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April 9, 2014

File Number: 4920-30

The Honourable Steve Thomson
Minister of Forests, Lands, and Natural Resource Operations
Room 248
Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC
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Dear Minister,

RE: Lack of public process when issuing community woodlots on Gambier Island

On April 9th, the bidding will close on the two community woodlots situated on the north east portion of Gambier Island in Howe Sound. The Gambier Island Local Trust Committee has repeatedly requested that the Ministry implement a public consultation and engagement process prior to these woodlots being awarded.

Your office has responded to letters from the Local Trust Committee and Nicholas Simons, MLA, encouraging us to engage with the local forest district on this issue but there has been no useful response back from them other than to imply lack of interest based on a low phone-call rate. Landowners on Gambier and people in the surrounding Howe Sound area have sent hundreds of letters/emails to your office as well as the Sunshine Coast Natural Resource District demanding that these bids be stopped or at least reconsidered based on public concerns. Apart from one meeting in July of 2013, which was carefully orchestrated (pre-vetted questions) and not public, there has been no serious response to public concerns about these woodlots. Since then, all requests for meetings or public engagement in the woodlot process have been rebuffed. Instead, the Land Officer for the Sunshine Coast has advised that the winning bidder would be encouraged to meet with the Islands Trust Planner which, in the Local Trust Committee's opinion, puts far too much onus on the leaseholder.

The Gambier Island Official Community Plan is required by the Province to include forestry uses on Crown land yet this has been used by FLNRO in correspondence to the local MLA as a rationale for how and why these woodlots are in compliance with local community values. This is a circular argument that implies that Local Trust Committee and the community have been the creators of this situation. Crown land on Gambier makes up 60% of the contiguous area of the island therefore the decisions that FLNRO makes about forestry absolutely impacts planning and the locally-endorsed official community plan. This deserves public process.

There has been no recognition that concerned residents on the island worked long and hard in the 1990s to develop a forestry plan with earlier holders of the woodlot licences (CANFOR). In fact, all acknowledgements of public process expectations, past or present, have been summarily disregarded.

Gambier Island already has active logging on public lands. There is very little information available about whether this logging is in compliance with a management plan or if the logging is being monitored to ensure it is done within current regulations. The lack of communication between the leaseholder, the Forest District, and the local residents has created a culture of secrecy and fear-based rumours. It is not surprising that community members on Gambier do not accept that a new leaseholder will consult constructively with the local residents. The bottom line is that there is no regulatory requirement for the winning bidder in the woodlot lease program to consult with the local community – only “encouragement”.

It is understood that a community woodlot licence program is the smallest parcel of land available for commercial logging on public land and is in part designed to accommodate sensitive areas close to communities and recreational areas. However, putting two community woodlots together on a small island can in no way constitute “small-scale” especially given that there is already a woodlot lease being harvested on Gambier. On an island only 6,893 hectares in size, the two new woodlots together are 1,325 hectares and the current woodlot is 400 hectares. **With these new leases, 25% of Gambier Island will be under active logging and this does not include private cutting.** No other island in the Sunshine Coast has this much land under logging pressure.

How can this possibly occur without any community input?

Gambier Island is far from uninhabited; there are more than 900 properties that are used year round, and more than 100 of these are primary residences. In addition, this island has four children's camps and four yacht club outstations. Within one of the new woodlots is Gambier Lake, the island's main lake and the premier land-based recreational destination on the island. The established trails to Gambier Lake are used extensively by outdoor recreation and youth groups throughout the Howe Sound area. Gambier Island is a wilderness day-hiking experience that is accessible on public transit from the Lower Mainland with a BC Ferries water-taxi service leaving Langdale eight times a day. In addition, it is a popular boating destination with easy access from Porteau Cove.

It is much argued that the long-term recreational opportunities on this island are greater than the value of logs that can be pulled off, with far less impact on the island ecology and Howe Sound as a whole.

The Gambier Island Local Trust Committee asks for:

- A public meeting, prior to any bid being awarded, between landowners on Gambier Island and the Sunshine Coast District Forester to respond to concerns about how logging will be done on the island.
- A recognition that there is a flaw in the public process of issuing woodlot leases and that it be re-structured to permit for community input prior to the issuance of a licence.
- A comprehensive response to how these woodlot leases adhere to the specified priorities in establishing the woodlots as outlined by FLNRO (see woodlot lease program brochure).
- Guidelines established to recognize the fragile nature of resource extraction on small islands based on scientific principles.
- That the woodlot lease program on islands in the Howe Sound be included as part of an overall comprehensive planning structure for this South Coast region.
- Serious consideration of the Crown Land on Gambier Island to be taken out of the Sunshine Coast timber supply, or at the very least, that the woodlots currently on bid be reduced in size.

The Gambier Island Local Trust committee will be following up with a request for a meeting with you to discuss the issues outlined above.

Thank You.



David Graham, Chair
Gambier Island Local Trust Committee

pc: Executive Committee
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