

## Community Forests Canada

A new national network established at the  
Building Resilient Communities through Community-based Forest Management Conference,  
January 16-18, 2013, Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario

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Organizing Committee: Lynn Palmer, Gayle Broad, Ryan Bullock, Peggy Smith, Meghan Ableson

Community forestry, involving local control over common forest lands, is more well-established outside of Canada. However, the unparalleled crisis involving forests and communities across the country has created an appetite for a fundamental rethinking of the relationships that link our communities, governments, industrial partners and forests to create a sustainable future. A wide range of actors are therefore mobilizing to promote increased implementation of community forests throughout the country. Advocates see this approach as being most effective to build resilience in forest communities and ecosystems by activating forest resource development opportunities, local benefits, and social responsibilities.

In response to the striking nation-wide growth and interest in community forestry, from January 16 to 18, 2013 in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, Algoma University NORDIK Institute and the Northern Ontario Sustainable Communities Partnership (NOSCP) hosted the first ever interdisciplinary conference to advance community forestry as a model for collaborative decision-making and development in Canada. Conference partners included Lakehead University's Faculty of Natural Resources Management, the B.C. Community Forest Association, the Canadian Environmental Network, Northwatch, the Northeast Superior Regional Chiefs Forum, the Towns of Atikokan and Nipigon, the Hearst Economic Development

Corporation, the University of Saskatchewan's School of Environment and Sustainability, and Nishnawbe Aski Nation.

The conference was a resounding success, attracting more than 150 delegates from the Yukon and BC's Haida Gwaii through to the Maritimes. The high level of interest from a wide range of representatives reflects the growing community forestry movement across Canada. There are currently 58 established community forest projects in BC, numerous examples in Quebec and southern Ontario, and the Nova Scotia government passed legislation in December 2012 to enable community forestry. In northern Ontario and New Brunswick, First Nations and municipalities are asking for community forests that would operate on a regional basis.

At the conference Dr. Ryan Bullock launched his new book (co-authored with Kevin Hanna), *Community Forestry: Local Values, Conflict and Forest Governance* (Cambridge University Press). Dr. Bullock predicted that, while there is a need to promote greater understanding among political and community leaders to support the advancement of community forestry, given the current climate, we are likely to see a lot of change in the next few years.

Dr. Jesse Ribot, a leading scholar in democratic decentralization of natural resource management from the University of Illinois, drew on his experience in Africa and around the world in the keynote address. He emphasized that for forestry to be truly democratic, significant forestry decisions must be made by people who represent the forest-dependent communities. It matters which decisions are decentralized and it matters that decisions are made by those whom they affect most. Dr. Ribot stressed that most forest tenure systems require transformative change rather than mere enhancement in order to achieve true representation and democracy.

Dr. Sara Teitelbaum of the Université du Québec à Montréal presented the unifying principles and experiences of community forests in Canada. Dr. Shashi Kant of the University of Toronto discussed the results of a recent study in which he explored how Aboriginal peoples' well-being is tied to continued land use activities and the practice of culture and spirituality. Dr. Evelyn Pinkerton of Simon Fraser University explored what constitutes good governance in municipally-run community forests in British Columbia. Dr. David Robinson of Laurentian University pointed out that community forestry can be more efficient than industrial approaches to forest management since the former mobilizes more brains, does a better job with environmental and social issues, and generates more wealth from the same land base.

BC practitioners Susan Mulkey and Erik Leslie explored lessons from the BC Community Forest Association and the Harrop Procter Community Forest. Jean Arnold of the Falls Brook Centre in New Brunswick presented a vision for a proposed community forest and described how community-based asset mapping has been used to help communities revitalize their economies following the forest sector downturn.

A First Nation panel shared challenges being faced in three jurisdictions across Canada—Ontario, BC and Quebec. Archie Stocker of the Haida Nation in BC focussed on the potential of non-timber forest products to support community economic development. Geoff Quaille provided a 10-year retrospective on the successes and challenges of developing nation-to-nation joint forest management through the Cree-Quebec Forestry Board. Members of the audience were intrigued with the Crees' approach of using traplines as forest management units. Chief Kim

Rainville of the Missinabie Cree First Nation described the Northeast Superior Regional Chiefs' Forum community forest initiative with First Nations, municipalities and the forest industry in the vicinity of the Chapleau Crown Game Preserve.

Delegates were brought up to date about Ontario forest tenure reform from Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources representative Leigh Colpitts. Clara Lauziere, of the Northeast Superior Forest Community and the Community Working Group involved in Ontario's forest tenure reform process, pointed to new approaches to collaboration emerging from these discussions.

Honduran speaker, Melvin Cruz of Madera Verde Foundation, a partner in Honduras' Atlántida Model Forest and a member of the International Model Forest Network, discussed experiences about building networks to support community forestry.

The conference culminated with a Talking Circle that led to the formation of a national network—Community Forests Canada--to support existing and proposed initiatives, policy engagement and research relating to community forests. The new network will focus on coordination and sharing of resources in three main areas:

1. Building community resilience;
2. Community adaptation to climate change; and
3. Cross-cultural collaboration/Aboriginal-Settler Relations.

The first key step for the network is to develop a national community forest charter through interactive online discussion. Interested individuals and organizations are encouraged to participate at [www.communityforestscanada.net](http://www.communityforestscanada.net).

The organizing committee thank the conference sponsors: the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), the Northern Ontario Sustainable Communities Partnership, Algoma University's NORDIK Institute, Lakehead University's Faculty of Natural Resources Management, the True North Community Cooperative, the Canadian Model Forest Network/Northeast Superior Forest Community, the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, and the Community Development Corporation of Sault Ste. Marie and Area.

Conference presentations, student posters, photos, videos and community forestry resources are available on the NOSCP website: <http://noscp.ca/>.