

# Humanity, Forest Ecology, and the Future in a British Columbia Valley: A Case Study

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**Abstract:** One of the most important and challenging issues facing humanity in the 21st century is the increasingly complex human-ecology interface. This article suggests the potential that integral mediation and integral ecology hold in addressing this interface. It distinguishes two categories of ecological challenges, *removed* and *local tangible* ones, and indicates that they require adapting methodologies to address them. Using a local tangible challenge—a 35-year old conflict over land use issues in the Slocan Valley, British Columbia, Canada—as an example, an integral mediation approach is outlined. First, context is given, both historically and geographically. Then the main capacities employed in the vision-building and mediation process are outlined. The article presents the case in such a way as to emphasize some generalizations, favoring these over a presentation of many case details. It concludes with a brief description of perspectives that are prerequisites in order to successfully apply integral solutions to the human-ecology interface.

**Keywords:** human-ecology interface, integral ecology, integral mediation

## Introduction

A deep breath in, and out. I looked up at the forested mountainside that I could see so well from our front deck, and finally admitted it to myself: this was not going to work. I had spent the last eight years trying to protect this beautiful landscape—a watershed that provided us with the purest of waters—from road building and clearcut logging. From the steep and fragile slopes ran water that could be savored straight from the creeks. Kneeling down to drink its sweet freshness had sustained me many a time, renewing my commitment to do everything I could to help protect it and thereby also the Life in its myriad forms being nourished by it.

The last year had been spent organizing an international conference aimed at raising awareness for the essential importance and fragility of water. This effort had tried to bring all sides to understand that what we still had in terms of water resources was indeed very precious and that it was possible to protect it, while also acknowledging and meeting the varied needs of very diverse populations. The conference was called FLOW: an acronym for both “For Love Of Water” and “For Love of Our Work.” A wide-ranging group of 45 speakers and over 350 delegates had come together for what turned out to be a great success from the conference-circuit perspective, leaving participants with a high level of inspiration, new knowledge, and maybe most importantly, connection and networking.

But there was hardly a show from the logging faction of the equation; their absence spoke of failure from my perspective. A true solution would be one that all sub-cultures of our society could embrace and support. In addition to the continued lack of presence from the logging community at this and other related events, I was also becoming increasingly aware of the self-

centered relationship to life some key environmental organizations often held at their core. The altruism presented to the world was just part of the picture. Beneath the albeit sincere, outer façade hid an alarming competitive spirit of self-preservation that led to ongoing backbiting amongst the organizations themselves as well as between influential players within these groups. I was dismayed to witness a level of animosity between people who actually believed in the same cause that repeatedly resulted in sabotage of great efforts and ideas from within and amongst the environmental groups themselves.

Wow, the mountain was indeed literally steep, and although the integral vistas that could be seen from the top were so clear and majestic, the way there seemed very elusive. As the breath escaped my lungs, tears came to my eyes. I had a contract with this forest, a promise made that included health and wholeness. The year was 2000, the future uncertain.

The environmental challenges we face as a human family standing at the beginning of this new millennium are more complex than ever before. With the advent of the communication revolution over the last 100 years, and the increasing speed at which information now travels, the spectrum of consciousness we span has widened considerably, and this not just on a global scale, but also region by region. Our needs, values, and perspectives are now often hard to reconcile within our own blood families, let alone our bioregions, countries, or continents. Life conditions are changing at an exponential speed creating a climate in which stress and knee-jerk reactions are accepted as the norm. Our political environment is stuck in shortsightedness, averaging a four-year look ahead, when what we increasingly need are 100- and 200-year perspectives. We are indeed living in interesting times, and to navigate them requires a wider and more comprehensive map.

Over the last 40 years our ecological awareness has increased, but along with it so has everything else: our population numbers, consumption levels, deforestation, pollution, and resource depletion, to name just a few of the current environmental challenges. The environmental movement that seemed to be on the upsurge in the 1980s/90s has not succeeded in achieving the level of change it originally aspired to and was driven toward. Why? My sense is that the complexity of the terrain came as a surprise to most. Once we understood the dire present ecological situation, let alone the bleak predictions for our planetary future, we thought environmental sanity was just plain common sense. However, we soon realized that we human beings are an integral part of any ecological solution, and that we are complex beings, to say the least. It was difficult for those of us convinced of a need for greater ecological sensitivity and action stemming from this increased awareness to marry our ideals with our daily lives. In addition to our own challenges of “walking the talk,” we also tripped up over other limitations such as emotional issues, our often narrow perspectives, and our inability to truly come together and work with like-minded people, let alone other-minded individuals with very different perspectives and worldviews. With the immensity of the challenges staring us in the face, many tried to forget what they once so strongly believed in, adapting their worldviews and related life styles to the imperfection of the situation at hand. Others became radicals, boldly and at times loudly embodying their ideas to an extreme, with little regard for others. Yet others became professional activists, working on environmental issues as full-time jobs, applying steady and sustained effort to issues that were often determined by what their organization (employer) could get funding for.

The obstacles and bumps in the road toward a more just, sane and ecologically aware world were harder to overcome than anticipated, and they are still being felt. Human consciousness and our ability to understand it, both in ourselves and in others, lies at the root of our capacity to

navigate the environmental issues of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. And, as mentioned above, these ecological challenges have not decreased over the last 40 years; indeed, they have grown in both scope and level of complexity.

In this article I attempt to demonstrate a way forward and also take a brief look back in order to highlight some of the mistakes that we have made in our efforts toward increasing our levels of responsibility and awareness in relation to the fragile earth that we inhabit. I will use as a case study my experience in environmental activism in the Slocan Valley of British Columbia, Canada.

## **Integral Ecology**

When dealing with any ecological problem we are basically dealing with human beings and their relationship with the natural environment. We—the human species—are the main cause of most present-day environmental problems, and it is therefore essential that we consider ourselves as a central part of any proposed solution in order to encourage its successful implementation.

As we attempt first to understand a problem, and then to figure out possible solutions, we must navigate amongst and appreciate many differing value systems, worldviews, priorities, preferences, habits, needs, fears, reservations, even differing cultural norms, and exterior structural and societal limitations. Given the complexity of one human being, bringing together a group of individuals, possibly even a whole bioregion, province/state or country to agree on a course of action can indeed appear to be extraordinary, if not entirely impossible. And yet, unless we take into consideration *all* that a human being is as an individual and *all* human collectives, an environmental solution, however sound it may be on paper, will fall short of “sticking,” of getting implemented, and achieving any real change.

An integral approach to the human-ecology interface offers a way forward in the midst of all this complexity. This approach honors and integrates all the various values and perspectives. It understands that all of these have something important to say and to contribute. And of course, in order to do this, we need to acknowledge the complexity of individuals and communities, as well as of any given environmental situation. In addition, understanding that it takes more than one individual, worldview, or knowledge base to apprehend the full picture as we endeavor to find solutions, we come to realize that each perspective actually holds some aspect of what needs to be considered in a solution that can be embraced by all. In other words, each perspective holds a jewel. Often this jewel is limited in some way, but it still remains an important part of the way onward and forward. Thus, bringing multiple perspectives together is the challenge, but also the opportunity.

While I have been explicitly informed by an integral framework, my inclusion of this in the case study I describe below has been much more implicit in my work with the core group that has become the Slocan Integral Forestry Cooperative (SIFCo), not all of whom had heard of such an approach beforehand. Some of the core group have since become interested and have learned more about the integral approach. Others have simply been open to it as I have facilitated the group and have worked from a stance of attempting to take into consideration as many facets of the situation as possible: interior *and* exterior realities; individual *and* collective dimensions; how our consciousness and our understanding of the world and ourselves changes and evolves; the past, present and the future; and the many aspects of human nature: body, mind, soul and spirit.

It has been my experience that it is only by using an integral approach that a diverse and divergent collective can come to resolution, a vision, and an action plan forward. Anything less will fall short of solving our present prevailing ecological predicament: actions are becoming less and less optional, and vision alone will solve nothing.

## Two Types of Environmental Challenges

We can classify the environmental challenges that we face today into two categories. Each one requires a slightly different approach.

The first category is *removed* challenges. These encompass ecological situations that we are facing indirectly due to their location and/or scale. Examples of this type of environmental challenge are global warming, the protection of ecological and wildlife values in non-human zones, international water exportation agreements, and CFC released into the atmosphere. Because of the magnitude or removed location of these challenges, they are more likely to be viewed impersonally: some individuals will be ambivalent in relation to the problem, others will have no clear opinion, and a very few will have a strong emotional and cognitive response associated with the issue at hand, as well as a sense that they can perhaps make a difference. These kinds of environmental challenges are generally dealt with at policy, political, and organizational levels.

The other category is *local tangible* challenges that affect everyday citizens directly; for example: expropriation of private land for road construction or high voltage electrical lines, displacement of villages in a proposed flood zone by hydroelectric dams, or a polluting industry that moves into a neighborhood. A distinguishing trait of this category is that pretty much every citizen within an affected area will have an opinion that is influenced by strong emotional and cognitive reactions to the issue at hand. An ecological problem within this category is experienced as a very personal issue by most, and dealt with at the communal, personal and local levels. With this type of ecological problem, people generally feel that they have at least a chance to affect change.

The remainder of this paper focuses on the application of an integral approach to a local tangible challenge<sup>1</sup> that affects everyday citizens: the long-standing controversy around forest management in the domestic use watersheds of the Slocan Valley in British Columbia, Canada.

## Slocan Valley Forestry – A Case Study

### Background

Over the last several decades, the Slocan Valley has become known in British Columbia as a place where the local communities take tremendous interest in the forests and watersheds that surround them. The vast majority of local residents' domestic water supplies come directly from small creeks that tumble down the forested mountain slopes and fragile springs arising from hidden aquifers. These are sensitive water sources on which the local population is dependent for both irrigation and domestic needs. For the last 35 years, competing demands have been placed

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<sup>1</sup> While making a distinction between *removed* and *local tangible* ecological issues is very helpful, many of the findings discussed in the following on how to work with local challenges can be translated and adapted to working with the removed type of environmental problem.

on the landscape by divergent interests: domestic water licensees, forest workers, forestry companies, outdoor enthusiasts, farmers, First Nations, and the government. The result has been tense relationships, to say the least. After 15 years of dedicated grassroots effort to come up with an alternative to the proposed and planned areas for logging cuts, in 1991 the logging industry, backed by government, began to build roads and log clearcuts in people's watersheds. Protests and ensuing arrests in the valley due to conflicting interests sadly became commonplace. Over the last 15 years, and as recently as 2004, over 120 individuals have been arrested, standing for what they believed to be a just cause: water and ecosystem protection. While arrestees paid personally for taking a stand, the community has paid with social divisions and a sense that the economic future is tenuous. Many tax dollars have been spent for very little return, and the situation is yet to be resolved.

### **The Geography – providing a sense of place**

The Slocan Valley is a long (over 120 km) and narrow valley consisting of approximately 840,000 acres of land and water. It is situated in the West Kootenay region of Southeastern British Columbia. The rugged Selkirk and Purcell mountains provide a spectacular backdrop for the Slocan Lake at the north end of the valley and the Slocan River that meanders through the south. The high elevation terrain of the steep and broken valley walls is home to alpine meadows, glaciers, and rocky peaks. This combination of forested mountain slopes, high elevation peaks and meadows, all crowning the lake and river, provide stunning natural beauty.

Approximately 6,000 people inhabit the Slocan Valley. They share this land with a wide range of animal species, including grizzlies, black bears, deer, elk, wolverine, mountain caribou, coyotes, lynx, mountain goats, cougars, and bobcats. The Slocan Valley is part of what is known as the only Interior Temperate Rain Forest in the world. The "continental" climate is usually warm and sunny in the summer, and overcast and below freezing in the winter. Average annual precipitation ranges from 30 to 70 inches.

### **The Population: who came to be here, and when**

Historically speaking, the Slocan Valley was first used by First Nations people of whom a small but very active band, the Sinixt, still calls the valley it home. The mining boom of 1890 marked the arrival of early settlers coming mainly from western USA, a hard-working group of people. Many of their descendents still reside in the valley and are associated with one form or another of resource extraction.

Economic activities associated with mining led to the development of roads, ferries, and railways, opening transportation routes for pioneer homesteaders in the early 1900s. These early pioneer homesteaders were mainly of Doukhobor descent. The Doukhobors (meaning Spirit Wrestlers) were a group of Russian peasants who escaped persecution in Russia in 1899. At that time, Leo Tolstoy and his colleagues, the Society of Friends (The Quakers), helped 8,000 of them immigrate to Canada. The persecution in Russia had begun four years before, when at Easter time Doukhobor conscripts, called to serve in the army, laid down their weapons and refused to continue military training, stating that they could not continue participating in the taking of human life. The Doukhobors are Christians; they base their philosophy on two commandments: "Recognize and love God—the spiritual force of Goodness and Creativity—with all thy heart, mind and soul" and "Love thy neighbor as thyself." For over 60 years the

Doukhobors maintained an established communal lifestyle in the Slocan Valley and surrounding areas. This led the Encyclopedia Britannica (1960 edition) to describe them as: "...when living up to the standard of their faith, they present one of the nearest approaches to the realization of the Christian ideal which has ever been attained." In the 1960s external pressures brought an end to their communal life style. Today only about 20% of the Slocan Valley population is of Doukhobor descent. Many of the descendants have joined the resource extraction faction of the valley. The elders are avid gardeners. They still administer their own playschools, youth groups, publications, Russian language classes, community and cultural centers, and heritage sites. They meet regularly for prayer services, spiritual meetings, and cultural festivals.

In the early 1940s, following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, both the United States and Canada relocated people of Japanese descent to what became known as internment camps. Essentially, these people became civilian prisoners of war, even if most of them were already citizens of one of these two countries. Of the 23,000 interned in Canada, 7,500 were sent to the Slocan Valley and placed in six different internment camps. Today, a small number of these so-called "ex-prisoners" and their descendents still live in the Slocan Valley.

In the late 1960s the next major wave of immigration occurred when young migrants, this time from the United States, discovered the Slocan Valley. American men were being drafted as soldiers for the war in Vietnam, and Canada provided a safe haven to avoid the draft and to establish a peaceful existence working with the land. Hundreds upon hundreds traveled north and discovered the Slocan Valley. A colorful array of communes sprung up. Alternative schools were built, food coops and community halls established, most beaches became clothing-optional, and the green plant started growing everywhere. These newcomers talked gender equality, free love, racial equality, and consensus decision-making. Environmental organizations were born. The then-emerging green movement had moved in, and this was the beginning of a 35-year long period of unease and conflict between this new wave of people and the long-established resource extraction faction of the community. A significant percentage of the present population arrived during this time, and many of their children have chosen to stay upon reaching adulthood.

In 1978, another event was to shape the future of the community: a forest company, Slocan Forest Products (SFP), was started up in the Slocan Valley. Until that point, the resource extraction faction of the community had been fairly diversified, and many small saw mills were spread out along the valley. None of these would survive the advent of SFP. Later, this company became the biggest forest product corporation in British Columbia, and in 2004, SFP merged with Canadian Forest Product (CANFOR) to create a new international giant.

In the early 1990s, the last significant wave of migration started and has continued to this day. A new era of "counter culture" individuals arrived, a group deeply established in "green" ecological consciousness, many equipped with higher education and a determined enthusiasm and motivation to do things differently. Among their distinguishing characteristics is a strong interest in a more spiritual life with a committed emphasis on "walking the talk." Vegetarianism, meditation, yoga, raw food, cleansing, voluntary simplicity, organic gardening, artistic expression, creative livelihood, activism, and leisure would become their main activities. They were joined by a growing number of "urban refugees" and semi-retired professionals, many of whom are well educated and financially independent.

This diverse assembly of individuals makes up the Slocan Valley of today, a small group of people (about 6,000) spanning an extremely wide spectrum of perspectives and preferences. Add to this mix a multi-national corporation whose main mandate is the growth of its shares' value on

the open market, and a government that in British Columbia is heavily financed by the forest industry, and an interesting situation is a sure result.

## The Challenge

### The Forest Crisis

In order to fully grasp the situation in the Slocan Valley, one needs to understand something about the land base in British Columbia. The following is a short synopsis.

In British Columbia (BC) 95% of the land base falls under what is called “Crown Land” or in common terminology “public land.” The other 5% is private land. Of the 95% public land, 12% is provincial parks. Such parks are protected land. Beyond these, most of the remaining public land is available for timber extraction. How did this come about? In 1865 the government of the day passed a land ordinance making it possible for government to grant rights to timber on public land to private interests without the government losing title to the land. By 1907, government had already granted the rights to timber to private interests on over 20 million acres of land. By the 1940s, the harvest rate of trees in BC had tripled, and the private companies holding the rights to these millions of acres of land had reached the limit of available timber supplies. So the timber industry needed access to more Crown Land. The government of the time got a little nervous about the prospect of future timber shortage, yet did not want to lose the investments made by these big corporations. Thus, in 1947 it decided to amend the Forest Act and to introduce the concept of “Sustained Yield Forestry.”

Two very important things came out of the new amendment to the Forest Act: (a) long-term exclusive forest management licenses (later to be named Tree Farm Licenses—TFLs), and (b) regulation of harvest rates. In other words, companies were given additional large parcels of land to manage with a harvest rate set by the government.

Today, two forms of tenure—*area-based Tree Farm Licenses*, and *volume-based forest licenses*—account for over 85% of the volume of timber cut on Crown lands in BC. Almost all area-based TFLs in existence today were granted before 1966, while the volume-based forest licenses were introduced in 1978, the year the Forest Act of 1947 was amended. The latter differ from the TFLs in that government gives these lands to companies, and companies have to cut a certain amount of wood from them every year. Government then gets a stumpage fee from each tree cut. By combining both the TFLs and the volume-based forest licenses, it is evident that fewer than 20 companies control 70% of the volume of timber cut in BC each year.

The Slocan Valley has a Tree Farm License that covers 24% of the land base; the volume-based forest licenses cover another 45% of the land; 24% is provincial parks (double the 12% provincial average for parks); and 5 % is in private lands. In other words, 98% of the land is spoken for; close to 70% is forested land and slated to be cut at some point in the future.

### So What’s the Problem?

Imagine moving north to Canada, escaping the draft for the Vietnam war, and finding a wild area, scarcely populated and with lots of cheap land available. You are hundreds of miles away from a big metropolitan center, surrounded by clean creeks, rivers and lakes, with four months of sunshine in the summers, and mild winters: a paradise where all your dreams can come true!? All those dreams born in the Berkeley cafes and on the LA beaches... Hundreds of you congregate

there, with ideas, visions, and ideals aplenty. The first summer is the best; everyone swims in the river, talks late into the night, and dreams of a new world just about to be created.

Then the deciduous trees and larches begin to turn yellow, the evenings become chilly, and the reality starts to dawn on you that life and the dreams you hold have a few things in between: work being one, personal growth another, and creativity probably the most important. Many relationships go sour, the warmth of the city begins to beckon. Most will leave. But some stay, drawing upon a creativity and dedication they might not have known existed. They build their homes and learn a variety of new skills: growing their own food, building with logs, and slowly getting established. The water line gets hooked up, a one-inch pipeline is buried two feet under the ground so that it won't freeze in the winter; sometimes the lines run thousands of feet, all the way to the closest creek that runs down the forested mountain sides. There, right by the creek, a water box is built to receive the fresh running water; attached to it is the water line, and that's it! The elevation difference between the box and the house creates your water pressure. You turn the tap on in your newly constructed house, and pure creek water flows out. You fill a glass, taste the water, and your life changes... The creek now flows through your veins. The creek water will slowly become 70% of your physical makeup, the average water content of a human body. The effect of this is hard to measure, but it is indeed for many the beginning of a love story. A love story between a people and the water that runs down the mountainside.

Each spring and fall you go to your water box to clean it up, emptying it and removing the sediment that has accumulated at the bottom of the box during the last six months. Back home for a drink of fresh water, the floating sediment you had noticed for the last few weeks in your water is gone. Deep contentment.

And then, one day, it happens. George, your neighbor, calls. He sounds very concerned. He has just gone to check his water box, and half the box is full of sediment. When he turned the tap on at home the water was brown. What is going on? The only way to find out is to walk uphill, following the creek. About two kilometers later you find the cause: A new 160-acre clearcut, with a logging road that has just washed away into the creek. This is sacrilege, this is the end of the world, outrage fills you: "How dare anyone destroy this fragile and faithful creek? This will never happen again! This is my newly found passion: Water is life, I am alive, never again, OVER MY DEAD BODY!" The year is 1972.

And that's only one side of a multi-sided problem. Check out this reality: You grew up here, have spent every day of your childhood roaming the fields, forests and valleys. Your great grandparents first made this their home, immigrating from Sweden in 1894. The stories of their settling, clearing the land, the many mosquitoes, the hard work, discovering the bountiful riches of this land: wildlife for hunting, silver and ore for mining, huge cedar trees for building, salmon and a wide array of fish right there at the tip of their fingers for fishing... all these and many more anecdotes were woven into the stories told to your grandparents, your parents and yourself. You feel embedded in a continuous stream: your family and this land belong together. You love this place, and feel lucky to be here. It is home. You belong here. The few times you have ventured to the city only confirmed this. You are uncomfortable there, out of place, feel pity for those who live and work in stuffy closed-in spaces, who can't call their home their own. Here you step out of your house each morning, look over your pasture and garden, notice a few jobs that need taking care of around the yard and get ready for another day's work of logging. You love working outside, the fresh smell of a newly cut cedar tree filling the air, the noise of your chain saw doesn't bother you, it is familiar. Holding it firmly in your hands as you skillfully clear one tree after the other, you enjoy the sense of power and strength it gives you. You are a

hard worker, and the guys at the mill respect you. However, it is not always an easy existence; in many ways it is a tough life. Money is often scarce; and although you yourself don't have a mortgage, you see many of your buddies struggling to make their monthly payments. And then there is increasing talk at the mill of possible closure due to lack of wood. You used to be able to go out and clearcut close to the home in the neighboring side valleys, now you often have a 20-30 km drive to just get to your work site. The valley has changed so much with all kinds of new people arriving. The stream of hippies who arrived in the 70s has been replaced with other waves of newcomers, many who seem to hold similar values as the former group, but are not as obviously "outlandish" – some even have short hair (!). They are fiercely protective of the water running down the mountain slopes and will do pretty much anything to stop you and your buddies from getting in there to do your job. Once in a while they pique your curiosity. Mostly they irritate you, sometimes downright enrage you... with their arrogance, with their very literal way of getting in your way by holding blockades. Who are these people? They pose a threat: to your kids, your job, and most of all YOUR WAY OF LIFE! They speak of logging practices that are "sustainable for future generations," of scientific evidence, and that you have no feelings for the trees. And your response? "What's the problem? I am 4<sup>th</sup> generation here and there is still plenty of wood! Besides, if I stopped logging, how would I survive? You guys just hang out and protest. Get a job and stop complaining." The year is 1994.

The above brief descriptions are only two snapshots in time representing the life conditions, worldviews and values active in this bioregion. Another one that must be noted, but that I will not attempt to describe myself, is that of the Sinixt, the Native people here in the Slocan Valley. They, like many other Natives, have been subject to enough misrepresentations and I do not wish to risk another non-indigenous portrayal of a nation that was decimated by smallpox in the early 1900s, a nation that have called this land home for thousands of years.

But in impassioned moments they will speak of the fact that they have not yet been recognized by government, a government that had the audacity to declare them extinct in the early 1950s.

In addition to the individual perspectives that are subjective, directed and influenced by a mix of personal, social, economic, cultural and other lenses, there are also some objective facts that contribute to the ongoing conflict in the Slocan Valley. In other words, it is not just human-related, but also a very real one in terms of ecology.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Worldwide

- With new technology, such as satellite systems, low altitude photography and side-looking radar, scientists have now figured out that the world is losing about 20.4 million hectares of tropical forest annually and that if these figures are not reduced, we will lose all of our tropical forests in about 50 years. <http://www.lclark.edu/~jay/Species%20Extinctions.pdf>
- More than 10,000 square kilometers of North American ancient forests are clearcut every year. (*Roadmap to Recovery: The world's last intact forest landscape*, Greenpeace, March 2006)
- There are approximately 3,800 million hectares of forest in the world, nearly one third of the planet's land area. <http://forest.ry.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/reprint/49/1/29.pdf>
- Deforestation is second only to the burning of fossil fuels as a human source of atmospheric carbon dioxide. Global estimates on the amount of carbon given off annually through deforestation amounts to 2.8 billion metric tons. Deforestation accounts for at least 25% of the annual emissions of carbon dioxide by humans. [http://www.ecobridge.org/content/g\\_cse.htm](http://www.ecobridge.org/content/g_cse.htm)

## Failed Attempts at Solving the Conflict

The struggle in the Slocan Valley has held a prominent place both in the media and politics for over three decades. Since 1974 the provincial government, in its attempt to solve the issue, has intervened nine times by sponsoring a variety of roundtable initiatives. Some of these lasted for years, involving skilled facilitators from around the province. Each process tried to come up with land-use decisions that would be acceptable to the majority of residents, together costing hundreds of thousands of dollars. Each initiative failed, some to such a degree that the initial division amongst involved parties actually widened during and after the process.

Summarized, the challenge the Slocan Valley faces in regard to its people, water, and surrounding forests thus involves:

1. A 35-year history of controversy over forest management in domestic watersheds;
2. Extreme polarities in perspectives and a wide span of competing values;
3. An exceptionally high degree of awareness by the local population regarding the issues at hand, with very strong opinions on all sides;
4. Deeply entrenched mistrust between various factions of the residents;
5. The historical fact that the BC government has already attempted to solve this issue nine times over the last 35 years, by sponsoring nine different initiatives at a cost of hundreds of thousands of dollars to taxpayers without any success whatsoever; and
6. A global and bioregional context of increasing water scarcity, depleted forest ecology, and declining economy in the forestry sector.

## The Initiative: The Slocan Integral Forestry Cooperative (SIFCo)

*“No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it.”*

(attributed to Albert Einstein 1879-1955)

In the fall of 2003, the provincial government of British Columbia announced its intention to offer forest tenures to communities as part of a province-wide tenure reallocation process. After 30 years of failed processes, an opportunity arose to start over, to try a different approach, one that would make use of the many lessons learned and take all the players into consideration:

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- In British Columbia more than 2 400 square kilometers are clearcut every year. <http://www.livinglandscapes.bc.ca/thomp-ok/env-changes/land/ch2.html>
  - Canadian logging causes almost 2.1 hectares (5 acres) of forest to be lost every minute of every day, principally to feed U.S. demand. (*Bringing Down the Boreal*, Forest Ethics)
  - In British Columbia 27,000 loggers were thrown out of work between 1981 and 1991, not by “tree huggers”, but by an increasing use of labor-reducing technology in the industry. <http://www.sierraclub.org/sierra/199905/media.asp>
  - While the cut has increased dramatically, almost doubling over the last 20 years from less than 40 to more than 70 million cubic meters per year (Ministry of Forests), forestry has decreased its contribution to the provincial economy by one half, from over 10% to around 5% in the same period (Heaps). <http://archive.greenpeace.org/comms/97/forest/jobtree.html>
  - The logging industry currently employs about 6% of BC’s workers, down from 9% at the beginning of the 1980s. <http://workinonet.bc.ca/lmisi/bc-econ/FORESTRY/forestry.html>
  - B.C. gets only 1/5 as many jobs per cubic meter of timber logged as California and has one of the worst records of job creation in the forestry sector in the world (Pulp, Paper and Woodworkers of Canada) <http://archive.greenpeace.org/comms/97/forest/jobtree.html>
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people, nature, culture, organizations, and corporations. I recognized this announcement as an opportunity to implement an *integral approach to community mediation* in the Slocan Valley of BC. The intention and aim were that an integral approach to a collective conflict could lead to the formation of a Cooperative that would hold tenure over some of the most contested lands and be charged with managing these lands.

If the residents of the Slocan Valley were to be successful in a bid for a community forest tenure, all sides of the ongoing conflict would have to come together under one vision. They would, together, need to change the course of history by replacing mistrust with a new direction that would benefit all members of the community. The social landscape was diverse. It was made up of First Nations voices; a conservative faction made up of loggers, miners and farmers; a highly concentrated and vocal green community; a multi-faith landscape; two internationally recognized environmental organizations; a strong artist community; and a multinational corporation (the main employer) involved in corporate forestry. Would they be able to rise to the challenge?

This new integral initiative would walk already charted territory, territory that had seen all kinds of approaches and processes stumble and fall. Was there a chance of making any headway whatsoever? Could and would an integral approach make a difference in navigating this landscape? Together with a small group of residents, I decided to give it a try.

### **Guiding principles**

First we needed to come up with guiding principles that would start the process of building a foundation of respect for divergent local perspectives. Our initiative is therefore based on the following points of understanding:

1. Residents hold diverse perspectives and value systems in relation to the forest that surrounds them,
2. These perspectives and value systems are guided and influenced by a mix of social, economic, scientific, spiritual, psychological, cultural, political, historical and institutional lenses.
3. Each of these perspectives is valuable and pertinent and must therefore be considered into solutions that will work for all.
4. By including and building upon these perspectives solutions found will be more complete and viable in considering how the community and the forest can interface.

### **Mediating between trees and all kinds of people!**

The problem in the Slocan Valley is specifically related to the interface and interaction between people and the natural environment, and to the myriad value systems and perspectives at play in regards to the issue. Thus, very early in the effort it became clear that a central component of achieving a Community Forest and then managing it in an integral way would have everything to do with our ability to work with people. In other words, success in achieving a Community Forest depended to a large extent on our capacity to navigate amongst and appreciate many differing value systems, worldviews, priorities, preferences, habits, needs, fears, reservations, even differing cultural norms, as well as ecological limitations, corporate interest, and national and local laws.

One of the main criteria to succeed in securing a community forest in BC is to get broad-based community support. Would it be possible for the union, the logging company, the recreation enthusiasts, First Nations, environmental organizations, and the residents to come together under one vision? Given the valley's history, it seemed unlikely. I was excited to try, however: I perceived the situation as a perfect challenge to see if an integral approach could make headway where other less comprehensive attempts had failed. Of course, once a community agrees on a vision, many tasks remain: to identify and negotiate a land base, develop a business and management plan, incorporate as a legal entity, get the government to support the initiative. In all these further aspects, an integral framework has continued to play a major role (I will touch on this briefly further down). However, given the valley's history, it was this first step of getting a diverse and split community to gather behind a vision that seemed to really show how extraordinarily viable and practical the integral perspective actually is. To be sure, the project has been precariously poised between possible success and failure, with one curve ball after the other coming at it. But doors continue to open. People continue to surprise me and I am left with a deepened appreciation and hope for the potential of human beings rising to the challenge of coming up with solutions that require stretching to a different way of seeing a situation and working with it, together and alone.

In addition, because we succeeded in integrating the insights and needs coming from different value systems, the final resulting business and management plans are much more solid and realistic than if we had worked only with a more homogenous sector of the valley population. Bringing multiple perspectives together has, therefore, been one of the main challenges. It has also proven to be one of our greatest strengths, contributing to our Community Forest making ecological, financial, and social sense.

As mentioned earlier, I myself have been explicitly informed by the integral framework, but my inclusion of the framework has been much more implicit in my work with the core group that has become SIFCo, all of whom had not heard of this approach beforehand. Some of the core group have since become interested and have learned more about the integral approach.

In the following I relate the main ways in which I as facilitator, and in many instances also the core group, have utilized the integral framework in our attempt to secure a community forest in the Slocan Valley. Rather than step-by-step activity descriptions, the following are generalized descriptions of the main capacities employed.

*Practicing the ability to simultaneously hold and inhabit multiple perspectives.*

In order to find a solution to the environmental conflict in the valley, we needed to discover a mutual understanding between diverging viewpoints and interpretations. This was important both to honor and understand the different voices and concerns present, as well as to actually come up with pertinent and comprehensive responses to a very complex issue. By acknowledging and integrating the many differing perceptions of reality held within the community at large, each person could feel understood and respected and begin to contribute to a solution. This required that those of us who met with residents, various interest groups, and the government had to bring flexibility to our use of language, embody a willingness to see and appreciate the healthy aspects of each perspective or set of values, and have the cognitive capacity to actually inhabit a perspective different than our own. Inquiry and deep listening were a central part of the process.

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*Awareness of and ability to manage people's multi-faceted diversity (multiple "lines").*

The awareness that what each person offered to the process and to the group was made up, motivated and defined by a multitude of emotions, beliefs, interpersonal habits, moral and ethical inclinations, physical circumstances, cognitive abilities etc., encouraged me to further develop a key skill: the ability to reframe positions held by others into issues and questions that required attention and that could lead to creative solutions. The awareness of multiple lines also greatly informed my group facilitation efforts. It helped me pay attention to the entirety of each person present, even whilst the focus has foremost been on the cognitive dialogue underway (for example, by creating a physically comfortable situation, a place where people could feel safe emotionally, offering and modeling constructive interpersonal skills, noticing where and when someone needed extra support or consideration etc.)

*Commitment to personal growth.*

In order to be as fully available as possible to what was unfolding amongst all the parties involved and not get tangled up in one's own shadow or agenda, it has been essential to work toward bringing awareness to our possible attachments and aversions. In addition, the ability to be attentive and present, centered, warm-hearted, empathetic, clear, patient, persistent, and to bring both depth and lightness (often with humor) to the process has proven invaluable. Who we *are* plays at least as great of a role as what we *do*. Of course, all these qualities require a certain level of maturity.

In the heat of any conflict, one can work on developing the capacity to be present to every aspect of that conflict, while stepping aside from one's own point of view and learning to distinguish one's thoughts, from one's emotions, from one's perceptions, from our conflict partner's point of view, to embrace a broader, more integrated, view – in the words of Thich Nhat Hanh (1987: 1), to *be* peace. (Bowling and Hoffman, 2000. p.23)

*Facilitating experiencing the bonds of shared motivations.*

While each participant in the process generally sees the world through the lens of their particular perspective on the situation, a collective glimpse into a possible future was made possible by skillfully touching on and addressing what I call the "spine" of the group. In other words, addressing and calling forth that which simultaneously touches a resonant cord in everyone. In our case, this was achieved by addressing the overarching care that each individual held for the well-being of the community and the fact that everyone wants a healthy economy, a healthy ecosystem, and clean water. How each person interprets, expresses, and translates their feeling of care and concern, and the span that this care and concern has, can differ greatly, of course. But these were the threads that ran through each person and that formed the spine of the group. I was thus able to utilize these common, healthy, authentic threads as "elevators," as something to draw upon in order to bring people to an inspired and motivated place that made possible a certain amount of stretching in each participant. It was the articulated vision of a thriving community (both economically and socially) in a healthy ecosystem that brought everyone to see themselves in this vision and thus to support it. In such moments, people did not feel threatened by the vision; rather they could see themselves thriving while being part of

something greater than themselves. Of course these experiences were translated differently by different people. For some, the translation ended up in an heroic effort to “save the day;” for another it was translated into “doing the right thing;” for yet another, the motivation laid in saving the water and forests, and gaining a sense of belonging. Each in their own way translated the common human yearning of being part of something meaningful and making a difference.

To enable such a collective bonding experience required using language that communicated directly with each person at close enough intervals so that no one ever felt lost, left out, or disconnected from the emerging mosaic that was being created. As Sean Hargens (2005) points out, it does not work “to take the value set of one worldview and try to force it upon another worldview . . .” (p. 22). This will only lead to unnecessary clashes. Thus, finding the highest common denominator, if only as a collective glimpse here and there, has proven invaluable in reaching agreements.

#### *Balance of empathy/engagement and impartiality.*

I have lived in the Slocan Valley for the past 15 years. I love it – the mountains, the creeks, the wildlife. I have knelt down to drink the pure water flowing down the valley sides regularly. This valley inspires and sustains me in many ways; its beauty and ecological health renews my commitment to do everything I can to help protect it and thereby also the Life in its myriad forms being nourished by it. I have attended more meetings than I care to think about, organized protests and conferences. However, I found that a key component to being effective in securing a community forest was that I cared, gave myself fully to the work at hand, and at the same time did not get drawn to the point of identification with and attachment to the process and its outcome. Both empathy and impartiality were essential. The former allowed for the interest, concern and motivation necessary to sink deeply into the process, the latter allowed me to embrace and hold additional perspectives. Without impartiality, I could easily have become useless, losing the larger context and perspective, getting pulled in specific directions, and becoming personally attached and driven. It helped me to approach this project as a case study, as an opportunity to learn how and why it might or might not succeed. This gave me the necessary distance to be effective.

#### *Importance of discernment.*

In order to cultivate mutual understanding and a way forward to constructive and comprehensive action, it was necessary that everyone participating in the core group held certain qualities of being. These qualities, attitudes, and capacities proved to be essential in order for us to be able to implement an integral approach in such a divided community. I believe that discerning who has the following qualities and, if possible, recruiting and engaging those particular individuals can be one of the most crucial steps in attempting to implement an integral ecology project on the ground. These qualities, attitudes and capacities are as follows.

- Natural inquisitiveness, an ability and willingness to listen to others.
- Integrity and reliability, where actions are aligned with words.
- A voice of reason to offer to their respective constituency, being respected and carrying a certain influence.

- Flexibility: not too entrenched in a particular value system, not too vested in one's own perspective—personally, socially or professionally.
- An inherent quality of being that includes personal growth as part of the life process, even if only unconsciously.
- Motivation of care and concern for the greater community and ready to seek its betterment.

Notice here that these qualities are found in certain individuals across *all* sub-sections of a community. In other words, they are not value-system dependent. This was invaluable to recognize because it was by engaging individuals with these qualities that we laid the foundation for our future success.

### **How the core team came to be**

Lisa Farr from the EACT Watershed Association and I began by surveying the social landscape and acknowledging the historical conflicts among the priorities people valued most. We then approached two or three individuals at a time, people we identified that held, from our perspective, some of the key qualities mentioned above. We approached them in an inquisitive manner. We were genuinely interested in understanding the insights, information, values, worldviews and knowledge base they each had to offer. In this way we discovered what elements from each sub-culture needed to be included in the overarching direction of our process. We also presented our general vision for a potential community forest tenure in the Slocan Valley, but we didn't present a detailed vision of what the outcome of such a co-creative endeavor could look like. Rather, we briefly outlined the historical conflicts that were present in this bioregion (a topic all could agree on), and then presented the idea of transcending the past, while including the insights gained from what had not worked. We shared our intention of seeking *together* to come up with a vision for the valley within which all the needs (both from the natural and the human worlds) could be met, and the gems held by each sub-group's values would be included. We also communicated very clearly our conviction that by including all of the valuable insights available in the population we would end up with a much more viable way of interfacing with the forest that surrounds us.

These smaller meetings quickly clarified who was a good candidate for the core team, and who wasn't. We made it clear at the onset of these meetings that we were approaching our discussions as a way to learn more about each of the value systems and worldviews held in the variety of sub-cultures in the Slocan Valley. Our intention was that by the end of each meeting, everyone would see value in the project, would not feel threatened by it, and would feel appreciated for what they had contributed and could contribute in the future.

As this process continued we gradually formed a core group, a diverse collective from the very beginning.

### **What about the forest?**

Once we had taken the first step—getting this diverse community to agree on and support a community forest—we developed our business plans and management and governance structures over the next few years. SIFCo's mission statement is “to create and operate a financially sound community forest business that fosters community and ecological health.” This is reflected in our

methodology and operational plans, which we have articulated for the short, medium, and long term.

On the ecological front we consider and plan for: the overall health of the ecosystem (including soil protection, biological diversity and wildlife, awareness of root and bark diseases); ecosystem restoration; wildlife enhancement projects; management and minimization of wildfire hazard; maintaining wildlife movement corridors; protecting water quantity, quality and timing of flow; protection of riparian ecosystems; and ensuring a successional pattern of multi-layered canopy.

On the economic front we consider and plan for: a diverse range of products, including specialty wood for value-added products; a long-term sustainable yield of harvest; enhancing economic diversity and sustainability of the community; local employment; retraining programs; non-timber forest products; developing partnerships and collaboration with local organizations and businesses; and retaining profits within the community for ecological restoration, community infrastructure and social programs.

On the social front we consider and plan for: inclusive and transparent public involvement; a monitoring and evaluation system, both internally and also involving the broader local public, to continuously improve SIFCo's performance and maintain public approval; training programs for youth and under-employed; minimizing the visual impacts of harvesting and road building in order to maintain the growing tourism industry and satisfy local residents' preference to maintain viewsapes; and protection of all identified First Nations cultural heritage features and, if requested by First Nations, an archeological impact assessment for specific areas.

## **Where we stand now**

To date, and needless to say much to our delight, we have experienced that the integral approach we are taking does indeed work! We initiated this process in January 2004 with a small group of volunteers. This group has grown. Loggers, city council, environmental activists, the Ministry of Forest and Range, a variety of local residents and three resident associations have come to agreement on guiding principles, management guidelines, organizational structure, and a plan for future profit distribution of the Community Forest. We have received over 140 letters of support from a variety of non-profit organizations, as well as from government, businesses and individuals that span the full spectrum of values and perspectives. On March 2, 2005 we submitted a preliminary application for a Community Forest Agreement that would cover some of the most contested areas of the Slocan Valley. Our preliminary proposal was accepted December 2005: government offered us a certain amount of land. On September 25, 2006, government surprised everyone by offering us a new invitation, one that gave us the right to double the landbase that we were originally offered. On December 4, 2006, our three-year negotiation came to a conclusion: we agreed to an area of 35,000 acres. On December 7, 2006, we were officially incorporated as a Cooperative under the Cooperative Act of British Columbia. In January 2007, our final application was sent to the government, and in April we heard that our application was in the final phase of being accepted: SIFCo should be tenure holder at the latest in July of this year (2007).

When our application for a community forest is finalized, we will have before us a unique opportunity to further put the integral framework into practice in how the forest and watersheds are managed in an entire ecosystem. Three years ago, a community was extremely divided; very soon, together, a community will be managing the lands that surround them.

## Concluding Reflections

Evolution happens a step at a time! This is a crucial reminder when attempting to practice integral ecology. In today's society, an applied integral solution may appear to be less than the most ideal solution imaginable. Why so? Because our minds and imaginations can come up with and envision solutions that are way ahead of where we actually are as a society and human family. A solution must be liveable – it must be “implementable” by those concerned. Otherwise it will remain just a good idea. Thus the achievable common ground of the general population that will live with the solution and actually bring it to life must be taken into consideration; this will determine how far and how fast a solution can actually go. In other words, an applied integral solution essentially takes the concerned population “where it is” and then propels it one step forward. This movement onward and forward may not be as far as some might wish, but it is a step forward nonetheless. Stagnation is replaced with movement that allows us to evolve toward a brighter future.

Understanding evolution from an integral perspective is important for two very practical reasons: first, because some people will tend to react negatively and indignantly to a solution that does not match their conception of the ideal. From a certain perspective, one could say rightly so, as there may be cases where an applied integral solution will seem to fall short of someone's ideal of what can be envisioned; taking into consideration the information at hand on the state of the environment and what is necessary to make a real difference, anything short of drastic and radical measures may seem futile. If we realize this at the onset, we can harness people's very important energy by acknowledging the fact that whatever integral solutions we may come up with to current problems, such solutions are but stepping stones toward yet-to-be more evolved solutions. This can be explained to people who are concerned or reactive. And we can be compassionate with what is agonizing for people who find it hard to settle for anything less than what they deeply believe is necessary. In over a decade of grassroots activism I repeatedly came across the sabotaging effect of immovable perspectives. Such individuals are often highly-motivated by ideals and principles that merit respect. But, by shooting for the moon, they can end up disheartened and, tragically, also with a trashed environment, because the “this or nothing” stance trips up their efforts. The environmentally-engaged activist often sees where we need to go, feels the urgency, but just as often presents solutions that disregard where many other people actually “are.” An unwillingness to compromise, and a lack of consideration for how evolution in human consciousness generally takes place (i.e., “a step at a time”), has all too often backfired, with stagnation, alienation and disenchanting burnout being the result. This really is a pity; brilliant plans, models and solutions of what could and should be fall short of ever getting implemented. People are emotionally hurt and discouraged. Integral mediation will attempt to include the invaluable input and driving force of such values in relation to ecological conflict, and simultaneously pay attention to potential obstacles they might pose to an integral solution.

This brings me to my second point: integral solutions need to be constructed at the onset with *ever-evolving mechanisms in place at the core of their systems*. Our world is geared toward stagnation. Change is one of the hardest things to accomplish in society. Every time a change is implemented, there is a whole mechanism that breathes out with it, settling comfortably into a new structure of stagnation. For example, it takes an extreme amount of time and effort to change the building codes of a county so that they start embracing green building technologies. By applying an integral approach one may be able to get a county (or state) to implement a reduction in wood consumption during the construction phase by say 20%. According to leading

edge environmental science, the real target to aim for is, say, 70%. However, 20% is better than nothing, and nothing it will be if the demand is for a 70% reduction. An integral thinker/facilitator will know that 20% is not enough. S/he will make sure that there are mechanisms in place for the 20% to become 30% and then 40%, as opposed to putting all the effort toward having the 20% set in stone and sealed by law. That would create yet another benchmark for societal stagnation, one that would require the same or maybe even more energy to move onward when the time comes for the 30% to be brought to the table. And at the speed that things are changing these days, such a time will come sooner rather than later.

In the next few decades, we will be facing some of the most interesting times in recorded history. Times that will challenge us to embrace an ever-complexifying landscape, which will require of us an exponential growth in our ability to navigate the interface between human societies and ecology. Integral mediation and integral ecology offer key perspectives to bring to the table as we begin to implement solutions in response to the planetary crisis we have placed ourselves in, both at the local and at the global level.

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