
THE CANADIAN BOREAL FOREST AGREEMENT: UNLIKELY ALLIES PURSUING CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN CANADA'S BOREAL REGIONS

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SUMMARY

CANADA'S BOREAL FOREST IS ONE OF THE LARGEST AND MOST ECOLOGICALLY significant ecosystems on the planet and the source of supply for one of Canada's most significant natural resource sectors. Recognizing this, forest companies and environmental organizations in Canada came together to create the Canadian Boreal Forest Agreement (CBFA) in 2010, creating a unique and unprecedented approach and a new era in conservation and resource management. Communications Consultant Roisin Reid uses the framework of Collective Impact to reflect retrospectively on the creation and development of the CBFA and considers whether Collective Impact offers further insights into how this work might proceed as they move from Phase III—Organizing for Impact to Phase IV—Sustaining Action and Impact.

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IN A RECENT BLOG POSTING, THE DEPARTING HEAD OF STANFORD UNIVERSITY'S Centre for Social Innovation, Kriss Deiglmeier, relayed the following observation: "The cross-sector collaboration things, they're really messy and they're really hard and they're really complex. And they're also the only frickin' way that things are going to get solved" (Deiglmeier, 2014). We couldn't agree more.

Canada's boreal forest is part of the largest and most ecologically significant ecosystems on the planet. One quarter of the planet's intact or undisturbed forest ecosystems and the majority of Canada's remaining wilderness is found there. This vast expanse is home to about 600 First Nations communities that hold unreconciled Aboriginal and Treaty rights to share the boreal forest and, among other things, "hunt and fish as formerly."

The Canadian boreal forest as a whole is home to a vast collection of species, including over 300 bird species, as well as species at risk of extinction, such as the forest-resident woodland caribou, which is listed as threatened under *Canada's Species at Risk Act*. Globally, boreal forests contain 80 percent of the planet's available fresh water, and in Canada much of that is found in carbon-dense boreal peatlands and wetlands.

The boreal forest is also a tremendous source of Canada's natural resources, including conventional and unconventional oil and gas, hydroelectric facilities, and mining developments. It is also the source of about half of Canada's annual timber harvest, which sustains nearly 200 forestry-dependent communities.

Obviously, both conservationists and the forestry industry deeply value the boreal forest; however, their divergent values led to decades of conflict, including large boycotts of Canadian forest products by a number of environmental groups.

More than 95 percent of the Canadian boreal is publicly owned and a significant proportion of this forest is subject to Aboriginal Treaties and rights. The federal and provincial governments allow the forestry industry access to the trees through geographically defined tenures, which are long-term licences to forestry companies. The tenure system was designed to encourage rural economic development and, despite efforts to manage Canada's boreal forest responsibly, nearly 50 percent of the woodland caribou's range has been lost to human activities that fragment or disturb their habitat – activities like forestry, oil and gas exploration, agriculture, and road-building. Meanwhile, recovery plans for the caribou are still a work in progress, and governments have come under fire for slow progress.

Why pit economic gain against environmental green? Remember the hugely important Canadian Boreal Forest Agreement, finalized just in 2010.... Talk about being radical. Bringing together groups that bitterly opposed each other. Well it's working.

Look, Canada is twice blessed here. We have a profitable resource and a priceless wilderness and we are losing track of that. Maybe all the name calling, the demonizing and setting up straw men arguments on both sides isn't the most productive way forward. Maybe being a radical in politics these days should mean something else. Having a reasonable debate and finding a reasonable solution. The forest industry did it. Call it being radically reasonable. It works and don't worry, it's a 100% Canadian idea.

– EVAN SOLOMAN, CBC, *The House* (January, 2012)

But a group of forestry companies and environmental organizations has come up with an innovative solution to protect both the boreal forest and the communities that rely on forestry jobs: the Canadian Boreal Forest Agreement (CBFA), the world's largest conservation initiative.

In 2007 and 2008, at the height of the debate over climate change in North America, the leadership that the membership of the Forest Products Association of Canada (FPAC) was showing on climate change created a bridge to the conservation community in Canada. The forest products company members had collectively reduced their absolute greenhouse gas emissions by nearly 70 percent from the Kyoto base-line year of 1990. Building upon this shared interest in action on climate change, a small representative group of forestry company executives and environmental leaders sat down together to explore the possibility of a broader solution to their shared challenges.

HOW THE CBFA WORKS

Signed in 2010, after two years of intensive negotiations, the CBFA recognizes that while governments hold the primary responsibility for managing and conserving Canada's boreal forest, both industry and environmentalists have a duty to help define the future of this important ecosystem. The agreement applies directly to more than 73-million hectares of public forests, and signatories include the 18-FPAC member companies, Kruger Forest Products, and seven leading environmental organizations including Forest Ethics, the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS), the Canadian Boreal Initiative, the David Suzuki Foundation, the Pew Charitable Trusts, The Nature Conservancy, and the Ivey Foundation.

A truce lies at the foundation of the CBFA: environmental groups have committed to stop boycotts of the forest companies involved and, in return, the companies have

suspended logging operations on almost 29-million hectares of boreal forest, which represents virtually all boreal caribou habitat within their operating areas.

The agreement represents a new relationship between the former adversaries and has created an opportunity for the more complex work of developing action plans for the recovery of caribou, developing proposals to complete a network of boreal protected spaces, producing ecosystem-based management guidelines that participating companies can use to improve their forestry practices, and presenting a common face to the global marketplace.

As the CBFA moves towards implementation, it is engaging a broad variety of stakeholders and rights-holders, including other industry sectors, Aboriginal groups, affected communities, and municipal, provincial, and federal governments. Once negotiated, recommendations are being presented to provincial and Aboriginal governments for implementation.

THE CBFA AND COLLECTIVE IMPACT

The CBFA exemplifies many aspects of the Collective Impact framework. As an industry-level cross-sectoral collaboration, the CBFA aims to create win-win outcomes for both environmentalists and the forestry industry – a goal that may seem contradictory at first, but one toward which real progress is being made.

In their article defining Collective Impact, John Kania and Mark Kramer note that “large-scale social change comes from better cross-sector coordination rather than from the isolated intervention of individual organizations” (Kania & Kramer, 2011).

This idea has been echoed by Avrim Lazar, a former CEO of the Forest Products Association of Canada and a key member of the group, who negotiated with the CBFA in May 2010. Lazar explains that government’s job is to find out how to reconcile competing environmental, social, and economic agendas, which has traditionally been done using a “consult and decide” model that takes the separate agendas of industry, environmentalists, and communities and often derives solutions, which satisfy none of the stakeholders; indeed, the objective of government policy-makers is sometimes described as ensuring that “everyone is equally unhappy.”

“This is bad public policy...but it’s the default model for government because we’re not really skilled, as a society, at finding solutions through consensus,” he said. “We need to put conservation and sustainable use at the centre – alongside economic and social agendas. And we need to pursue this at a landscape level” (Lazar, 2013, November).

Looking at the five conditions of Collective Impact – common agenda, backbone organization, shared measurement system, mutually reinforcing activities, and continuous communication – the CBFA is a profound example of the approach.

COMMON AGENDA

Signatories to the CBFA share a vision for Canada's boreal forest – all the parties are interested in seeing better protection for key species, ensuring Canada is recognized as a world leader in conservation, as well as ensuring a new prosperity and a sustainable future for the Canadian forest industry and the communities that rely on it for their economic and social well-being.

The agreement has six goals, which aim to find balance between conservation objectives and the health of the forestry industry:

- Implement world-leading sustainable forest management practices.
- Accelerate the completion of the network of protected spaces for the boreal forest.
- Fast-track plans to protect boreal forest species at risk, with efforts initially focussed on woodland caribou.
- Take action on climate change as it relates to forest management.
- Improve the prosperity of the Canadian forest sector and communities that rely on it.
- Promote and publicize the environmental performance of the participating companies.

A dedicated group of environmentalists and forestry industry representatives worked with facilitators through two years of negotiations to write this ground-breaking agreement, which established the architecture for a new relationship between the signatories, based on collaborative solutions, not compromise.

BACKBONE ORGANIZATION

The CBFA Secretariat is a small group of highly qualified and well-respected experts in the areas of forest management and environment, and is responsible for coordinating the work of all the CBFA committees and working groups to ensure the efficient implementation of the agreement. The Secretariat works closely with the CBFA's forestry and environmental signatories, providing program management, logistics, coordination, communications, and facilitation support.

The Secretariat is headed by executive director Aran O'Carroll, who has been involved with the agreement from the beginning. O'Carroll came to the CBFA Secretariat from the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS), where he was national manager of legal and regulatory affairs and CPAWS' lead negotiator for the CBFA, and is currently on long-term leave from CPAWS to perform this role.

The CBFA working groups are divided into national and regional committees, each supported by a Secretariat coordinator and a small cadre of facilitators. The national working groups develop science-based guidance, while the six regional working groups apply this national-level guidance to developing recommendations to implement on the ground.

The CBFA's regional working groups include representation from both industry and environment groups. With the support of the Secretariat, these working groups act as liaison between CBFA signatories and governments, Aboriginal governments, communities, and stakeholders. Government and First Nations representatives are increasingly integrated directly in the working groups.

SHARED MEASUREMENT SYSTEM

Measuring the outcomes of an agreement on the scale of the CBFA can be challenging, but the agreement signatories have assembled a team of leading scientists, headed by Dr. Fiona Schmiegelow, Professor of Northern Environmental and Conservation Sciences at the University of Alberta, to, among other things, help to evaluate the CBFA's progress at implementation.

The CBFA Science Committee provides independent, science-based guidance on implementation of the CBFA by assembling and managing topic-specific Independent Science Advisory Teams (ISATs), which counsel the National and Regional Working groups to promote the use of the best available information in decision-making. The Committee's role is to provide quality control and assurance on the information the CBFA is using to move forward on its objectives.

The fact that the CBFA signatories have agreed to use an independent committee as the arbiter of what is the best available information is another innovative feature of the agreement. Prior to the CBFA being in place, both environmentalists and industry tended to use science as ammunition – each interest group would choose the facts that suited their purpose and use them to support their own interests.

“As a policy person, I thought of science and facts as things that I would take to persuade people that what I wanted was right,” says Lazar, who was Assistant Deputy Minister (Policy and Communications) for Environment Canada before becoming President and CEO of the Forest Products Association of Canada. “It was rare that I would look to science to tell me what my point of view would be. I knew what my point of view was. I looked at science to provide ammunition to let my point of view prevail. The CBFA basically shifted the paradigm of the role science plays in these discussions” (Lazar, 2013, October).

The CBFA Science Committee is developing methodological frameworks and other guidance for the agreement's goal and is now working on defining indicators of progress and an explicit measurement system.

“Progress across the breadth of activities isn't uniform, and some indicators are clearer than others,” says Aran O'Carroll. “For example, with regard to caribou habitat restoration, consistent with the direction of the Government of Canada, we've set a target of having 66 percent of habitat undisturbed across Caribou ranges while ensuring social and economic viability. However, on the economic side, the agreement talks about providing 'demonstrable benefit' to the forestry industry, and that is an example of an area for which we have yet to specify targets and indicators” (Aran O'Connell, personal communication, February 21, 2014).

MUTUALLY REINFORCING ACTIVITIES

While the work of developing solutions across the agreement's six goals is key to the CBFA's success, getting rights-holders' and stakeholders' input on and eventual support of the recommendations that emerge from that process is equally important. And there is a wide range of rights-holders and stakeholders who are affected by the CBFA's work – from the residents and leadership of small communities that rely on forestry jobs, to Aboriginal governments, to industries outside forestry, such as mining, that have operations in the areas affected.

As such, the CBFA signatories are becoming adept at tailoring their outreach efforts to capitalize on their varied interests, networks, skills, and capabilities.

“The CBFA is fundamentally an agreement between industry and Environmental Non-Governmental Organizations (ENGOS), but for it to succeed we need to garner broad support among governments – Aboriginal, as well as municipal, provincial, and federal,” says O’Carroll. “There are different levels of receptivity to industry or conservation groups among our stakeholders. Working effectively sometimes recommends unilateral engagement, based on who has the best relationships. For example, in Manitoba, conservation groups have a close relationship with the provincial government, so they have occasionally taken the lead on discussions with government. In other locations, such as Alberta, it is industry which has occasionally taken the lead.”

CONTINUOUS COMMUNICATION

It has taken years of sustained effort to reach the position in which CBFA signatories now find themselves, where they have moved beyond cooperation and compromise to a truly collaborative relationship. The level of trust involved in the outreach described above – having industry and ENGOS represent each others' interests – has come about through continuous communication and a focus on interest-based negotiation.

The CBFA secretariat has ensured that each working group has received training in interest-based negotiation to establish a foundation for productive discussions.

“Institutional change is a monumental challenge, but we’ve made a lot of progress in developing trust among all the players at the table,” says O’Carroll. “In some instances, we have achieved a very productive and solutions-based space where working-group members are actively seeking solutions to shared challenges.”

“What has come out of this work is not about negotiation, it’s not even interest-based negotiation. It’s the point at which you leave the negotiating behind and become stewards, become responsible for collective problem solving, for finding solutions,” says Lazar. “It’s about the technology for running environmental and other policy processes in a way that actually is solution-oriented rather than simply interest-oriented.”

Among the challenges facing the prospect for large-scale, cross-sectoral collaboration is that institutional funders usually have a rigorous, investment-like approach to choosing projects. They look for novel and current strategies, and try to pick “winners” – organizations or discrete projects that promise short-term results.

One of the radical requirements of the Collective Impact model is that it’s necessary for funders to think differently about enabling change on a larger scale – providing funding that can be used to inspire dialogue and create opportunities to identify a common agenda across sectors.

The CBFA has a diverse funding base – the majority of funding to date has come from the signatories themselves, supplemented by government funding, as well as individual funders. The Ivey Foundation and Pew Charitable Trusts took a substantive risk in financing the intensive negotiations of the CBFA from 2008 to 2010.

“Our funders stepped up and invested in the two years of negotiations that led to the initial agreement,” says O’Carroll. “But the early successes and the potential of what we can achieve through this collaborative approach is beginning to reward that risk.”

ORGANIZING FOR IMPACT: CBFA ACHIEVEMENTS AND NEXT STEPS

From the perspective of the implementation phases described by the Collective Impact framework, the CBFA is moving from Phase 3 (Organizing for Impact) to Phase 4 (Sustaining Action and Impact). The infrastructure and processes to support the agreement are in place for the most part, and the work being done under the CBFA is beginning to produce concrete results.

In June 2012, the signatories announced a major breakthrough – consensus recommendations for caribou action planning for an 800,000 hectare area of Ontario’s boreal forest – almost five times the size of the amalgamated City of Toronto. The recommendations will help to conserve more than one-quarter of the 3 million hectares of caribou range in northeastern Ontario’s Abitibi River Forest, as well as to maintain hundreds of jobs in forestry.

Once implemented, these recommendations would exclude over 800,000 hectares of critical habitat for boreal woodland caribou from harvest. The remaining 2.2-million hectares would remain open to forestry, with sustainable forest practices in place to safeguard wildlife and ecosystems.

This action plan will not only conserve forested areas that are home to critical caribou habitat, but will also allow for increased harvesting in areas where caribou have not been present for some time. In fact, it will provide an estimated 20 percent increase in wood supply over the next 30 years. Since the announcement of support for the CBFA’s recommendations in northeastern Ontario, regional working groups have been making substantial progress in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Newfoundland and are expecting to be able to propose recommendations before the end of 2014 in these regions.

Progress has not always been easy – the peace between traditional rivals in the conservation and industry camps can be fragile. For example, in December 2012, Greenpeace Canada and a group called Canopy pulled out of the agreement, in part because they claimed that progress on concrete objectives had been too slow.

The remaining signatories of the agreement have also been frustrated by the slow pace of progress, but there is an emerging appreciation for the challenge represented by the CBFA. Indeed, many signatories would concur that the agreement is “the only frickin’ way that things are going to get solved.” As part of ongoing work under the agreement, the CBFA Secretariat and working groups are engaging in a formal “lessons learned” process – documenting successful and unsuccessful experiments in the CBFA approach. This is essential to refining the program management approach and dispute-resolution process included in the original agreement, to help get around roadblocks, and to achieve faster progress in specific areas.

“This is the most ambitious agreement of its kind in the world. If it was easy, there wouldn’t be anything ground-breaking about what we’re trying to do,” says O’Carroll. “It would have been miraculous if the first phase of work had resolved all the problems in areas like North-central Québec, where mills have been closing for decades, and caribou have been rapidly disappearing. But we’re prepared to keep working at it and the necessary relationships are in place.”

But at this point in the evolution of the agreement, it could be said that the CBFA’s legacy is as much about the evolution of a productive relationship between signatories as about the outcomes on the ground.

“We went the next step, and shifted the paradigm about what our jobs were,” says Lazar. “Instead of the industrialists being at the table to argue for jobs and the environmental community there to argue for conservation, the CBFA says actually you’re all responsible for both.”

WEBSITES

The Canadian Boreal Forest Agreement (CBFA):
www.canadianborealforestagreement.com

Forest Products Association of Canada (FPAC): www.fpac.ca

Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS): www.cpaws.org

Canadian Boreal Initiative: www.borealcanada.ca

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