



The Clayoquot Protests: Taking Stock One Year Later

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*"...I've told you a hundred different times—that there is
nothing wrong with the world. What's wrong is our way of
looking at it."*

— Henry Miller

"Nature Bats Last"

— bumpersticker

Did the Clayoquot protests fail? That question haunts us as the clearcutting continues its juggernaut of greed through the ancient rainforests of Clayoquot Sound. All those people roused from slumber on our communal train to annihilation. Twelve thousand people protesting at a remote bridge, standing up for a forest most had never seen. Over 900 hauled away by the police. Hundreds more arrested outside Canadian embassies overseas. Rallies and protests around the globe. It was so much more than anyone could have expected, so much more than anything Canadians had ever seen. It was so strong, so powerful, so un-Canadian in its determination. The quiet, fragile power of conscience protecting the remnants of the natural world from

our culture's drunken orgy of destruction.

But the clearcuts continue to tear through the fjords of Clayoquot Sound. After decades of peaceful struggle, the Escalante region is barren, the Atleo watershed stripped, the Cypre denuded. Streams are silted, creeks forced underground, salmon are disappearing. And yet the clearcutting goes on. Political leaders locked into debates the rest of us stopped listening to ages ago. Industrial leaders too myopic to read writing on a wall that we are fast approaching.

The frustration above all is that everyone agrees we are in deep shit. Anyone with a few drinks in them will admit that homo sapiens are on the verge of committing communal suicide. But we're just not very good at making the connections between the obvious general problem and its specific manifestations when they occur in our own backyards. Canadians sat twirling acid rain-drenched skeletons of maple leaves while the Atlantic fishing industry collapsed. Our fossil-fuel frenzied neighbours can no longer fish for salmon off the American West Coast. We have torn holes in the sky over our heads and poisoned our oceans and lakes. Every day 40 to 100 species disappear forever into an extinction crisis too frightening even to contemplate. And as a final farcical icing on a very ill-tasting cake, we stand a very real chance of turning our planet into a giant unsurvivable sauna.

And Clayoquot Sound is still being clearcut.

So were the protests futile? The outlook is pretty bleak if they were. It's hard to see what more could have been done. Civil disobedience is the strongest stand a citizen can make. The strongest message we can send to powerholders, the hardest kick in the butt we can each, individually, give our society. And the kick is well placed. Our treatment of the forests of British Columbia is where we might start doing our bit to steer away from the cliff we appear to be intent on driving over. Forests are home to three-quarters of the world's species. Half to three-quarters of the world's natural forests have already been eliminated. As far as temperate rainforests go, there never was much. Just a thin thread of forest caught between towering mountain ranges and crashing oceans and squeezed along a few western coastlines.

Less than one percent of the planet to start with. Huge, ancient, fine-grained trees. Unfortunately for them, ideal for timber and other wood products. More than half of them are gone. The only big chunks left are in B.C., Alaska and Chile. That's it. Half of all that's left is in North America, over half of that is in British Columbia.¹

Our politicians tell us they've heard the message. Massaging their bruised hides they spew rhetoric about new directions for forestry. "World class logging" and "performance based logging" have become the jargon of the day.

We've heard all this before of course but, just to be fair, Greenpeace commissioned a random audit of recent and active clearcuts in the Clayoquot Sound region. It was released in July of 1994. The results? Every single cutblock in violation of even the "old" standards. Between sixty and one hundred violations in all. Damage to salmon streams, eroding topsoil, logging outside designated boundaries and landslides are still business as usual.²

These results confirm government-commissioned audits carried out across the province in 1992 and 1994. Those studies, popularly known as the "Tripp reports" after their author, showed that more than one stream with "fisheries concerns" gets damaged per clearcut.³

And even with all the attention and all the controversy and all the promises, there is still only one single method of logging being used in Clayoquot Sound—Clearcutting.

Rhetoric aside, very little has changed on the ground.

In the broader context we have seen some change. Some of it progressive and some not. The provincial government, intent on wiping some egg off its face before the next election, has produced a series of initiatives designed to placate its upstart citizenry. The federal government's Committee on Natural Resources has held a series of hearings on the joys of clearcutting. The major logging companies, faced with a marketplace eager to appear green, have turned several shades of green themselves as they come to terms with the increasingly precarious future for their bottom line. Ecoforestry and selection logging institutes and woodlot operators are enjoying an all-time high.

Billions of dollars worth of the European pulp and paper market is now committed to buying clearcut-free products. Two major British companies have cancelled contracts with Macmillan Bloedel because of its logging in Clayoquot Sound. *The New York Times* has refused to buy pulp or paper from Clayoquot Sound. And those are just the big shots.

If anything proves that the Clayoquot and similar protests have been influential, it is the response from government and industry. A sophisticated series of television, newspaper and radio advertisements has been launched to convince the public that all is well in the woods. A multi-million-dollar overseas campaign, paid for in tax dollars, is being waged to convince importers that any problems in British Columbia's forests have been solved. A recent report in *Canadian Forum* tallies the total cost of the anti-environmental push at \$46.8 million over the next five years. The P.R. firm involved, Burson Marsteller, has achieved infamy for its involvement in damage control with the likes of Union Carbide during the Bhopal disaster, and Exxon during the Exxon Valdez oil spill.⁴

The provincial government's initiatives and plans are probably the least easy to get your head around. Two positive developments have begun in Clayoquot Sound. Both have implications much further afield. Picking up on the two prongs of the campaign to protect Clayoquot Sound—land rights for First Nations and ecological integrity for the region—the province has signed an accord with the Nuu-chah-nulth and has set up a panel of scientific experts to review industrial activities in Clayoquot.

The agreement with the central region tribes of the Nuu-chah-nulth has been touted variously as "the end to colonialism"⁵ or a sleazy way to take the wind out of environmental sails. Government intentions aside, the Nuu-chah-nulth tribal council feel they have negotiated a promising beginning to recovering control of their traditional lands. Non-native environmentalists disagree over how substantive the agreement really is, but have decided for the most part to keep their mouths shut. Telling First Nations people what is good for them is colonialism as surely as is logging off their lands without permission. Viewed in this light, the

Clayoquot protesters have been successful in one out of their two demands. The Nuu-chah-nulth have a say in the management of their lands.

I wish the Nuu-chah-nulth well. Their lands sure aren't in the same shape as when they were stolen.

The second government initiative in Clayoquot is a promising combination of high-powered scientists and highly respected Native people. The Clayoquot Sound Science Panel has delivered two reports, both of which blend traditional ways of knowing with scientific understandings of conservation biology. So far, so good. Their final recommendations have not yet been released but, without a doubt, we will be better off than we are at present. Any chink in the "clearcuts or bust" armour of the companies will be invaluable.

The government initiatives that are not specific to Clayoquot Sound hold less promise. Some are a blatant leap backwards. None stands up well in comparison to progress that has already been made in other countries. Everyone agrees that a "Forest Practices Code" is a long overdue piece of legislation. The content of the one we have been given, however, is a matter for disagreement. The spin doctors are spouting "stricter rules" and "tougher enforcement." More level heads have pointed out that its primary contribution is to make clearcutting the legally enshrined logging method of choice. As far as "world class logging" goes, just be glad you're not a British Columbian salmon. The Code provides less protection for salmon spawning streams in B.C. than the United States accords streams without fish. The Code also develops new tenets in ecological theory. Most notable is that anyone following an "operational plan" cannot, by definition, cause "environmental damage."⁶ Who knew there were still legislator-philosophers?

Another initiative, the "Forest Renewal Plan," is being hailed as the Camp David accord of the old-growth wars. But a little caution might be in order when logging companies are happy about some one doubling the prices they pay to cut public forests. Perhaps all the stuff about intensifying the conversion of B.C.'s forests into tree farms caused a smile or two in the odd boardroom?

The "Vancouver Island Land Use Plan" is not as popular among CEOs. It is the government's version of the CORE (Commission on Resources and the Environment) proposal combined with the Brundtland Commission's magical 12 percent protection goal. Under the plan, protected areas increase to account for about 13 percent of the Island's land area. Any self-respecting tree hugger has to be happy about the protection of long fought-over areas in the Walbran and Carmanah watersheds. Cynical voices among them note that the struggle lasted so long that the number of trees left to hug in those areas has been greatly diminished. Other cynics note that the 13 percent includes a disproportionately high percentage of the Island's alpine and glaciated regions, while only about seven percent of the rainforest is offlimits to chainsaws.

The CORE process is one very encouraging development. A sharp change from the status quo of closed doors and backroom deals, the CORE process sits everyone down at the same table to hash out their differences and come to some agreement. No surprise that it didn't work. The group did not reach consensus, but it was promising that the government even tried. The next obvious step is for everyone to agree that the biological realities of life are not one among the many "interest groups" at the table. But one thing at a time.

It is really in the wider, societal context that the Clayoquot protests can claim to be successful. Environmental concerns have been catapulted to an entirely new level on political agendas. If ever blind exploitation of the natural world takes its proper place in the annals of historic barbarisms, it may be that the Clayoquot protests will be seen as the turning point in Canadian history. The point at which mainstream society decided our captain needed radically new sailing orders. The point at which we realized that jail was pretty cushy compared to where we were heading: at best a thoroughly homogenized globe but even more likely some Mad Max vision of ecological collapse.

One distinct change that has spun out of the summer of 1993 is that our society is no longer just arguing about parks. Earlier,

the primary question had been whether to protect five percent or twelve percent or even twenty percent, now we are asking what should be done with the other eighty or ninety percent. What kind of place do we want to live in anyway? Should a practice like clearcutting be allowed anywhere? It's a fundamentally important dimension to the debate. It's about learning to live in the world instead of off the world. It's about learning to be friendly to our neighbours regardless of gender, race, or species. It's about learning to take responsibility for our own mess.

Clearcutting ranks with strip mining and driftnetting as some of the most destructive industrial practices ever devised. With absolutely no consideration to taking only what we want, let alone only how much we need, we attack vast tracts of forest, killing everything in a furious grab for certain species of tree. No thought given to how much we have to leave behind for the forest to be able to survive. No thought given to how we might remove certain trees without levelling an entire ecosystem. Barbarism, pure and simple.

Ninety percent of the logging in Canada is clearcutting. Almost one hundred percent along the Pacific coast.⁷

Clearcutting is now a hot issue. Since the summer of 1993, we have this particular bull firmly by the horns. It's only to be expected that it will bellow and charge and trample a good many thousands of acres before it stops to catch its breath and take a clear look around. Of course, there is no guarantee that the bull won't break free. This one, especially, is louder and more testosterone-filled than most of us had realized. We all have a lot of work before us.

It is work that has got to be done. Clearcuts are chomping voraciously into our forests. And let's not kid ourselves, clearcutting is deforestation. Trees may grow back but a forest won't. Not in our lifetimes, and maybe never.

Cross your fingers, but things seem to be starting to change. Although you would be forgiven for not having noticed the signs of change over the companies' high decibel screams of outrage. The industry claims everything from rural communities to urban

hospitals will collapse if their divine right to clearcut is questioned. Clearcutting, we are told, is the only possible way to log. But people seem to be starting to remember that, in the past, when cutting down a tree meant a lot more work, leaving the ones you didn't need seemed very possible indeed.

Woodlot owners have been arguing for years that it is actually more productive over the long run to cut and remove individual trees at a rate not exceeding the growth rate of a forest. It's just common sense really, and scientists as well as politicians are beginning to get the picture. For months, public forests in Washington, Oregon and Northern California have been tied up in the courts because of proven destruction wrought by clearcut logging on those ecosystems. The crisis is so advanced that the Pacific Northwestern United States has only 10 to 15 percent of its old-growth left. The American government is now going to allow companies back into some public forests, but they will have to leave some of the forest's structure behind when they leave. It's only modified clearcutting really, but it's a step in the right direction. The scientists recognized the unnaturalness and outright destructiveness of clearcutting, and the politicians realized that the better you treat the land, the less of it the public will demand in parks. And the companies? Well, everyone realized that the companies can be told to do whatever needs to be done and they'll do it. And they'll make a profit at it.

"It took a century and a half to arrive at the current crisis in the Pacific Northwest," according to U.S. Federal government scientists.⁸ Up here, north of the 49th parallel, we have more of our natural forests left. Conventional wisdom has it that we are a couple of decades "behind" the Pacific Northwest, and we still have the chance to learn from their experience before our forests are as fragmented and degraded as theirs. As yet, we see little movement from our politicians to address the problems of clearcutting, but companies, spurred on by the situation of their American affiliates, are beginning to investigate "alternative silviculture systems." They won't give up clearcutting until they're forced to, but they seem to be preparing for that day.

Canadian scientists are now addressing the problems of clearcutting head on. Environment Canada's 1994 report on "Biodiversity in British Columbia" states unequivocally that clearcutting causes a "loss in biodiversity" and warns that this may have "economic and social, as well as ecological repercussions." The Federal government scientists go on to say that "Modern methods of partial cutting can be selected and designed to maintain the structural attributes of old-growth forest, wildlife habitat, or other non-timber values. However...about 90% of the harvested forests...are clear-cut."⁹

The Clayoquot Sound Science Panel has already recommended a shift to "ecosystem management," the buzzword of the recent American developments, as well as an avoidance of the practice of clearcutting.¹⁰

So there are signs of hope out there. And we can credit the Clayoquot protests with having served notice that people are beginning to recognize the gravity of our situation, and that politicians are going to be expected to take care of things from now on. "Stop the world, we want to get off" was the awakening joke of the sixties. "Slow it down, we'd better think about this" was the reasoned plea of the Clayoquot jailbirds. Whether or not it happened in time, and whether or not the brakes are applied hard enough, the Clayoquot protestors have had their voices heard.

We can only hope that the Clayoquot protests turn out to have been a watershed in our society's evolution towards balance and responsibility, not merely an early spasm in the death throes of a society pathologically bent on destroying its environs and obsessed with consuming itself. More than a brief moment of lucidity in a maelstrom of psychosis.

"It's like our society is heading towards the edge of a cliff. We're either going to fall over it or we're going to learn to fly."

—Rya Shankman, age 15. Speaking to sentence in the Supreme Court of British Columbia.

Notes

1. Ecotrust and Conservation International, 1992. *Coastal Temperate Rain Forests: Ecological Characteristics, Status and Distribution Worldwide*.
2. Sierra Legal Defense Fund, 1994. *An Independent Environmental Assessment of Active and Recent Cutdowns in Clayoquot Sound and the Port Alberni Forest District*. Prepared for Greenpeace Canada.
3. D. Tripp, 1994. *The Use and Effectiveness of the Coastal Fisheries Forestry Guidelines in Selected Forest Districts of Coastal British Columbia*. Ministry of Forests, Integrated Resources Branch.
4. Joyce Nelson, "Pulp and Propaganda," in *The Canadian Forum*. July/Aug. 1994.
5. B.C. Premier Michael Harcourt, Speech: University of Hamburg. January, 1994.
6. Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, 1994. *Bill 40, Forest Practices Code of British Columbia Act*.
7. Forestry Canada, 1994. *The State of Canada's Forests 1993*.
8. Forest Ecosystem Management Team, 1993. *Forest Ecosystem Management: An Ecological, Economic, and Social Assessment*. United States Department of Agriculture, Commerce, Interior, and the Environmental Protection Agency.
9. L. Harding and E. McCullum, eds., 1994. *Biodiversity in British Columbia*. Environment Canada.
10. Clayoquot Sound Scientific Panel, 1994. *Report #2*.

Clayoquot Sound, 1994: Ongoing Industrial Logging Violations

The unsustainable, unacceptable forest practices of past decades must never be used again.

—Premier Harcourt, news release from the office of the Premier, November 9, 1993