

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

* Transcribed

Seeing the Forest for the Trees: Implementing EBM in the Great Bear Rainforest: Status Update and Lessons Learned

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Question: (34:00) You spoke about separating science from the social decisions. I can understand that perspective, but I wonder about what questions science is answering and the role of the social values in determining what those questions are so that you are actually getting the information that you need to be able to make the decision.

Answer: (34:27, Holmes) The trick is, it's really about separating the scientists from the politics. You create a buffer for the scientists so they are not having to deal with the issues of politics when they are trying to figure out what's a risk threshold and they're not having to worry about whether they're going to get fired if they make the risk threshold too high because it creates too much of an economic impact. That said, there's a group of people who are going to define the questions that you want scientists to answer and they very much need to be informed by the social context and what decisions it's going to be relevant to. And it's not to say that you don't tell scientists what the decisions are, that you're asking them to create information to be relevant for, but what you try and do is keep them away from the politics so they're not having political conversations in the room and trying to decide whether or not they are coming up with something that is going to satisfy the political masters.

Question: (35:20) You said that two elections ago, you nearly lost this thing. Can you just explain what election you were talking about and what happened?

Answer: (35:36, Holmes) So, 2001, we were trying to get all of the protected areas put together. We were trying to get all the First Nations' protocols and agreements put together and we had a series of what were then nascent land use objectives that were almost ready to be land use objectives, but were not land use objectives. And all the parties had some problem or another that they were wrestling with, but they couldn't quite come to the deal with. So we pushed it right up against the election window. And at the very end, everybody came together and said, "Yeah, yeah, we're going to do it, OK. We can let go of our little problems. We're going to make the deal happen." And we were too close to the election window and because there had been so much conflict coming up to the election window, the government at the time decided that it was too dangerous for them, basically, to make the decision then, because it would adversely affect them during the election. And so they made the decision to not do it and they made commitments basically if they came back into power, to do it post-election. But what happens post-election, which I hadn't realize at the time, was there's just a vacuum for at least a year as they reassign portfolios and they figure out who's doing what and what the government's platform is going to be in the new world. And there was absolutely no focus on it for at least a year. So all the commitments that

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they had made in writing to us they just didn't follow through on, because they were too busy doing other things.

Question: (37:03) It was another election which we nearly lost the Great Bear Rain Forest, also. The election in which the Conservatives were elected. And I was involved in all that for a long time because the new government came in and, anxious to be called efficient at spending and everything, looked as if it was going to reject the former federal government's commitment of a significant amount of money. Has that turned around? I was wondering if that was the election you were referring to?

Answer: (37:45, Holmes) No, but there's two elections that we can say that affected it.

Comment: (37:49, Fraser) The point that comes out of that is that, I really thought it was almost lost. But we put a bunch of people together and got it turned around. We had to go to the politicians. We had to work hard at it. And it worked. So, it shows you how quickly you can lose ground and also how hard you have to work to get it back. Terrific presentation on your part. Thank you.

Question: (38:18) I certainly commend you for all you've put into this and having been on the outside and not being, I don't claim to be, particularly well informed, but I'm aware that the way the negotiations evolved did create a great deal of resentment. Resentment that the LRMP had somehow been compromised because people who didn't fit into the three categories of government, First Nations or environmentalists, but who nevertheless had a seat at the LRMP table, was sort of then excluded and I think, as you're probably aware, there's been a great division in the environmental community about this and some people feeling that, in fact, you and the others have sold out. That's basically, I think, what the feeling is and I think that's maybe due to a lack of communication and a lack of the transparency that you acknowledge is really important. Do you feel that is one of the lessons you've learned out of this?

Answer: (40:15, Holmes) I'm going to put it a slightly different way, I have a slightly different frame on it. It's been very interesting to witness. I think there's definitely a communication issue, but what I would also describe it as is, there's a philosophical difference in the environmental movement, there is kind of a spectrum, and on one end there is the idealists and the other end there is the incrementalists. And I see this as a perfect example of incrementalism verses idealism, because I think, in the end, everybody wants the same thing. In fact, I am absolutely convinced of that. Everybody wants the same thing. It's just the idealists want it all now and the incrementalists are willing to take pieces of it and build it slowly over time. And there's been a tendency to look at the pieces that have been built and say, "well, it's not everything, so it's not good enough." But the incrementalists take the long view and they go, "No, no. We're getting there. It's just we're doing it in steps." We're not done right now, the problem out there in the media and what keeps getting communicated is, "Whoa, we're done. We got this amazing thing", and everybody gets the message that it's done. But what I am trying to say to you here is it's not done. It's definitely

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not done. And I wouldn't be able to stand up right now and say, "Yeah, we got it." Yeah, we don't. I can't proudly stand before you and say I've got everything I need to have to be able to feel like I've achieved what is necessary here. And I think what happens with the idealists is they just look at what's done and go, "Well, it's not enough. You failed." And the incrementalists say, "No, we're just not all the way there yet."

Comment: (41:46) I think you're right in that and I certainly belong in sort of incrementalists step-by-step side of things, whereas others will go for all-or-nothing and then you maintain your honour, I guess. But I think probably it does highlight the need for communication and maybe that's something that people working on the Skeena Watershed can also bear in mind, that the importance of being inclusive and transparent.

Comment: (42:26, Holmes) I will restate again, maybe I wasn't clear enough about it, there is a philosophical difference, so even when you're completely transparent, sometimes the communication just passes in the night. And at a certain point, I just decided that that's really a lot of what it's about. It didn't matter how many times I told certain people, "We're only part of the way there." They just say, we weren't there, and it wasn't enough. We hadn't maintained our honour and our dignity. So I jokingly say now, I am laminated card carrying member. I have a seat. I have a window in the sell out club. Because I am an incrementalist. That's what I do. I'm interested in getting it done. And I just don't see how you get there in one step.

Question: (43:15, Brian Riddell) Well I have two questions. As we enter into the new programs on the Skeena, is the availability of the EBM handbook readily available? Is it something that people can go and download?

Answer: (43:30, Holmes) Absolutely. There is a website.

Question: (43:35, Riddell) It's also the second time, I think Merran gave a similar type of talk down in Palo Alto, and I'm impressed with the lessons and the way that you have summarized. Is there anybody trying to share this formally and writing up their experience?

Answer: (43:52, Holmes) Merran has got a version of it that I think she's written up. Ivan maybe knows this better than I do. It's coming. It's not quite done yet but she is definitely working on doing it.