

REBUILDING RELATIONSHIPS AND FOSTERING COLLABORATION

A CASE STUDY OF FSC CERTIFICATION IN THE BURNS LAKE COMMUNITY FOREST

The Burns Lake Community Forest is situated on the traditional territory of the Wet'suwet'en Peoples and Carrier Nations. Since its inception the community forest has expanded from 23,000ha to 92,000ha. The majority of the community forest overlaps the Tsayu Tat'l'at Bin, Gilseyhu Honeagh Bin, and Laksilyu Tselh K'iz Bin Clan and Houses.

In 2004, after six years of operation, BLCF struggled to create open communication with the public at large and specifically First Nations communities. Despite an initial alignment on the establishment of the community forest, challenges arose because of unclear management strategies, lack of appropriate engagement with Indigenous

communities, and the absence of profit-sharing mechanisms. These issues were exacerbated by the impacts of the mountain pine beetle epidemic, which peaked in 2005, hitting the local economy hard and further eroding community support.

Recognizing the need to rebuild trust and achieve

CASE STUDY TIMELINE

1998	2000	2004	2005	2007	2016	2016	2017
Applied to Community Forest Pilot Project	Obtained community forest pilot agreement	Transformed to a long-term community forest licence	Mountain Pine Beetle epidemic peaked	Community forest AAC increased	Developed the Beyond the Beetle Management Plan	Developed new communication strategy	Attained the FSC certification



high environmental standards to safeguard the long-term health of the forest, the community forest licence and forest management model were restructured in 2015 to align the social and environmental values with community's expectations.

In 2017, the Burns Lake Community Forest along with the Office of the Hereditary Chiefs of the Wet'suwet'en, Ts'il Kaz Koh (Burns Lake Band) and Wet'suwet'en First Nation pursued and achieved Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification.

The FSC-certification system was selected for its enhanced forest management practices and proven frameworks to foster collaboration, unite stakeholders and improve the well-being of local communities.

This includes engagement in joint decision-making processes, exploring local employment opportunities, and co-creating a dynamic, shared vision for sustainable forest management.

The adoption of FSC-certification also requires an annual strategic review and independent third-party audits which helped bolster trust through transparency.

The road to certification was truly transformative.

On-the-ground interactions became commonplace. An enhanced and aligned focus on environmental stewardship ensured that

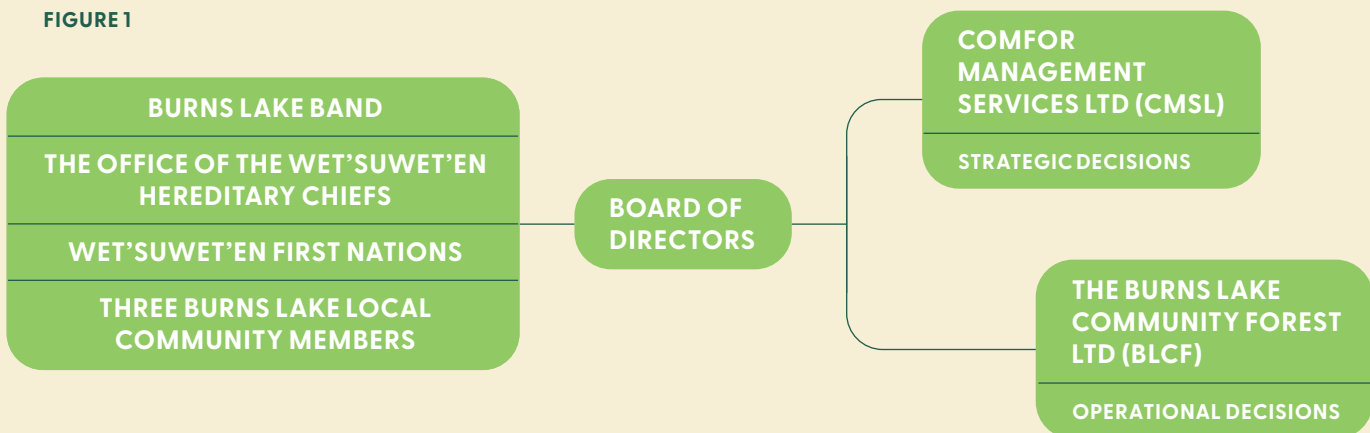
members of the community and partner Nations actively participated in forestry activities, sharing perspectives, and deepening mutual respect and understanding.

The collaborative efforts also resulted in an improved public engagement strategy, a balanced board of directors (see Figure 1), cultural preservation efforts including the protection of Indigenous cultural heritage sites, economic opportunities for local harvesting and silviculture contractors, and profit sharing models.

The Burns Lake Community Forest actively communicates with its partner First Nations, participates in local cultural events, and prioritizes traditional knowledge sharing. Logs harvested on the community forest, are now sold to local facilities on a priority basis, with sales revenue and profits being equally distributed with First Nations partners and the shareholders. These funds support local community development, build social and economic capacity, and support non-for profit volunteer groups in the community.

The Burns Lake Community Forest is not only one of the largest actively operating community forests in British Columbia, it is also a model for inclusive, sustainable and resilient forest management. Prioritizing communication, partnership, and shared decision-making unlocked the collective power of positive change ensuring the long-term sustainability of the forest and the prosperity of the Nations' Territories.

FIGURE 1



“Burns Lake Community Forest is proud to be FSC certified since 2017. This certification demonstrates our commitment working collaboratively with First Nations for decision making and the on-going operations of the community forest. It also proves that we are managing the forest to the highest social and environmental standards.”

FRANK VARGA RPF

General Manager, Burns Lake Community Forest Ltd, COMFOR Management Services Ltd

“Becoming FSC certified ticked all of the important boxes when looking at overall area-based management of the Burns Lake Community Forest. Not only is FSC well respected it removed all the guesswork with relationship building with our First Nations partners. FSC Principle 3 ensures that the certified body upholds Indigenous Peoples legal and customary rights (UNDRIP).

FSC certification has given us the confidence that regardless of board member appointment changes, our First Nations partners will continue to be consulted and protected in all decisions made on the community forest licence.”

CRYSTAL FISHER

Burns Lake Community Forest President, representing public at large



“This past year BLCF has started to gain insight and comfort in participating with our Indigenous gatherings. When we lost a community member, Hereditary Chief Madeek, it was an honour to participate in his farewell ceremonies and a teaching moment for our board. How we show up and learn from each other is important. Respecting and understanding our way of life helps further strengthen our relationships.”

“BLCOMFOR’s also participated in the

Aboriginal Day parade. We received so many positive compliments on the trees handed out at the parade, and children and youth were happy to plant a memory of that day near their home.”

“We are starting to truly bridge the gaps between our communities and I am grateful to be a helping hand in this process. I look forward to seeing how we continue to show our presence and support not only to our shareholders, but to all of the surrounding Indigenous Communities.”

CRYSTAL FISHER

Burns Lake Community Forest President, representing public at large



SOURCE DATA

- blcomfor.com/forest-management/
- wiki.ubc.ca/Documentation:Open_Case_Studies/FRST522/2020/The_Challenges_and_Benefits_of_FSC_Certification_to_Community_Forests:_A_Case_Study_of_The_Burns_Lake_Community_Forest,_British_Columbia,_Canada