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Implications of the Brundtland Commission Report for Canadian Forest Management

by

Patrick Duffy

Introduction

In April, 1987 the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (Brundtland Commission) was published under the title "Our Common Future". The report serves notice — an urgent notice based on the latest and best scientific evidence — that the time has come to make decisions needed to secure the resources to sustain this and coming generations. A cornerstone of the recommendations in Our Common Future is the concept of sustainable development "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".

Shortly after Our Common Future appeared, a Canadian response was published as the "Report of the National Task Force on Environment and Economy" under the auspices of the Canadian Council of Resource and Environment Ministers. This report endorses the findings in Our Common Future and focusses on a number of strategies tailored to the Canadian condition.

Because of the importance of these two reports to the Canadian economy and environment (see book review and editorial in the April, 1988 issue of The Forestry Chronicle), the Economics and Policy Working Group examined their implications to Canadian forest management at the 1988 Annual Meeting at Prince Albert. The main speakers were Dr. J.J. Stan Rowe, Professor Emeritus, Plant Ecology, University of Saskatchewan and Dale F. Stewart, Assistant Deputy Minister, Department of Natural Resources, Government of Manitoba. Their presentations follow.

References

- Our Common Future: The World Commission on Environment and Development.** Oxford University Press, Toronto, xv + 383 p. 1987. ISBN0-19-282080-X.
- Report of the National Task Force on Environment and Economy.** Canadian Council of Resource and Environment Ministers. 4905 Dufferin Street, Downsview, Ontario M3H 5T4. 18 p.

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Stan Rowe

The order of the words in the United Nations-sponsored "World Commission on *Environment and Development*" wisely imply that environment precedes development and is the latter's prerequisite. No environment, no development.

Nevertheless, somewhere along the line when the Brundtland Report, *Our Common Future*, was being written this bit of wisdom got lost. Instead, the Commission adopted Sustainable Development as its centerpiece, and in its follow-up the Canadian Task Force — mindful that commerce rules the world — further refined the goal toward which all should strive as *Sustainable Economic Development*. Whatever happened to *Sustainable Environment*?

Perhaps the elusiveness of the concept accounts for its slipping through the cracks. Environment is a vague word with built-in wooliness. It is unique in being its own put-down, its own pejorative, for it means that which surrounds something else of greater interest. It diffidently declares itself to be peripheral, unimportant, not to be taken seriously. Thus the Law Reform Commission in its exploration of the question as to whether crimes against the environment should be recognized, concluded yes, if people suffer!

The greatest boon of the NASA space flights was the revelation that yes Virginia, there is a real environment. No longer a fairy tale it has at last been seen, photographed, revealed as the cloud-swathed skin of the planet: air layer