

## **Interview with Johnson Ginger, Huu-ay-aht First Nation**

*Johnson Ginger is a Huu-ay-aht board member of the Bamfield-Huu-ay-aht Community Forest on the west coast of Vancouver Island. Johnson was recently in Geneva for the United Nations Forum on Forests, and answers some questions here about the community forest in his community and the negotiations at UNFF. Johnson is also a member of the Global Caucus on Community Based Forest management, who advocate for the rights of local communities and Indigenous Peoples to manage, control and use their forests in ways that are socially just, ecologically sound, and economically viable. Updates on the Caucus are currently available at <http://www.forestsandcommunities.org>. Join our online discussion group by sending a note to: [globalcbfm@yahoogroups.com](mailto:globalcbfm@yahoogroups.com). Note: Views expressed above are those of the authors and not necessarily shared with all members of the Global Caucus on CBFM.*

### **Where do you live? Tell us a little bit about your community and the forests you live in.**

I live in Port Alberni, which is on the west coast of Vancouver Island in British Columbia. Vancouver Island has mostly been logged once over within last 75 – 200 years. The remaining forests are mostly second growth with pockets of old growth. The forests are basically part of the coastal temperate rainforest biome.

The communities in this area are forest-dependant and composed of both First Nations and non-First Nations. The First Nations are Nuu-chah-nulth peoples, which means West Coast People. Within the Nuu-chah-nulth there are 14 different groups, the Huu-ay-aht are one of the them, and I am Huu-ay-aht. Socio-economically, there is a significant amount of poverty within the First Nations communities, especially in villages, which are isolated, and jobs are hard to come by.

### **Tell us about the Bamfield/Huu-ay-aht Community Forest. Why are you involved? How are you involved? How is it governed, who controls decision-making? What are your biggest successes and challenges?**

The community forest is a pilot project between the community of Bamfield and the Huu-ay-aht Nation. It is governed by 9 directors, which include 1 person from the municipal government, 4 Huu-ay-aht, and 4 Bamfield community members for balance between the two communities. We meet monthly to make decisions. I am the acting vice-president director and a registered forestry pupil with 18 years experience. I bring this experience to the community forest.

There is some participation by general community members in the forest, but it's hard because many people do not know about forestry, and have difficulty understanding what it is we are trying to do. There is definitely room for more participation, but community members need to want to be involved, and to learn. I feel over time there will be increased capacity and interest in the management of the forest.

There are many challenges. The main one is that we have not harvested anything yet. It's taken 8 years to get through the paperwork, to jump through the hoops, to find our way around the bureaucracy. So, needless to say, we are currently in the red, and until we start to harvest and sell some timber, we will continue to be in the red. We need this revenue

in order to survive! Sometimes I think the government gave us this licence, but not the support, thinking it may or may not happen, or succeed. But that said, we've made a huge dent in the last three months, we've got a silviculture prescription approved, and now we can apply for the cutting permits and road permits.

Another challenge is certification. The market is demanding more certified wood, but because we are so small we could not consider this. The costs are far out of reach. There has to be some sort of exception for small producers like us. Our nation has managed the land for thousands of years – we sort of think that if our council feels it is being done well, it should be certified. We need certification to open markets up. We would also like to contribute some Bamfield-Huu-ay-hat CF timber to the Olympic construction, and certification is going to be required.

I feel that now there seems to be a real continuity between the Bamfield community and the Huu-ay-aht community now that there is a team (the BOD) that is working together. Interestingly, the division of labour is now divided equally. There is a Bamfield community director that completes the necessary work required to run the office in Bamfield, and there is a Huu-ay-aht director that completes the necessary work to run the operational and political side. There seems to be a good feeling here, and all are relatively happy with the way the CF is evolving.

## **UNFF**

### **Was this your first time at UNFF? What did you think about it? What did you hope to accomplish here? Was it a good use of your time?**

Yes, this was my first time. It definitely stimulated my mind, with respect to what I could, or could not do at this level. It stimulated me enough to want the drive to continue supporting the CFBM by informing associates, colleges, friends etc. that we should be working towards community forests rather than these big TSLs that are handed out to the big corporations. It made me realize how we especially in BC are getting a raw deal – the government virtually gave away a massive Tree Forest License to Weyerhaeuser – they get to log the land, and ship it all out. Jobs are being lost, Canadian jobs we need. I didn't realize the magnitude before going to UNFF. It was a pretty good use of my time – well, about half and half. I was so new to it, and I didn't feel very prepared. But even being exposed to it, I think I'm starting to get the big picture, and maybe how I might get more involved with national and global advocacy. On the other hand, the meeting was made up of a lot of thank you's, and congratulations – which are not the best use of time!

It was also good to talk with other community forest folks – but in some ways here in Bamfield we are ahead. In other countries, they seem to have more trouble with governments, with more barriers. Here, we have the permission from the government, we already have the approval, we have women on the workforce and on the board, we have a plan, we've done archaeological assessments, we are mindful of traditional forest related knowledge. Compared to some of the Caucus members I met at the UNFF4, we seem to be in a better position.

## **Did you have a chance to talk with the Canadian delegation about your concerns?**

Yes, I did chat with Mike Fullerton, who was of course very government/politician-like – he listened to me, he heard me out, but... I mentioned to him that the Canadian materials (STATEMENTS?) did not say anything about community forests – he was not very aware of the community forest movement, or of community forests in BC. We are so marginal – less than 1% of BC's land base – so I guess that makes sense. He was receptive and invited me to give him a call/email. I am hoping they might be able to help us with our start up costs. But I haven't heard back yet.

In general though, I thought the Canadian government was very quiet. In the one intervention I heard them make, they basically thanked everyone – we want to thank Mr. Chairman, and the secretariat...and then said they had nothing else to say. Very Canadian! The US had much more to say. I was a bit saddened; I thought Canada would have more to say, and more progressive things.

## **What was the most important issue discussed at UNFF? The least?**

I thought the major stakeholder dialogue was interesting. I saw what stakeholder means – I also thought the Traditional Forest Related Knowledge issue was really important. I was talking with one of our elders the other day, and she was saying that if we lose our old growth, then how do we pass on this knowledge? The old growth and second growth are different ecosystems. If we lose the old growth, we lose the knowledge. This is generations of knowledge. Being interested in the knowledge is not enough, we need the forests to go with it. If we do lose it – that should be against the law.

## **What could the UNFF do, or what should it do?**

Well, I think the more younger people get there, and spread new ideas, the better. It is important for the dialogue to continue, so that new seeds and ideas can be planted. It could also work to help us pressure our own governments, or to pressure our governments to uphold their agreements – and to make sure things are being done right. It's too bad it has to be this way...but governments can't seem to do it themselves. The governments are making lots of money off the 'major stakeholders', like Weyerhaeuser. I can see why they don't want to change. We are in treaty negotiations to take some of our traditional territory out of Weyerhaeuser's hands; to put it into ours. Ironically, we have to prove to the big stakeholders that we are capable of managing this forest – even though we did it just fine before Macmillan Blodell and Weyerhaeuser! We are slowly building up the professional capacity to meet these demands – through training and education. In the meantime, Weyerhaeuser is quickly taking wood off our traditional territory – I counted one day – it was about 700 cubic meters in an hour and a half as I drove through our traditional territory on my way to work one day! With all due respect to the political leaders in our nation and the political leaders outside our nation, whom have negotiated/advocated for treaty and agreements in principal, that have got the Huu-ay-aht to where they are currently, with respect to the Huu-ay-aht managing their traditional territory etc in the way they seem fit, it seems we are just getting crumbs of the pie rather than a big slice...

