



## The Good Fight

*Text and Photo by Joe Foy*

**T**here are two questions I like to ask environmental activists. The first is, “When did you first realize you were green?” People often tell you about their favourite childhood stream or forest. It’s a good question to ask because it unearths some great memories.

The second question is, “When was the first time you were confronted by people telling you that your efforts to protect nature were anti-human?”

The responses to this question are bittersweet. You often hear tales of plans laid with good intentions, only to be crushed by cold, hard reality.

I still remember the day when I gathered up enough courage to go into the local Forest Service office to talk to someone about a local hiking trail that had been obliterated by a clear-cut logging operation. I had thought, what could be more reasonable than to protect a hiking trail that families had been using for generations? I was genuinely shocked when the Forest Service staff made it plain to me that they did not care very much for my point of view.

But that’s nothing compared to the public information meeting I attended in the late 1980s about logging

in a watershed relied upon by several communities for their drinking water. I had stood up at the meeting to suggest that a small lake and its surrounding ancient forests be protected from logging. I was followed out of the meeting at its conclusion, by a fellow who identified himself as a logger, accused me of trying to put him out of work and threatened to punch my lights out.

Never forget that humankind sprung from the natural world. We are dependent upon it.

Here’s a bit of friendly advice for all those thinking of making a stand for nature:

First of all, never forget that moment when you realized your “greenness.” Hold on to it like a smooth stone in your pocket. The memory will get you through the rough patches.

And second – think about how your efforts to protect the environment impact the public interest. Are you protecting a public good?

I ask myself this question every time I work on a new issue. I have come to believe that a healthy environment is the ultimate public good.

When BC environmental activists advocated for lowering the rate of logging in the 1980s and 1990s, we were often accused of being anti-jobs or even worse – we were against the families of forest workers. Doesn’t sound like we were on the side of the public good, does it?

But in fact we were – and we knew it. In many forest-dependent communities, the large logging companies were allowed to log as fast as they wanted. Now in 2014, in these over-logged regions of the province, most of the big tree forests are gone. The timber companies have left town, the local mills are closed and the workers and their communities have been left without mill jobs. Clearly, over-logging is not in the public interest. Maintaining forests for the employment of future generations is a public good.

When activists seek to protect fish and wildlife habitat from being bulldozed for a copper mine, or when citizens band together to stop an oil pipeline from fueling the next big oil spill – not to mention runaway climate change – the public interest is at the root of their actions.

Speaking out to stop farmland from being converted into a strip-mall, or to prevent a mega dam from flooding a valley, is about protecting opportunities for future generations to survive and thrive.

Never forget that humankind sprung from the natural world. We are dependent upon it. When we defend the health of nature – we defend the health of humanity.

Now, let’s all go and fight the good fight



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