

Case Study: Creating Adequate EBM Capacity - The Great Bear Rainforest

The Great Bear Rainforest on Canada's west coast demonstrates how capacity to do large-scale, integrated management can be created and sustained. It is not a marine EBM project in the traditional sense: its focus is on the rainforest, not the adjacent coastal waters. But the initiative has much to offer the marine community in terms of lessons learned. Although full implementation remains to be carried out, these elements of necessary capacity for EBM are in place:

- Sustainable financing;
- Leadership;
- A good scientific base of information;
- High awareness and participation by stakeholders;
- A strategic plan based on assessments of governance, as well as ecology, of the region; and
- Political will generated by strong partnerships among governments, civil society, and the marketplace.

History of Great Bear

The Great Bear Rainforest and the islands of the Haida Gwaii are part of the largest coastal temperate rainforest complex on Earth. Its 21 million acres (85000 km²) represent a quarter of all existing coastal temperate rainforest worldwide. The project area itself extends more than 250 miles (402 km), from the northern end of Vancouver Island, across Queen Charlotte Strait, and along the coast of the province of British Columbia to the Alaskan border. To view a map, click [here](#).

Civil society has had an important role to play in the transformation of management of these forests from single-sector (timber management) to true EBM. In 1995, two NGOs that had long focused on the region's forests - Round River and Raincoast Conservation Society - joined forces with several national and international NGOs to initiate the Great Bear Rainforest campaign (www.savethegreatbear.org), with support from the David Suzuki Foundation. The other NGOs included Greenpeace, Forest Action Network, Rainforest Action Network, the provincial chapter of the Sierra Club of Canada, and Natural Resources Defense Council. Over the course of the ensuing decade, these groups called for improved management of the forests and also conducted research, helping to build scientific capacity to support eventual EBM.

In February 2006, the British Columbia provincial government announced that over 4.5 million acres (18000 km²) of the Great Bear Rainforest would be placed in protected areas and another 19 million acres (77000 km²) under strict EBM land-management guidelines. To manage this region, a landmark agreement was reached a year later, featuring an unprecedented consensus among the timber industry, NGOs, First Nations indigenous groups, federal and provincial governments, and local communities. In an innovative public-private partnership, NGOs matched governmental commitment to ensure adequate capacity to manage the rainforest ecosystems sustainably. The Canadian federal government committed CDN \$30 million, as did the provincial government of British Columbia. In turn, The Nature Conservancy - acting as a conduit for private sector investment - and a core group of U.S. and Canadian foundations committed an additional CDN \$60 million. Together, this total of CDN \$120 million would support the forests' management, with the dual goals of economic and ecological sustainability.

"The challenges of our age require innovative approaches that place a premium on a healthy environment," said Merran Smith, BC Coast program director for ForestEthics, an NGO. "We are proving that conservation can attract investment and actually support jobs that won't threaten the living systems that we depend upon." First Nations, provincial, and federal governments continue to meet in special Land and Resource Forums to decide on the policy and legislative framework for EBM, as well as on detailed land-use and resource management plans to put EBM into practice throughout the region.

Some parties remain skeptical about the outcome, saying that although the agreements have been lauded and the financial commitments made, little has happened on the ground so far. The litmus test for true EBM will be when the EBM framework and the regional land/resource plans, to which all parties have agreed, are given legislative approval and implemented.

Conclusions

It is too early to tell if this ambitious EBM plan will result in conservation success and the safeguarding of the livelihoods and cultures of residents of the region. But if the project fails, it will certainly be difficult to peg the failure to a lack of capacity.

The main lesson from this large-scale initiative is that transformations of management from fragmented and sectoral to integrated and ecosystem-based are possible without the formation of new institutions. While the tendency in environmental management is to build capacity by investing funds in the creation of new institutions, the capacity may be more effectively grown by creating strong linkages, backed up by negotiated agreements, between existing institutions. Partnerships that span all aspects of governance - from civil society to governments to the business community - take the pressure off single agencies to create sufficient overall capacity for EBM. In the marine environment, where building capacity for EBM may be even more of a challenge, these innovative partnerships may have great potential to further EBM goals.

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