

SCRD mulls creation of 'watershed entity'

Chapman Creek Blockade

Sean Eckford / Staff Writer

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The Elphinstone Logging Focus blockade in the Chapman Creek watershed has reached the one-month point.

Recent events in the Chapman Creek watershed have the Sunshine Coast Regional District (SCRD) looking into creating a "watershed entity."

The proposal came from Roberts Creek director Mark Lebell at the March 3 infrastructure services committee meeting. Lebell said his idea draws from recent reports on watershed governance, including A Blueprint for Watershed Governance in British Columbia. It was released in 2014 as part of the POLIS Project on Ecological Governance, at the University of Victoria's Centre for Global Studies.

Lebell also pointed out that the March 2006 Sunshine Coast Water Summit (organized by the Ruby Lake Lagoon Nature Society and Sunshine Coast Community Foundation) also recommended some sort of umbrella organization to handle watershed issues.

"I think we've got a very complex situation here, that's existed for about 50 years. There's elements of water scarcity and water quality protection, First Nations rights and title, there's conflict, there's fiscal restraint, and there's fish habitat," he said. "And that's just half the list I have here of challenges that face us in the watershed."

Lebell put forward a motion to "develop a proposal for a watershed entity on the Sunshine Coast that would include First Nations, different levels of government, local organizations and businesses, licence holders and possibly other actors, and would not compromise any participating party's autonomy or legislated authority."

The suggestion met with general approval from other directors; however, the committee didn't vote on it, because some directors had left the meeting. It will come forward at a future meeting.

SCRD staff have also been asked to prepare a report for a future meeting on installing access gates in watersheds that supply drinking water.

Lebell also had some words of caution around expectations for the potential entity.

"This is not a magic bullet. It would likely not resolve the situations, certainly this season," Lebbell noted. "But it is a long view and I think, hopefully, it's the kind of thing board members 10 years from now will be thanking us for."

Out in the forest, the Elphinstone Logging Focus (ELF) blockade has hit the one-month mark, and the group says it has three supporters taking turns camping at the site.

ELF is trying to keep crews working for AJB Investments from getting into a cutblock on the company's private managed forest land property in the Chapman watershed.

The group has also filed a complaint with the Managed Forest Council. It alleges the company is "currently operating [clear-cut logging, log sorting] during the heavy rain season in the Chapman Creek drinking watershed," notes that on March 3, "there was an intense downpour in this area that lasted for 2.5 hours – one of many during the last 30 days," and accuses the company of "flagrantly" ignoring a 2015 environmental report that "clearly stated not to be logging during the heavy rain season in a highly sensitive drinking watershed."

ELF calls on the Council to "inform Surespan of this complaint and to immediately stop logging and hauling in a highly sensitive public drinking watershed."

In a March 8 email to Coast Reporter, AJB managing director Mark Rogers said the company was aware of the complaint, and that the Council has an internal process for addressing complaints. He also said AJB is still doing other work on the property.

ELF's Ross Muirhead also wrote SCR D directors last week. The email (copied to Coast Reporter) said although the company "did not have the 'public licence' to proceed with recent timber falling on this east block," ELF would agree to lift the blockade to allow the cut timber to be hauled out under three conditions:

- Surespan agrees to stop any further timber falling in the surveyed block under question.
- Surespan agrees to set into place the highest sediment control measures available, in cooperation with SCR D water staff.
- Over the coming weeks, Surespan agrees to engage in meaningful discussions with the SCR D on a protocol agreement, including options that would allow future control of the lands by the SCR D.

In a lengthy statement released March 8, SCR D chair Garry Nohr reiterated that the SCR D does not support logging in any community watershed.

"The current logging activity is taking place on private land and is in compliance with provincial legislation. While the SCR D is responsible for providing drinking water, the SCR D does not have the authority to regulate the harvesting of trees," Nohr said.

"The SCR D's Source Assessment Response Plan is a management plan that was developed to reduce and mitigate impacts of logging in the watershed. There has been a great deal of community concern regarding this issue, and the SCR D's position continues to be one of ongoing and strong commitment to protecting the watershed in the interest of public health."

Nohr noted that the SCR D and the Sechelt Indian Band (SIB) have a joint watershed management agreement to protect and mutually watch over the Chapman Creek and Gray Creek watersheds.

"The SCR D is continuing to monitor water quality upstream and downstream from the harvesting activity," he said. "Water quality monitoring is also part of the daily requirements at the Chapman Creek water treatment plant. On the basis of the community's strong support and passion for protecting the watersheds, the SCR D fully intends to continue to advocate and engage in constructive dialogue with the parties involved."

ELF supporters were planning to converge on the SCR D's Field Road offices for a rally March 10. The group is also marking the first month of its blockade with a gathering at the roadblock on the Sechelt-Airport Forest Service Road at 9:30 a.m. on