

Summary Report

FUTURE BENEATH THE TREES SYMPOSIUM

&

SHOP THE WILD CONFERENCE

Royal Roads University

Victoria, BC

August 27 – 28, 2005

Community Delegate:

Donna McBride-Mackey

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My focus in attending this event was to gain insight into the various aspects of marketing Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPS). I had particular interest in learning how NTFP businesses might fit with our Community Forest Project (CFP).

The symposium addressed the fact that throughout history and in every corner of the world an “Informal Economy” (underground/black market-like...unreported income) of “Wild-Crafters” (anyone creating economic value from forest resources) has been evident. Today, it is as alive as ever and estimated to contribute billions of dollars to BC’s economy. Hence, efforts are now being directed at ways in which this Informal Economy can be drawn into the mainstream Formal Economy, for the benefit all stakeholders.

Forest Conservation is, of course, a big concern for the NTFP sector. I heard all sides in agreement that some form of user-accountability is needed. Our Community Forest Program will need to investigate licensing and/or certification programs for Wild-crafters; possibly tenure/leasing agreements as well. Wild-crafters agreed that the ‘playing field needs to be leveled’ and they could benefit from programs that offer legitimization of their work.

A major frustration for wild-crafters is in getting fair value for their products. The informal marketplace is often subject to the ‘middleman’ and that dependence diminishes the individual wild-crafter’s negotiating power. It was suggested that wild-crafters find avenues to direct marketing. An example was made of farmers’ markets where local farmers have formed associations & created their own retail outlets. Another example is B.C. wineries. They offer their consumers the ‘experience’ of wine production by providing winery tours and this has proven to be a huge key to their success. Both these marketing approaches could be applied to a variety of wild-crafters.

Wild-crafters that harvest foods and medicinal herb are hindered by the fact that we do not have the research and education in place in Canada to support the value of those native forest commodities. Generally speaking, Canadians do not know much about their native, wild foods. We don’t know the nutritional value and we probably don’t know how to prepare them. A wide range of government agencies, particularly Health Canada, needs to be brought in line to rectify this. Information from

Finland was presented. Finland is a solid model of a country supporting its wild food/medicinal herb industry. Our Community Forest Project could be a very strong voice in this matter.

A common thread throughout the conference was the need for Wild-Crafters to organize their efforts and work together to secure the value of their NTFP livelihood. An Associations of Wild-Crafters could be advantageous in several ways:

- Conservation: Farmers' Associations create and enforce their own standards for membership – organic status, for example. Wild-crafters should establish their own forest friendly conscience & work together to ensure their raw resources are sustained.

- Organizing could help individuals address many of their unstable market issues.

Middleman/black market practices could be overcome. Further, our government needs to be lobbied to do the research that will validate the full worth of our NTFPs. Wild-crafters will need to combine their efforts to make any speedy headway with that.

- A well managed Association could provide the support that serious wild-crafters need to make it in the Formal Economy. Membership fees could combine to a larger 'buying power' and formal business needs, such as insurance and advertising, could become more feasible for these micro-businesses. This is a current practice for the Vancouver Island Farmers' Association & its members.

I've come to the conclusion that our Community Forest Project will be expected to play some kind of role in formalizing the business practices of the wild-crafting sector. A worthwhile focus may be for the CFP to sponsor the creation of an NTFP marketplace. That concept is very appealing to this wild-crafter, and I suspect it also has good economic potential for the CFP.

My sincerest thanks go to the Sunshine Valley Rate Payers Association and the Community Forest Initiative for the opportunity to attend this conference as a Community Delegate. I am ever more confident that I do have a "Future Beneath The Trees" and I look forward to any opportunity for further discussion and involvement.

Best regards,
Donna Mackey

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Royal Roads University
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Community Delegate:

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Over 400 international and North American delegates, speakers and exhibitors were in attendance for the first Non-timber Forest Product (NTFP) Symposium, Conference and Shop the Wild trade show. These events were a success for both the organizers and the attendees.

Culinary delights using wild products punctuated the excitement as business cards were collected, stories shared and the potential for an association in the near future were discussed.

The informal business of wild crafting is occurring throughout the world. The wild products here in BC include berries, nuts, plants for medicinal purposes and edibles, floral products, furniture, arts & crafts etc.

The diversity of user groups was both surprising and encouraging. The group included First Nations, wild harvesters, local governments, wild product entrepreneurs, native plant nurserymen, educational institutions, commodity traders, homeopathic /naturopathic, United Nations executive, students and consumers.

During the sessions many presented insights to the large wild industry. The exact value and number of individuals involved here in BC is unknown.

There is a Future beneath the Trees with non-timber forest products. All presentations given during the symposium and conference will be available on line at the following link: <http://www.royalroads.net/cntr/ntfpconference/>

The value added products and services are the recommended direction for rural development opportunities. Wholesale supply of commodities is not sustainable or economically viable given the current un-organized, un-graded or certification of products. The majority of the economic value is retained by the middlemen and or brokers .

Recommendations:

- Forward a letter to the Hope & Community Forest Initiative Re: Inclusion of NTFP as part of the business plan for submission to Ministry of Forest
- Consideration of sponsoring NTFP certification for local interested residents
- Consideration of research and development of viable rural development options involving the emerging industry for NTFP
- Formally request relevant Ministry of Forest documents, studies and maps for the Chilliwack Forest District regarding non timber forest products be provided to Hope Community Forest.
- Recommend the inclusion of resource manager as a staff member to the community forest to assess all resource removal: water gravel, minerals, NTFPs, timber and other natural sustainable resource extraction.
- Explore the potential partnerships with educational institutions for research & development opportunities
- Invite as a special guest Anne Mortifee(singer & song writer and advocate for the use of NTFP) for the announcement of acceptance for the Business plan for the Hope Community Forest.
- Consideration of additional resource allocation for research & development of NTFPs conference & symposium contacts and presenters for advancement of the business plan for the Hope Community Forest

Respectfully,
Kate Zabell

Attachments:

Conference agenda, brochures of existing business, materials from the Ministry of Forestry, Canadian Dept of Forests, forest consultants brochures and miscellaneous information from exhibitors .