

December 18, 2023
Bulkley Valley Community Resources Board
Smithers, British Columbia

Dear BVCRB Board Members,

With this letter, I am following up on my presentation to the Bulkley Valley Community Resources Board (BVCRB) on 20 November 2023. What I offer here are my thoughts, opinions and ideas for your reflection and consideration about how board members might gather the support needed to carry the BVCRB forward. These are times of rapidly changing natural systems (e.g., climate system, ecological systems), social systems (e.g., food systems, transportation systems), cultural systems (e.g., indigenous-settler relationships), provincial, federal and municipal policy, governance and problem solving initiatives, as well as systems changing within business and economic realms. All of this and more, have relevance to the current state of and future opportunities and challenges for land and resource management in the Bulkley Valley.

BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Since 1991, local citizens representing a diverse range of value perspectives held by a somewhat diverse bunch of residents and organizations within the Bulkley Valley have been meeting to protect these values. At first, the BVCRB's mission was to complete the complex and challenging work of creating the Bulkley Land and Resource Management Plan. Seven years later, the plan, considered one of the most successful in the province according to the BVCRB website, was completed. Since then the BVCRB has continued to carry out and deliver on their responsibilities to protect these values.

Over three decades, the forestry sector—at the heart of land use planning—has boomed. The mining sector resisted involvement and inclusion in the land use planning process. Since then mineral exploration has waxed and waned with commodity prices. The mining sector is currently on the rise, in anticipation of energy systems transformation to renewable energies. Over the last decade, the oil and gas sector has come on board to propose numerous and pipeline corridors for fossil fuel transportation, with one completed, an intensive and expansive type of land use that was not considered at the time of planning. All the while, the Wet'suwet'en First Nation, the Lake Babine Nation, the Province of BC and the Government Canada have been engaging (e.g., with respect to reconciliation, rights and title, treaty processes), within and outside of courts.

Also since the early days of preparing the Bulkley LRMP, British Columbians have faced mountain pine beetle and other tree pests and diseases, wildfires, draught and floods that have ravaged settlements and ecosystems. Many of us are now feeling the effects of diminishing fish and wildlife populations on ways of life and livelihoods, from moose to caribou to salmon to steelhead. Through my career, I've witnessed the decline of fisher, goshawk, grizzly bear, caribou, white-barked pine and (probably) wolverine populations, as well as the disappearance of old growth forests and losses of whitebark pine trees.

Throw in a global pandemic, and we find that much has happened in thirty plus years. Where are we now? Economically, many people are prospering from land development and natural resource extraction. At the same time, a greater proportion of people are living in precarious conditions challenged by all sorts of insecurities, from health to housing to food. Across the board, we've been losing ground on ecological and other environmental values. No natural resource or ecosystem that I know of is recovering as fast as we're degrading it. It shouldn't be surprising to any of us that the BVCRB is currently struggling to recruit new board members. So where to from here?

In my view, the most extraordinary and promising accomplishment of the BVRCB is in the continuous tending and passing on of the torch, for over three decades, involving (by my count on the BCVRC website) 93 Bulkley Valley residents, most of whom are still living in this area. This is invaluable legacy

that could be conceivably draw from to help empower people in Smithers, Telkwa, Witset, Fort Babine and others in the surrounding area to collaboratively find a way or ways for us to move forward, together, from within and outside of land use and natural resource management planning processes.

And, in my view, overwhelmingly disappointing results were that land and resource management planning originally intended to be science-informed through adaptive management cycle was instead axed in the plan phase. Further, First Nations and key natural resource sectors were not involved in the planning process. Monitoring for implementation and effectiveness of the plan barely got off the ground, even then only with the extraordinary and largely volunteer efforts of community members via the Babine Watershed Monitoring Trust. Updates to the plan never happened. In sum, there's been little to no organizational opportunity to gather and incorporate additional and new knowledge (scientific, traditional and local), experiences, values and interests, from across peoples, disciplines and groups, to better inform problem solving processes and more effectively achieve goals and objectives.

AT CROSSROADS: SOME QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

In my view, the BVCRB is at cross roads. Some questions worth considering, whether or not:

- To keep trying to advance the BVCRB along the same general trajectory?
- To disband the BVCRB and try to find other way(s) outside of the BVCRB to protect community values? or
- To hibernate or reduce BVCRB traditional activities in order to take stock of the situation by surveying and collaborating with past board members, First Nations, the Province of BC, and others to better understand the issues at hand with a view to co-creating visions of desired and possible futures for land and resource management in the Bulkley LRMP area (or some rendition or portion of landscape area thereof)?

The last question is the only option that I can see that could conceivably orient the BVCRB towards the healthy, resilient and sustainable communities and ecosystems that we all need to effectively navigate, adapt and transform ailing systems in times of rapid change. Through an integrative problem solving process, it's conceivably possible to clarify and secure commonly held interests within our communities. That is, with attention to differentiate common interests from special interests—those that compromise common interests, as has been the case for too many social and ecological values, for decades.

POTENTIAL WAYS FORWARD

We also have three ways, that I know of, to find our way out of problem solving processes that are failing to achieve goals and objectives and get moving more effectively towards a better place, as described by Susan Clark, professor, policy scientist, Yale University.

1. Withdraw from the process. This could be as a form of resistance, as Susan Clark expressed it. But it could also be a strategy to avoid wasting precious resources and time or to not participate in making the situation worse, as for example, through unintended consequences. This was my choice when I resigned from the BVCRB Board in 2014 when I realized that I was beyond my level of competence and found no means to call in the subject experts needed to appropriately inform decisions. I left stating that the Bulkley Valley Research Centre could be a valuable partner to help fill the independent, scientific expertise gap, at the time another valuable and under supported organization.
2. Work from within to change the process. This is where the Board focused, since inception, until today we find the Board all but completely excluded from land and resource management decision making process, as best I can tell.
3. Advocate to find another way forward. This is where the Board might have the capacity or might be able to gain the capacity to find a way forward.

SOME ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS:

What does the BVCRB have to work with?

In my view the BVCRB's most powerful and as yet untapped resource is the diversity of people and organizations in the Bulkley Valley and surrounding area that provide a rich source of ways of knowing, expertise and experiences to draw from to image desired and possible alternatives to find a way forward. We have innumerable connections with each other and the land to work with.

How can we protect social and ecological values that consistently fall by the wayside in these times of rapidly changing human-created systems and earth systems, locally to globally?

And how can we better network people and organizations to respond more effectively and efficiently to change?

Learn from and with traditional and alternative ways of problem solving that have emerged to fill gaps, like the BVCRB, Wet'zinka Community Forest Corporation, Bulkley Valley Research Centre, Skeena Wild, Skeena Knowledge Trust and others. These times call for rapid learning, adaptation, transition or transformation in various facets of society, as and where needed. We could conceivably do this, as community networks and interconnected communities.

How can the BVCRB network within the context of government to government negotiations and planning, in progress? And how does the BVCRB navigate a path with the province that helps to recognize the traumatic effects of colonization on indigenous peoples, to reconcile with indigenous peoples and to address the imbalances of power and privilege over indigenous people?

To uphold British Columbia's Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act and to reconcile and move forward with indigenous peoples these key commitments need to be advanced. There is much the BVCRB could do to help shift harmful stories and imbalances of power and privilege so that we can all move forward, together.

How might the Board become visible to and valued by the Province of BC?

Premier David Eby has directed Nathan Cullen to work with business and industry, along with **local communities** (bold text mine), First Nations, and other key stakeholders to ensure values like nature, outdoor spaces, wildlife and ecosystems continue to survive and thrive for this and future generations. As yet, the BVCRB remains outside, apparently with doors to conversation closed. Eby also stated that he's looking for good ideas, no matter where they come from. The BVCRB could conceivably play a key role in helping to advance community and ecosystem health and resilience and sustainable use and development of natural resources.

In closing, I would be happy to delve into such thoughts and ideas with BVCRB members to see if or how I might be able to help.

Yours sincerely,

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