

BC Woodlots lead global forest innovation

By [Contributed - Clearwater Times](#)

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The United Nations "Year of Forests" came to a close last month, marking the end of a worldwide celebration. It was a year to acknowledge the profound impact the planet's forests have on our communities, to learn from the experience of others and share successes with peers.

Woodlotters at September's Federation of BC Woodlot Associations annual general meeting had an opportunity to hear about the differences, and similarities, in forest practices from representatives of Germany, Finland, Scotland, Canada and Zambia. In many respects, Canada - and B.C. in particular - is considered a leader in forest management, and the woodlot model contributes to that reputation; however, there are still lessons to be learned.

As Peter de Marsh, who spoke on behalf of the International Forest Alliance, pointed out, the overriding questions about daily life are the same the world over: how can our kids have a better life, how can we sustain what we have and how can we improve upon it? With over one billion of the world's population directly related to forest life, it's no surprise that much time and energy is spent exploring ways to improve the relationship. What is surprising, though, is the fundamental difference in how individual countries perceive the value of their forest resource. While in B.C. we see forests primarily through the lens of lumber and leisure, shade is the prized commodity of a forest in countries like China, Ethiopia and Zambia, where trees protect coffee plants, mushrooms and medicinal herbs. In fact, honey is the second most important forest product in Ethiopia, before lumber!

By contrast, the forestry sector is the largest employer and the second largest contributor to the economy in Germany. Lumber and its by-products are the valued commodity in this scenario.

It's obvious that, as we try to develop unified global policies to promote long term forest health, it's important that we stay mindful of the values embedded in different cultures. This is particularly relevant for areas such as Zambia, where food security is so fragile. As Garry Brooks of the African Community Project demonstrated so passionately, efforts to reforest vast areas of land that were completely deforested and left barren have given shape to a type of "social forestry" that creates benefits well beyond ecology. Using their communities as the borders, villagers are managing

community forests and, with the aid of the ACP and its local facilitators, are exploring means to secure safe, clean water, improve health, increase opportunities for education and create sustainable, stable lifestyles.

Most of Scotland's forests are in the hands of large private landowners and the government, whose holdings are overseen by Forestry Commission Scotland, a branch of Great Britain's Forestry Commission. Recently, inspired by the model here in B.C., a Scottish Woodlot Association has taken root and hopes to form a network of "renters" who will manage small parcels of the government-owned land and manage it for commercial purposes. This kind of small tenure forestry is lauded by experts; when individuals are responsible for the well-being of woodlands - both socially and economically - the resource is managed more effectively and generates greater revenue and stability.

Ironically, while demand for timber is rapidly increasing in Germany, interest in forestry is waning. Small tenure holders who have inherited their plot don't necessarily have the knowledge or equipment they need to make a living off their trees and the general demographic trend is towards greater urbanization. According to Philip Weiner of ForstBW, the state provides support in the form of free consulting, assistance with logging and marketing, and financial support with initial afforestation, but much more needs to be done in order for supply to keep up with demand. Efforts are being made to develop more locally-based associations that can share equipment and form regional logging pools to aid in harvest, transport and marketing, not unlike B.C.'s federation. If the downward trend isn't reversed, the effects will trickle down to a significant portion of Germany's secondary lumber sector, and their economy by extension.

As the backbone of their economy, forestry shares a similar place of importance in Finland. Taking into account the number of "family forests", a startling one in five Finns has ownership of a productive forest. In fact, 70 percent of Finland's woodlands are under private ownership, with holdings under 30 ha each, according to Registered Professional Forester Ian Lanki. Intensely and efficiently managed using industry-leading machinery, timber stands are treated as more than lumber. In the face of UN and European discussions regarding sustainability in the early 90s, Finland shifted its own policies to reflect the changing ecological, social and economic demands of the forest resources. Where the focus had been solely on sustainability of yield, it expanded to capture biodiversity and other uses of the forest beyond pure lumber production, i.e. recreation, mushroom harvests, and wildlife habitat, similar to the mandate of B.C.'s woodlot program.

Forestry practitioners in regions around the globe are taking great strides to preserve and enhance forest growth for social, environmental and economic benefit. While the political and social values and geographic constraints may vary from region to region, the universal imperative is to balance

rights and obligations with regards to forest use. As we arrive globally at a point where we no longer see trees as an expendable commodity and, instead, as a deciding factor in our long-term quality of life, it's encouraging to know that the trend towards small-scale, community-based forestry is gradually reasserting itself in the industry, with B.C.'s woodlot program leading by example.

– Federation of BC Woodlot Associations