



Public Policy Profile

POLICY: Great Bear Rainforest Sustainable Development Initiative

DATE INTRODUCED: The fund to support this program was officially launched in April 2001; however, it was not until 2007 that the funds were allocated.

JURISDICTION: Regional (B.C.)

INTENDED OUTCOME: The intended outcome of the fund is to work collaboratively with First Nations of the Great Bear Rainforest and Haida Gwaii to support sustainable economic development and conservation management in the Central Coast, North Coast and Haida Gwaii areas of coastal British Columbia.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

The Great Bear Rainforest Sustainable Development Initiative is a \$116 Million fund overseen by Coast Opportunity Funds. Initial funding was made available by the Province of British Columbia, the Government of Canada, and six private foundations. Sixty million dollars of this remains in a perpetual endowment that contributes \$2-2.5 million/yr toward conservation efforts. The other \$60 million is made available through the Economic Development Fund that supports projects that are compatible with this ecosystem-based management regime. Eligible participating First Nations share contributions from the Funds to support conservation initiatives and economic activities. When a Participating First Nation applies for, and is approved by the Board of Projects the First Nation will receive their dedicated share of the Fund to contribute towards those projects.

It is expected that the First Nation will seek additional funding from other sources. First Nations communities within protected areas for these regions totals 1.8 million hectares.

The goal of the project is to help build the capacity and infrastructure of a conservation-based economy in the Great Bear Rainforest. Scott Rehmus, CEO of Coast Conservation Endowment Fund Foundation stated that,

“Our fund started making awards at the end of 2008, and we have spent a lot of time and money since then to help build the infrastructure in the First Nations communities to take advantage of the funds. Our funds can help First Nations on their core capacity, like hiring staff. We think of it as building the conservation sector of the economy. We have been spending time with these economic development corporations and helping them build their capacity.”

BARRIERS

According to Rehmus, one of the biggest barriers identified “in the long term success of the funds and the success for the Nations is the capacity to take advantage of the opportunities that our funds represent. So we have begun to really look at this issue of capacity, and we are in the early stages of scoping out what those needs are, who out there are trying to meet those needs, what the gaps are and what our organization can do. Clearly the biggest issue for us is the capacity, having the people there that can really implement the project.”

SIGNIFICANCE

The significance of this initiative according to Rehmus is that “we have conservation and economic development being worked on together, so technically they are separate foundations. But when we work with the First Nations we work with them with that holistic perspective in mind. We are trying to do what we can to not perpetuate the split in many communities of conservation vs. development. We think there is a way forward here that is building an economy based on a healthy environment and we are doing that in a style of awards, and think about these issues at the same time.”

“We work with Nations to help them achieve their conservation and economic development goals. As you can imagine with 27 Nations some are much further along than others so we work with them at their own pace. This is proving to be a very important part of the long term success, because the Nations are taking the time they need to actually develop that internal capacity and infrastructure to be able to effectively use the funds.”

REPLICABILITY

According to Rehmus there is no question that this project can be replicated and passed on to others. However, it is important to proceed cautiously because, “this model has never been done before, we have yet to find a fund that combines the conservation and development in one operating unit. So we are very much focused on getting this model working properly. There are a lot of funds being developed and money dumped places, and you don’t get the kind of results. So we are trying to focus internally to see that this works, but in a year or two we will be likely much more engaged globally on this.”

The funding aspect of this initiative is quite unusual in that the fund “was raised on the backs of conservation commitments made. The private funders came in and committed \$60 Million, and it was because of that money that the province committed their \$30 [Million], and the federal government took another year to commit to that other \$30 Million.”

The idea of bringing together multiple sources of funding is of growing importance globally and there is growing interest in this type of model. The meeting of International Funders for Indigenous Peoples for example, being held in May 2010, will showcase a panel on this initiative contributing to the global conversation on the conservation-economy.

Rehmus also mentioned the United Nations Collaborative Program on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries (UN-REDD Program) as a similar forest value-added venture. “The REDD funds are based on carbon credits [and are] similar in terms of funding conservation and development. The REDD funds is one of the biggest commitments that came out of Copenhagen. There are a lot of problems with them, but from those that work on this they look to us and say ‘wow, you are way ahead of us on these things and we want to engage with you.’ This is about the combination of conservation and economic development that is being in a holistic model at a size that matters ecologically”.

INTERVIEWS

Scott Rehmus CEO, Coast Conservation Endowment Fund Foundation, COO Coast Opportunity Funds.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

www.coastfunds.ca