

The Rainforest Solutions Project

“You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete.” – R. Buckminster Fuller

STATEMENT FROM THE FULLER CHALLENGE REVIEW COMMITTEE:

Human wellbeing is dependent on the health and diversity of Earth's biosphere. However, industrial economic models have deteriorated ecosystems worldwide. Efforts to conserve and regenerate these environments face significant – and often seemingly intractable – challenges. To be effective, they must simultaneously take into account social, cultural, ecological, technological, and economic considerations.

The Rainforest Solutions Project has played a critical role in developing an integrative, whole-systems approach to address these complex challenges. Focusing on some of the world's most pressing challenges—including climate change, deforestation, biodiversity loss, and the defense of indigenous rights—this initiative has achieved a multi-generational agreement between previously conflicted decision-makers and stakeholders. The result is a highly sophisticated model for sustainably managing 15 million acres of one of the last relatively intact coastal temperate rainforests on the planet.

Too often, industrial economic pursuits to secure access to resources as well as status-quo conservation approaches disempower and disenfranchise indigenous groups and local communities, marginalize ecologists, sideline alternative economic models, and concentrate decision-making power. Collectively, these actions have had destructive impacts on indigenous cultures, biodiversity, and climate. The decades-long struggle over the Great Bear Rainforest of British Columbia brought all these issues to the fore. The Rainforest Solutions project sought to address them by creating a revolutionary, complex strategy involving legal challenges, creative grassroots and national and international activism, long-term multi stakeholder diplomacy, intense negotiations, and the creation of radically innovative processes and frameworks that evolved over the course of more than two decades.

The project's 20+-year process involved many players, including provincial, regional, and local governments in BC and the Canadian federal government; over two dozen First Nations; giant multinational logging and mining corporations; and many environmental organizations. Demonstrating the power of a small group of committed people to effect great change, the initiative was shepherded by a small, primarily women-led, coordination/leadership group that integrated a wide range of tactics at different stages of the process. It is difficult to find a comparable conservation struggle in which a core team carried through such a complex, multi-pronged strategy over decades and on such a massive scale. Oversight, collaborative problem solving, and building a narrative for model transfer have been just some of the methods demonstrated as effective within this initiative.

The Rainforest Solutions Project balances two core principles: “Ecosystem-Based Management,” which is a scientific approach drawing on the cutting edge of forestry, wildlife biology, and climate studies; and a deep respect for the sovereignty, cultural traditions, and worldviews of indigenous peoples. Since many of the world's remaining relatively intact ecosystems and biodiversity hotspots are home to long established indigenous cultural groups, harmonizing ecosystem-based management with traditional knowledge is critical to any credible strategy for the future health of the biosphere. The Rainforest Solutions Project team is now making efforts to reach out across the world to share those aspects of their model that are exportable and widely applicable in a range of contexts.

Selecting the Rainforest Solutions Project as the 2016 Winner of the Fuller Challenge Award comes at a critical point in the evolution of the Challenge itself, as design is being recognized as an integral part of business and society. By synergistically cooperating with industry, First Nations, environmentalists, and government, the project demonstrates the importance of large-scale and long-term comprehensive design thinking. It meets all of the Fuller Challenge criteria, reflecting deep integrity and a commitment to designing a preferred system that works from multiple perspectives. It provides an adaptable strategy that dynamically addresses complex social-ecological systems that change over time, demonstrating that healthy human relationships are key leverage points in the regeneration of planetary ecosystems.

CRITERIA-BASED EVALUATION:

VISIONARY: Designing and restructuring of systemic methods of both living with and as a part of “Spaceship Earth” require that we design for large-scale ecosystems. The Rainforest Solutions Project has resulted in a 15-million-acre “Living Case Study.” It provides models for the paradigm shift towards integrative approaches to managing and regenerating ecosystems worldwide.

COMPREHENSIVE: This project presents a nested approach at varying scales, from on-the-ground measurements to remote-sensing satellites. It is a comprehensive approach to systems change - linking environmental, social, and economic values, has solved multiple issues for various parties simultaneously - pioneering collaborations among deeply divergent interests, including indigenous and non-indigenous governments, environmentalists, and logging companies. The Rainforest Solutions Project has approached seemingly intractable problems with a more comprehensive understanding of complex relational dynamics across significant scales of space and time.

ANTICIPATORY: From the very beginning, this group has had its eyes on effecting global change as various areas of the world grapple with rapid changes threatening critically important ecosystems. This project presents a model that not only integrates and anticipates human resource needs, but also concerns itself both with economic realities and the regenerative potential of indigenous management of ecosystems. This anticipatory approach has resulted in a historically unprecedented multi-generational agreement.

ECOLOGICALLY RESPONSIBLE: The *raison d'être* of the Rainforest Solutions Project is ecological responsibility. The project embodies the environmental principles of balancing the needs of the production of human culture with the ecosystem capable of supplying and regenerating those human needs. They approach the forest as an organism in and of itself, with a science-based threshold of ecological integrity that must be respected by logging activities. This speaks to its intimate understanding of the challenge of creating of a balanced “ethnobiome” that few modern organizations have been able to successfully demonstrate.

FEASIBLE: The Rainforest Solutions Project presents a model for the success of large-scale conservation efforts worldwide. It demonstrates a method of developing multi-pronged strategies that combine resistance and activism with intense, honest negotiation and the ultimate development of partnerships among divergent economic, political, and ecological actors at the scale at which all these systems operate. It provides one possible solution to negotiation and implementation of these operating terms, with the inclusion of the often unglamorous but necessary measures of knowledge transfer, monitoring, and ongoing problem-solving.

VERIFIABLE: The Rainforest Solutions Project has successfully reached a 250-year agreement among various parties to conserve and sustainably manage the 15-million-acre Great Bear Rainforest, the largest old-growth temperate rainforest on the planet. Eighty-five percent of these forests are now legally off-limits to logging. In addition, First Nations have gained shared decision-making power over land use, and a \$120 million conservation economic and management fund has been established. Further, a \$120 million conservation economic and management fund was established with funds raised from the philanthropic sector, the government of British Columbia and Canadian government as a means to bolster First Nations conservation management and economic development initiatives.

REPLICABLE: The Ecosystem Based Management model is well articulated and proof of concept is largely demonstrable. Systems at this scale are not easily transferred directly to other bioregions or political/cultural/economic systems, but this project *does* offer a desperately needed model of a holistic strategy that combines resistance with alliance building with deep, long-term negotiation to ultimately balance divergent interests. The Rainforest Solutions Project is currently sharing its process with other organizations to implement similar strategies in different locations.