast is with the prairie farmers who work land settled by their great-grandparents: they owe much to academic theorists and to research plots, yet their greatest debt is to past generations, drawing on knowledge gained from the success and failures of their parents and their neighbours.

There is no such population of third or even second generation forest-farmers, and only a handful of first generation people who understand the arts and techniques of growing trees and tending forests. Although the academy, the research institute and various public and private bureaucracies have much to contribute, in the end silviculture will be created in the woods by people who live in the woods. We must find ways to build a tradition of silviculture which will evolve not out of strict enforcement of rules and regulations uniformly applied, but through the activities of creative people. To this end a stable indigenous rural work force and forest dwelling foresters must be developed rather than the present system when the bulk of forest work is performed, at great expense, by non-resident workers while foresters work at desks in centralized offices most often in cities.

This uncompromising look at the past and present state of B.C. forestry is followed by a challenging vision of the future. Drushka challenges British Columbians to look to the future of their forests, their timber resources, their fish and wildlife habitat, recreation values and watershed protection, and to develop tenures, administrative structures and silvicultural policies that address the needs and resolve the conflicts so that the forests may be better utilized and meet the real economic and social needs of the province.

The parallel is drawn with the effort of convincing a tribe of hunter/gatherers to invest their energies in tilling the soil. In anthropological terms such a transition brings about a "cultural shift" — a period of conflict for the individuals directly involved and for their society. Given the primitive state of silviculture, he suggests, it is not surprising that cultural conflicts are developing as we shift from a forest-cutting to a forest-farming economy, displacing so many habits, mind-sets and hallowed concepts.

Drushka concludes that "to receive all that our forests can give, we must restructure our forest industry, our tenure arrangements, our forest management and even — ourselves."

While one may disagree with individual parts of Drushka's highly personal brief, it is a must for the bookshelves of all concerned for the well-being of British Columbia's economic and social mainstay.