

TIRED OF HIGH FUEL PRICES?



Part of the  **canada.com** Network

Jump to: Newspapers, TV, Radio

[classifieds](#) [jobs](#) [cars](#) [obituaries](#) [celebrating](#) [shopping](#) [homes](#) [dating](#)



3°C

Overcast

Detailed Forecast

[Oceanside Home](#)

Search for

in the Oceanside Star

[find](#)

go!LOCAL
OCEANSIDE
PARKSVILLE
FIND LOCAL BUSINESSES

Site Index

- News
- Opinion
- Letters
- Entertainment
- Health & Fitness
- Money

Contact Us

- Back Issues
- Live Green

Classified

- classifieds
- driving (autos)
- working (jobs)
- homes
- personals
- shopping

Island Papers

Select...

Spotlight



eFlyers

Advertise with the
Vancouver Island
Newspaper Group

Bookmarks

- City of Parksville
- Parksville Chamber of Commerce
- Town of Qualicum Beach
- Qualicum Beach Chamber of Commerce

Laissez-faire approach hurting forest communities


Roy Ostling, Oceanside Star

Published: Monday, January 05, 2009

One of the sectors hit hardest by the financial crisis that devastated commodity markets in 2008 is BC's forest industry. In the 1960s, thanks to cheap sources of old-growth timber, Port Alberni enjoyed one of the highest per capita levels of income of any community in Canada.

Today after a century of mismanagement and misguided policies, the common wealth of our forests has been squandered.

A hallmark of this approach has been the conversion of high-value old-growth forestry stands to second-growth plantations that lack diversity and consider hardwoods, such as red alder and big-leaf maple, as weeds.

 [Email to a friend](#)

 [Printer friendly](#)

Font: 

 [BOOKMARK](#) 

The conventional response to dealing with BC's ailing industry has been increasing privatization. The Crown owns 94% of BC's forest lands. This is viewed by many forestry analysts as an impediment to investment and market efficiencies.

Since 2001, the Liberal government has stuck to a narrow view that considers any forest policy that promotes the secondary

manufacturing or community forest development as social engineering. The Liberals abandoned the concept of tying forest tenure provided to major forest companies in exchange for cutting rights to the requirement of the companies maintaining local processing facilities.

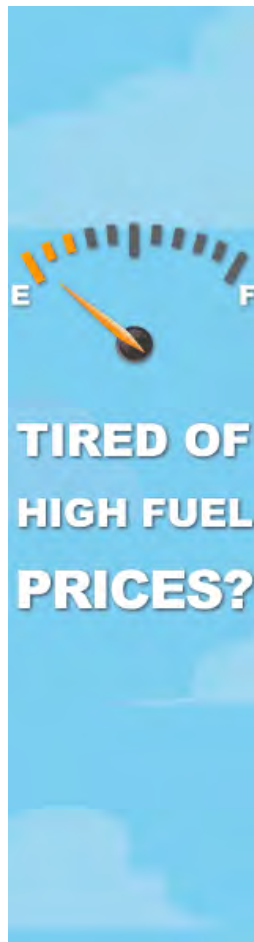
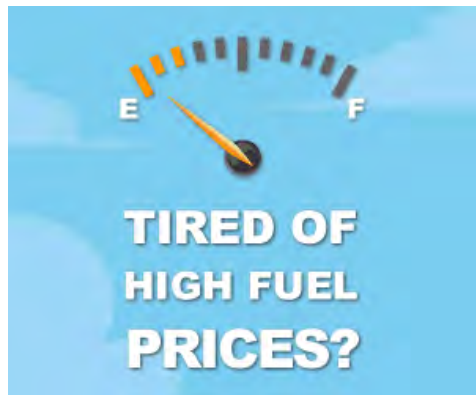
This laissez-faire approach has devastated forestry-dependent communities on Vancouver Island and has restricted feedstock for independent secondary manufacturers. Logs harvested on Vancouver Island are either processed by primary mills owned by major forest companies or towed to the Vancouver Log Market. This means many processors on Vancouver Island have to bid on logs harvested in their community and then pay the cost of towing those logs back to the Island.

Another impact of the Liberal's ideologically driven approach to BC's timber industry has been a race to the bottom. Log exports to the U.S., China, and Japan have more than tripled since the Liberals took office. A focus on supplying export markets with boards at the cheapest price possible has led to overcapacity in the BC Interior and exacerbated the decline of the value-added sector.

Here's just one example. Prices for construction-grade lumber in the U.S. market have dropped in the past year from more than \$300 per 1,000 board feet to approximately \$170. Meanwhile, our province largely ignores the opportunity to develop secondary manufacturing of products such as high-value flooring that can sell for more than \$1,500 per thousand board feet.

One of the most absurd situations is the lack of BC forest products used in commercial-municipal installations in our province. The new Parksville Community Centre is a prime example in which the use of timber frame accents would have supported the local forest industry and created a much warmer ambiance for this public facility.

Meanwhile visitors to commercial buildings built with public funds for the



- Regional District of Nanaimo
- Oceanside Tourism Association
- Qualicum Beach/Parksville School District
- Vancouver Island Health Authority
- Oceanside Seniors Advisory Network
- Oceanside Volunteer Association
- Oceanside Coalition for Strong Communities
- Parksville/Qualicum BCSPCA
- BC Ferries

2010 Olympics in Whistler will see Hardy Plank exterior siding and walk-on bamboo flooring from China. Another problem with BC's approach to forestry and the forest industry is the undervaluation of the services provided by healthy and diverse forest ecosystems.

Next time you enjoy a glass of clean fresh water or enjoy the cooling breeze on a hot summer day, remember many of those benefits flow from a diverse and intact forest stand.

So what can we do to put BC's forest industry on a sustainable and stable track? The answer, as with most things, starts at home. Before you buy lumber, furniture, windows, doors or forest products, ask yourself some important questions.

These questions include: Does the timber used come from sustainably managed and harvested forests? Are the products locally made? Is saving a few dollars by buying a door from China a better choice than investing in a door made by a Vancouver Island company that supports the local economy and that will be a showpiece for your home for years to come?

When the next provincial election comes around in May, review the forestry platforms of the provincial parties. If they are serious about fixing the problems that have resulted in 50 large processing mills closing in the past year and putting 13,000 forestry workers out of a job, they will take the time to develop a well-thought-out strategy that can truly see the potential of sustainable forests.

Roy Ostling owns Ostling & Associates Communications. He can be contacted by email at rostling@qualicuminstitute.ca