



“UP COAST” by Richard Rajala

Rajala, Richard A. 2006. *Up-Coast, Forests and Industry of British Columbia’s North Coast, 1870-2005*. Royal BC Museum, Victoria, Canada. 294 p.

Review by Ray Travers, RPF

In his book “Up Coast,” Mr. Rajala provides a well-documented history of the north central coast of British Columbia, from Seymour inlet to the Cassiar District. Rajala integrates ecological, economic and social issues as he describes the relationship between forests, industry, people and communities from the late 1800’s to the present.

The theme is all too familiar for the management of BC’s public forests. In the early days, there was a small-scale industry (including salmon canneries) with a diverse structure of sawmills, tie and pole producers, and hand-loggers. From the early 1900’s forward, government policies favoured the interests of giant pulp-and-paper firms such as Pacific Mills. The sustained-yield forestry “era of error” after World War II promoted further concentration of control of forest tenure, and the region became a hinterland log supplier from large Tree Farm Licences for southern coast mills. Today the drivers of north coastal events are treaty negotiations, environmental activism and capital flight.

Rajala describes the unresolved search since 1900 for a more equitable and sustainable relationship between humans and British Columbia’s forests, as up-coast forest communities and forests wind down today after most high quality old growth timber has been logged.

Forest policy makers in B.C. have never successfully resolved the difference between its citizens, large investors, and the sustainable management of its forests. From the Fulton Commission in 1911, to the Sloan Commissions in 1945 and 1956, all have expressed faith in co-operation between industrial behaviour and the public interest to achieve rational forest management. Events at Swanson Bay, Ocean Falls and more recently Prince Rupert have demonstrated that BC’s faith in business-government co-operation has not served to retain the wealth necessary to sustain regional well-being, and that short term profitability has consistently trumped social and ecological sustainability. More recently, the main hope for a new forest economy lies in the Great Bear Rainforest Agreement between First Nations, the federal and provincial governments, the forest companies and the environmentalists.

Rajala concludes, “What will emerge out of the rubble of the old order in anybody’s guess.” His comprehensive understanding of what has not worked is a must-read for citizens who want a sustainable future. It is time for British Columbians with better ideas to bring them into the public arena, and perhaps for the first time, to develop and successfully implement a forest management model that gets the fundamentals right - and that is a topic for another conversation.