



Conversations
That
Matter



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Margaret Mead said, "Never doubt that a small group "of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. "It's the only thing that ever has."

That statement epitomizes bare-knuckle democracy.

It's underway right now in 21 communities in British Columbia.

Communities that are fed up and they're not gonna take it anymore.

They've come together to petition the provincial government to change regulations to favor resource developers over local citizens, local governments, and the environment. The BC Coalition for Forestry Reform says it's time to put an end to a Campbell government regulation that handed land use oversight back to the companies that are logging and mining on crown lands.

The regulation is called Professional Reliance or self-regulation. Since its introduction more than 15 years ago, the Coalition says watersheds have come under attack and there's nothing local governments can do to stop it. The Coalition contends Professional Reliance puts logging companies in a conflict of interest.

They say how can a company be entrusted to protect the very environment it utilizes to make money. When that happens, the environment is a regular loser.

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We invited Taryn Skalbania of the Peachland Watershed Protection Alliance to join us for a conversation that matters about the right to roll up your sleeves and make sure your government represents everyone's interests.

- [Announcer] Conversations That Matter is a partner program for the Centre for Dialogue at Simon Fraser University. The production of this program is made possible thanks to the support of the following and viewers like you.

- Welcome.

- Thank you.

- We find ourselves in an interesting situation right now. The provincial government has asked for a response to this Professional Reliance legislation that exists. Let's talk about what that is and then where you think we need to go. So, what is Professional Reliance?

- It's known by its opponents as the fox running the hen house.

- The fox running the hen house, yeah.

- Yes, and being a farmer I know all about what that means. But it's the industries in BC being regulated by the people who work for the industry. So for example, logging, the foresters making the rules and being responsible for monitoring the logging industry.

- Okay. So on the outside when you say that I go okay, so I would want foresters making those rules. But it's a little bit more than that, isn't it? It's those foresters who are working for the forest company.

- Yes. They're being paid to do work that may or may not benefit the rest of the environment or the communities that they're working in. They're being paid to get the best price of wood and to get the best amount of wood, for the cheapest, and so...

- You're being very cautious about saying saying it is a conflict of interest.

- It's totally...

- You see it as a conflict of interest.

- Yes, I do. A lot of people do, I do too, yes.

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- So , why? Like why does that become a conflict of interest? We need, let's say, professionals in particular industries to be on top of this. They have to have a commitment to the industry. What is it about the current situation that causes you so much concern and where's the evidence to back it up?

- I don't think that all professionals in the industry are like this. Say, you're for example like a doctor or an engineer, you know, they're more precautionary. It's a doctor's job to keep people alive or keep airplanes in the air, so they take a more precautionary, you know, approach. Whereas in the forestry industry, it's less precautions are taken. It's more about dollars, the bottom line. So gambles are taken and eventually we'll catch up and our environment.

- Well, you say you've seen it happen where you call home, Peachland. Tell me what's going on there and why does this start to cause you concern that okay they're carrying out their duties for a forest company, okay so what? But where does it start to cross the line and have an impact on the community?

- We have a water treatment system and legally, the district of Peachland has to supply water to its 5,000 inhabitants. However, they have no say in what happens in the watershed. The--

- Huh? How's that possible?

- Well, it's crown land and the government has given 100% of control to the logging companies. The foresters and licensees have more control in a community watershed than the community. They can tell you where they're logging, when they're logging, what they're logging, how they're logging, and we have no say. They advise us, but the district of Peachland or the regional district or any jurisdiction has no say in what happens to the logging in the area.

- So, when I saw the Forest Practices Code that was brought in by the Mike Harcourt government going back to the 1990s, would have addressed all of these kinds of issues, because when you took a look at the stack of recommendation or regulations that came with all of that, I was under the impression that all these things had been addressed because they were so concerned about preserving habitat and not just for fish, but everywhere. What happened?

- Well in 2000, that great document, the Forestry Practices Code was thrown out. It did have its problems, too, but in the interest of saving money and reducing the amount of labor as far as forest rangers and foresters in the government, they adopted something called the Forestry and Range Practices Act, which gave the power to the professionals in the logging industry.

- So, they actually took the power out of the hands

- Yup.

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- of the regulators

- Yup.

- and gave it to the users.

- Exactly, there's no more Ministry of Forests. It became Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resources, and they also added you know, agricultural land use in there. And, there's actually a little passage in the Forestry Range Practices Act that people who are opposing things like logging have no say if it unduly reduces the amount of timber supply. So we can say all we want, they can ruin our water system. We can say, please don't, but if it ruins their timber supply or reduces their timber supply, we have no say.

- Gotta get you to hang on for a second while we take a quick commercial break. We'll be right back.

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- Were you paying attention to this as it happened?

- No.

- No?

- Not at first, no. We're like, there's 488 community watersheds in British Columbia, so everybody lives in a watershed or an air shed or a soil shed, however there's more and more ongoing communities having issues with their water system. More and more communities having to build expensive water treatment plants, because the effects of logging in their watersheds.

- So, what's happening? You say they're building, you know, roads, and they're logging. So what's been the impact on community watersheds?

- Well, anytime you deforest, whether naturally or

- Through forest fires or what not

- for forest fires, bug kill, landslides happen naturally. Those are enough threats, but you bring in logging, clear cuts, and road building. It's the road building especially that impacts watersheds, because all runoff is channeled into ditches and culverts, and you know, it really accelerates...

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- And then it continues along down the hill.

- Yeah, yeah. And we had a ditch in Peachland. It wasn't there last year, but this year it was two kilometers long and you could drive your jeep through it.

- Through the ditch?

- Through the ditch on the side of a road, yeah. And where that water came from, we don't know. Where all that soil went, well it's eventually now in Lake Okanagan, but amazing amount of power behind runoff. When you speak to industry professionals, they'll tell you well it was mother nature, it was a extreme weather year, weather related event. But when you speak to other critics, they said it had a lot to do with the accelerated pace of clear cut logging in the Okanagan, especially in steep critical watersheds. Like our terrain is really steep already. We already get natural mudslides. Yes, they have rules in this Forestry Range Practices Act of how much clear cutting can be allowed in certain areas, certain elevations, but again the professionals that are monitoring it are the ones that would benefit from having these clear cut areas, so there's--

- Benefit from not impeding the total amount of wood that is being output.

- Right. And you know, they all go to university and they're all foresters, but they're taught in this university of a sustainable forestry model, which a lot of critics question as well, because we have yet to clear cut, harvest, replant, and clear cut again. That whole model hasn't happened yet. We've only been clear cutting in the seventies, they've just started reforestation. So these trees at the most are 50 years old, at the most at five to six inches to a foot a year of growth, so at the most a 50 feet tall, let's say. For example in the Okanagan, they grow much slower, in the coast or Vancouver Island it's a difference scenario. So they should have different rules everywhere. So these trees are now let's say 50 feet tall. They should be logged when they're 80 to 100, 120 feet. That's what a good pine tree is. That's what they're looking for, but with other variables like climate change and this extreme weather, who knows if they're gonna be getting these trees that are ready to be harvested again. So to call the logging industry sustainable is a guess. You know, I'm a farmer, I know if I plant something and harvest it and replant, it will take me a whole season of growth to know that's sustainable, what I'm doing. They haven't had that yet. They don't know if it's sustainable. There's no scientific data to back this up. We've got some data from places like Norway, Iceland. They were clear cut. I think 1,200 years ago Iceland was denuded. Norway has clear cut, harvested, replanted, and they're onto their second cycle now, and they're not getting great results with the regrow. Of course it's a different climate and different areas and different ways of forestry. Maybe they're better with their clear cutting, maybe they're worse. It's not all equal. But, I would say we'd be gambling to say that this forestry's sustainable. And I'm not a forestry expert at all. That's the problem with it, we were just community groups, and you know, we've had to learn how to take soil samples, we've learned to test the water for turbidity. We're out there, ya know, checking on
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species at risk, counting moose droppings, planting grass seeds, looking for Lewis's woodpeckers. So, what's happened now, because the government has given up monitoring the forests, they've outsourced that to professionals. But the professionals aren't doing the job that we think they should be doing, so now they've outsource it to us. We've had to go--

- Yeah, but not intentionally, unintentionally.

- No, unintentionally.

- This is our second commercial break. We'll be back in a moment.

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- What happened that made you go, hang on a second, you know, there's a problem here. We need to find out what's going on. What was that thing that motivated you to get involved?

- Well, for me personally it was a large mudslide that came into our water reservoir area about 50 meters from the intake and--

- And when was that?

- It was in May of 2017, so during a high for shed from spring runoffs. And turbidity is normal in any creek source water system. You know if you don't draw from a well or from deep under the lake you get spring runoff and you get the tannins in the water will color the water. Some people just drink it, but if you're pregnant or have compromised immune system or are a senior, they advised you not to, so we started with the boil water notice. And that happens yearly in Peachland, and we've talked to pioneers and we've got anecdotal evidence that since the turn of the century, there was always one or two weeks a year there was a boil water notice. Well our boil water notice lasted five months this year.

- Five months?

- So there's more stuff coming into our water system.

- [Interviewer] Enough.

- And it did, it shut down our water treatment plant for a while. So it's cost us huge amount in extra chlorine, so now we're ingesting more chlorine, which, you know, of course the government tells you it's fine, like fluoride. We're now paying for more filters. So our water treatment plant's been plugged, and Conversations That Matter is an Oh Boy Productions program. Please help us to continue to produce this program by making a donation at www.conversationthatmatter.tv

we also had to actually, we moved boulders, rocks, and sludge from both our water intakes. That was a cost of about \$260,000 to \$350,000. Those final costs aren't even in yet. There's also, another factor that's really affecting our little town of Peachland, we want them to help preserve our watershed, protect it, because anything you do up on the watershed translates as being a lot cheaper, safer, easier to do than than treating the water at the tap. So our government in Peachland, unfortunately, has decided to go just with water treatment plant measures, so they've just approved a \$10 million loan, that our 5,000 residents that are gonna have to payback, for a \$24 million water treatment plant. Our current water treatment plant is still just filtration. So now with this new plant, state of the art, we'll have UV sensitivity, filtration and chlorination, so it should get rid of all that turbidity, as long as there isn't a major mudslide, deforestation from forest fire, logging. There's no guarantees.

- Okay, so this is what made you say, well hang on a second,

- Yeah. why are we having to go and spend \$24 million

- Yeah. on a new water treatment plant? Like why does this situation exist? Was it a real eye opener for you when you started to see what the regulations were?

- It was. I was absolutely shocked. I did not know that the district of Peachland had no say on what was happening in their own watershed. It's 400 square kilometers, yet, and full of pressures. They have no say over the 1,500 head of cattle that range there five months of the year and poop 100 pounds of manure a day into our creeks and streams,

- [Interviewer] Oh my, God.

- unfenced, unmonitored. Rangers and ranchers are professionals, but no one monitors the cattle.

- Well, there's a lot of water-born illnesses that can be associated with that.

- You know, let the beaver and deer be there, but now we have cattle ranging. Again, I'm a farmer, I have cattle, so I would still take 1,500 head of cattle over a clear cut. We also have recreational use. We have old Brenda mines legacy. We have, you know, there's three kilometers of road in our watershed for every square kilometer. That's a huge mass amount of crisscrosses through our forests.

- Those are not paved roads those are?

- They're not paved roads, they're gravel roads. And you know, rain on a gravel road, might as well be raining on a parking lot, it just... You don't understand it until you go into perspective like a place like Vancouver. You're not allowed to walk in the watersheds, nevermind logging, cattle ranging, ATV tours.

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There's a guy prospecting for copper right now on Peachland. He's allowed to disturb the beaver dam, because he's got some rights to look for copper.

- Yeah, I know, because when I think about the water reserves here, they're all fenced off and you are not allowed in there for any reason whatsoever.

- Victoria's slightly different. You're allowed to mountain bike in Victoria's reserve. So that's one of the issues that our group's found out about these watershed reserves. Vancouver bought their watershed area for...

- So they own it.

- Well, we leased it, 999 years. They allowed some logging in the seventies, and then they realized that the value of timber can nowhere come close to the value of clean drinking water for a population. And Victoria's different. They actually use legislation to protect their watershed.

- So, you have this mudslide. It motivates you to get involved. It's an eye opener. We've got a new government that's come in though that seems to be listening. Is this encouraging for you or are, do you remain concerned?

- We remain concerned. Right after we galvanized after the first mudslide, there was a second mudslide, took out our other water treatment system, not much more than a month later. And we actually called a state of emergency in Peachland.

- In Peachland?

- Peachland had their very first historical state of emergency, because this mudslide was so close to taking out the water treatment plant. It started by this legacy mine, Brenda mines. We then had another smaller bunch of mudslides and runoff, and then the whole water situation was overshadowed though with the Okanagan Lake flooding. I mean and we had this historical rise of lake water, seven feet above normal.

- Wow.

- It's amazing. And everybody was busy bailing out their basements so they didn't really care what was coming out of their taps. So that kind of got quiet down and... However, we were optimistic because every municipality around Lake Okanagan and every regional district banded together and they've approached, they approached the government at the time which was still the liberals and asked for complete review of what caused the flooding.

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- And their response?

- The study's still not out, but upland logging is one of the factors they're gonna look into.

- Upland logging?

- Yeah.

- What does that mean?

- It means logging above in the watershed. There's a, they called it a gentleman's agreement, in the Okanagan, that the forestry companies don't log anything with visual

- Impact.

- Impact, yeah.

- Because they don't wanna affect tourism.

- Don't wanna affect tourism and property values, and other things, but there's no other trees left in BC, that's what the word is on the street. There's about ten years, 20 at the most, even the ministry's saying that.

- And then the foresters are gonna be quite quiet, and there'll be a little bit of a lull until these trees that they've planted start to catch up. That's why they've come down into critical watersheds or logging in communities.

- Third and final break. We'll be right back.

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- Why do you wanna have this conversation? Why do you wanna make it public at this point? What do you want people to do with this information?

- Well, it's amazing how I noticed there was a mudslide, and the very next week, one of the licensees, which is a forestry company, and we have four in Peachland logging, pressure on the watershed, approach the mayor and council saying our Forestry Stewardship Plan has expired, we're writing a new

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one. We will be re-logging in five years throughout your watershed. And they just tell them that as a, you know,

- Courtesy?

- Privilege, courtesy.

- [Interviewer and Taryn] Yeah.

- District of Peachland couldn't do anything and they go ahead. The only thing the district of Peachland can do, is restrict the amount of trucks going down through their roads, but you know, the mills are employers and you don't really want

- Have any effect on jobs.

- to create too much of a kerfuffle. So I immediately went to council and I wrote letters to the editor, and how dare you support logging, and then I find out that

- [Interviewer] They had no choice.

- they had no choice. My family and other groups that I belong to had been worried about the logging on our watershed for a while because we're all outdoors people. I do back country horse riding and we do cross country skiing. My husband's a biker and fisherman. And so we've noticed that every year we have to go less far, because further places we went, our ski trails, have all now been clear cut. And we even asked the logging companies, you know, can we maintain those trails, they're designated trails, these are trails that are built by federal grant money, as a make work project. And they said no, unless you've actually got designation recreation. They said we couldn't possibly keep every trail that people use in British Columbia, you know, it'd be too expensive. We started to band together, a bunch of different groups, and about 40 of us started to get together in my living room and we created this Peachland Watershed Protection Alliance. Our vision would be a universal understanding of the value of water. Water is more important than other values in our watershed.

- Right, and so then you learn that you're not alone. There are groups like this around the problems as well.

- Yeah. A guy, our very first town hall meeting, I invited the whole world, and we talked to mayor and council. A fellow showed up from Apex and he'd been challenged the same way. Apex, not so much as a watershed issue, but a visual impact. All the property owners in Apex rely on tourism and they clear cut all the vistas around Apex. They have three different logging companies. It is well known that every tree

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in British Columbia is of value and loggable, and they've just announced that every watershed, if done properly, is loggable.

- So, when the provincial government comes along and says okay, we're gonna review this legislation--

- We were giddy.

- Yeah, but you're cautiously giddy, otherwise you wouldn't be having this conversation right now.

- You know, again, it's outsourcing. Why do I have to tell them what they already know? Since the seventies, people, there's reviews, there's forestry practice boards complaints, there's compliance and enforcement, compliance. They've known all, so they know that there's a problem. They don't need me, a community member, to tell them that there's a problem.

- Well, I wish you all the best of luck.

- Oh, thank you.

- Thank you for coming in and sharing this, what I think will continue to be a very important conversation.

- Thank you very much for the invitation.