

IMAGINE BC

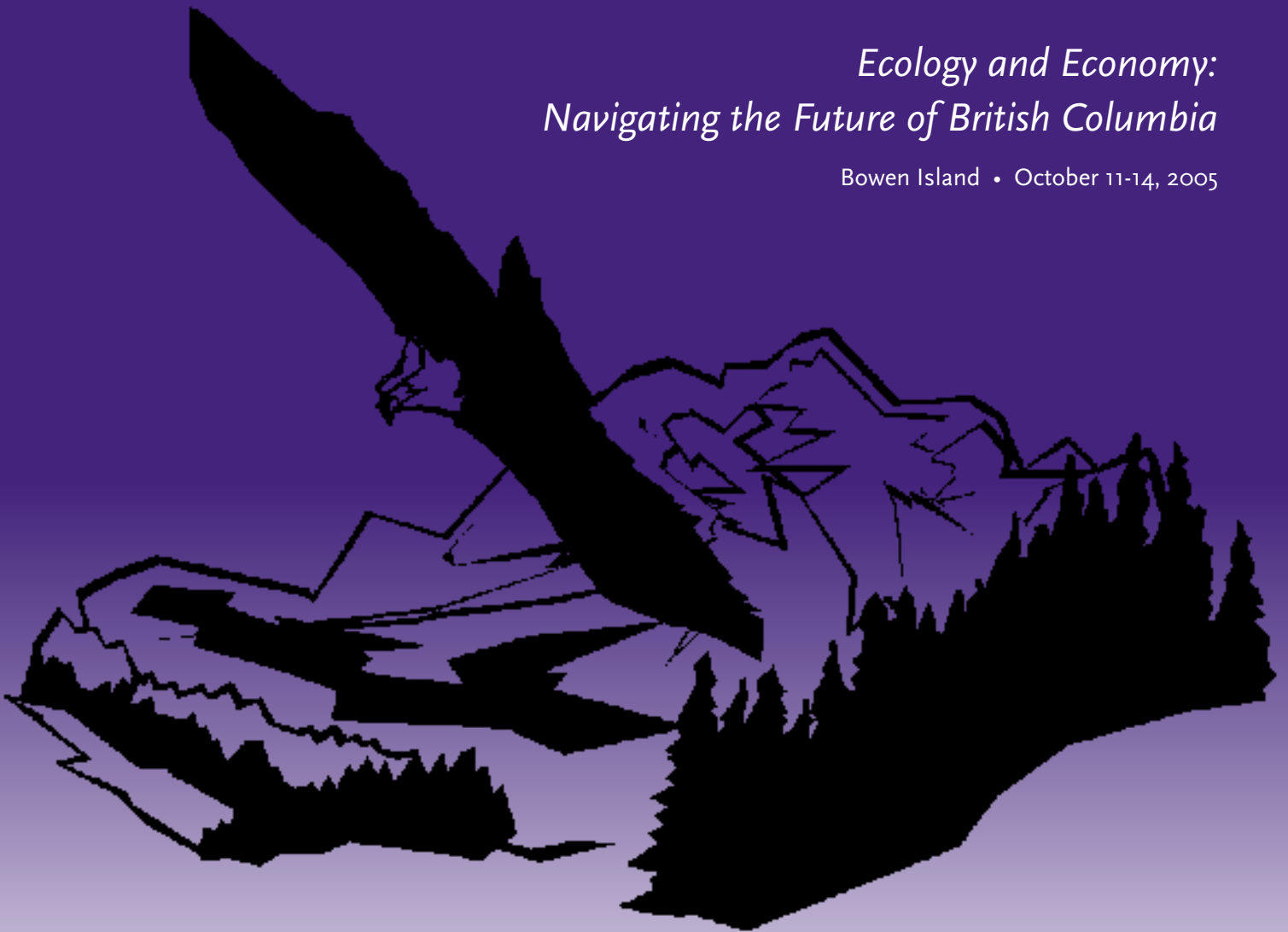
Dialogues on the Future of British Columbia

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

YEAR 2

*Ecology and Economy:
Navigating the Future of British Columbia*

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CONSENSUS STATEMENT

IMAGINE BC seeks to:

Create a network of interdisciplinary innovators who will generate provocative and constructive ideas about the kind of future we want for BC;

Engage British Columbians in meaningful public dialogue, transcending partisan politics, about our province's future;

Produce a number of educational materials that support public dialogue on BC's future;

Cultivate a culture of dialogue that engages citizens and specialists/experts/thought leaders to consider our future from multiple perspectives;

Contribute to public judgment about what choices we should be making for a sustainable future;

Influence public policy discussions regarding emerging economic, social, cultural, environmental issues and opportunities in BC.

BACKGROUND

Under the leadership of Simon Fraser University's Dialogue Programs at the Morris J Wosk Centre for Dialogue, IMAGINE BC is a five-year initiative that aims to create opportunities for a public dialogue on British Columbia's social, economic and cultural future. IMAGINE BC began in the Fall of 2004, engaging a small, but diverse group of experts in the examination of several broad questions: Is there a distinctive BC culture? How might we have economic prosperity, environmental sustainability and healthy communities? What should BC be in 30 years? And what are the choices we must make today to achieve that future?

This initial dialogue produced a consensus document highlighting a series of urgent issues and persistent questions. It also inspired and informed a series of larger dialogues that followed throughout the year, engaging members of the public, as well as experts in economics, ecology, education, health, Aboriginal issues and culture.

The result was a different kind of consensus—a very apparent public willingness to work toward a BC future that is sustainable, prosperous and healthy. This consensus gave us energy for a new challenge in 2005/06. A second group of experts gathered to dig deeper and look harder at a central theme: What is the current state of the BC economy and ecology, and what might it become? What complex choices face us as citizens, policy makers, academics, sectoral leaders and legislators? We also questioned the nature of change, trying to identify driving forces, as well as the leaders who can put ideas into action.

The document that follows is a brief account of those deliberations—and it is intended less as a measure of our success and more as an invitation for all people who care about the future of British Columbia to join us in this ongoing dialogue.

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INTRODUCTION

Among the world's immutable truths, this stands most certain: the future awaits us all; no matter how studiously we avoid thinking about it.

With that thought for inspiration, 13 diverse delegates—leaders in their respective fields—gathered from around the province to imagine BC 30 years hence. A landscape architect, a forestry executive, an energy executive, an entrepreneur and policy advisor, a cultural programmer and an artist, a First Nations criminal lawyer and former Tribal Chief, a professor in resource management, an ecologist, a journalist, a resort owner from the East Kootenays, an Aboriginal researcher, a finance specialist and a communications director for a large multinational company—almost all of them strangers at the outset—joined together for three days to think and talk about BC's future in the context of these questions:

Q. What is the current relationship between the ecology and the economy in BC? Where have we got the balance right?

Q. What would it take for British Columbians to assert proudly that we are a living example of a genuinely sustainable society?

Q. What might the future look like under different scenarios of economic growth and ecological evolution?

The third point proved most difficult; because under any reasonable set of assumptions, it seems clear that great challenges lie before us. The world's human population is rising at an unprecedented rate, and the human appetite for the earth's natural resources is rising even faster. A collision—or, at least, a constriction—seems inevitable.

IMAGINE BC's mission is clear: to provoke an informed dialogue on the future of British Columbia. And, ideally, to inspire the BC populace and the body politic to extend the planning horizon in BC from three or four years (the length of a term in government) to 30 years (a generation). To that end, this is the second formal IMAGINE BC Dialogue on the Future of British Columbia. And as with the first, it generated hours of notes and a host of ideas and visions for the future. This document stands as a record and an encouragement for others to join this dialogue—to make the best of BC's future.

Why dialogue?

Dialogue is a unique form of conversation with potential to improve collective inquiry processes, to produce coordinated action among people with diverse points of view, and to bring about genuine social change. Dialogue focuses on developing an approach to enable groups of people to dis-identify with polarized positions and engage in critical inquiry into their underlying assumptions and tacitly held views.

A DISTINCT BC CULTURE

Just as every journey must begin with a known starting point, every survey of the future requires some organized sense of the present. In the first IMAGINE BC Dialogue in 2004, participants set that context by asking: Is there a distinctive BC culture? In Year Two, that question was the starting point for the delegates and a place to inquire into the current state of BC culture and society.

The sense of pure culture broke comfortably again into four themes. British Columbians are defined by: their love of the land; their diversity; their physical location on the continental edge; and their still-unsettled relationship with BC's aboriginal people.

Love of the Land

While most British Columbians are passionate about the land—proud of its beauty and its richness—there is a sense that many people take it for granted. Within the province, there is a tendency to look at the vastness and wealth of our natural resources and presume that the bounty knows no end. And beyond BC's borders, some observers find our stewardship inadequate—at times to the point of carelessness.

“The future should be informed as much by rural values as by those in the Lower Mainland.”

—Carol Seable, President and CEO, Fairmont Hot Springs Ltd.

Diversity

There is no challenging the fact of British Columbia's cultural diversity, but there is reasonable debate about the implications of our diverse nature. BC—in the Lower Mainland especially—is one of the most culturally diverse communities in the world. It is a vibrant and creative population as comfortably joined to Asia and points west as it is to the rest of Canada to the east or to our American neighbours to the south. Yet there is a cultural divide between BC's urban communities and its less diverse rural regions. There is also a sense, on the Coast and in the Interior, that First Nations people have not been included unreservedly into the multicultural mix. It suggests that while we revel in the benefits of cultural diversity, we have not fully conquered the cultural divides.

A province on "the edge"

The question of the geophysical imperative—of the cultural effect of living at the edge of the continent—was not as prominent in this year's Dialogue as it was in 2004. But what was defined last year as a physical "edginess" speaks to a different kind of diversity. BC is unlike other Canadian provinces—in its ethnic makeup and in its traditional psyche. It has always stood at a distance—separated by mountains, borders and by the sea. BC sits on a physical and cultural frontier: it is equally a gateway to Asia and a first port of call to Canada.

Relationship with First Nations people

As referenced above, the nature of this relationship is unresolved. British Columbians have embraced elements of First Nations culture—especially First Nations art—and we are making progress in resolving age-old treaty claims. But the quality of our joint future seems to rest, in part, on our ability to accommodate the ethnic and cultural groups that have occupied this land since the beginning of human history in BC.

That said, socially, culturally, ecologically and economically, BC is in transition. Advances in transportation and communication have made the world small; but no less complex. And while technology enables us to harvest the earth's resources more effectively than ever, we remain ill-equipped to judge the point at which our use becomes unsustainable. In fact, even as technology insulates us from the vagaries of nature, it has a tendency to isolate us from the implications of our decisions.

Lawyer and delegate Mavis Erickson put this principle in perspective in a story about her grandmother's reaction to one technological aid. Erickson told of the occasion, after running water had been introduced to her home, when her grandmother stood before the tap and demanded, "Where does the water go? Where did it come from?" These are the kind of questions that many urban British Columbians have stopped asking—a habit of neglect that could have dire consequences.

It is through remembering and seeking fresh answers to such questions—through dialogue—that we will enter a more purposeful, and less risky, future.

WHAT IS THE RIGHT BALANCE BETWEEN ECOLOGY AND ECONOMY?

This is, in essence, an infinitely variable question; both the ecology and the economy are dynamic systems whose operations are understood at only the most rudimentary level.

To begin with the ecology, delegate Robert Butler, a Senior Research Scientist at Environment Canada's Wildlife Research Centre in Delta, BC and an adjunct professor in Biological Sciences at Simon Fraser University, led the IMAGINE BC discussion on the nature of the earth's ecological systems, describing some of the most fundamental building blocks and some of the most complex relationships. He described how BC is blessed with a diverse set of habitats with a temperate climate, and in most parts of the province, significant rain, creating an excellent habitat for diverse species. But he concluded with three points:

1. What is absent from the landscape is any true understanding of how the whole puzzle fits together. Within the current state of scientific understanding, it is impossible to know, unequivocally, when or where we might reach a crisis point in maintaining a livable human environment on earth.

2. According to the United Nations-sponsored Millennium Ecosystem Assessment Report (www.millenniumassessment.org/en/products.aspx), humans are already consuming the earth's resources at an unsustainable rate.

3. Given a critical lack of understanding, and a highly professional warning that current human behaviour may be ultimately self-destructive, it is prudent in planning all future behaviour to use what conservation biologists call the precautionary principle, i.e., when the consequences of an action are unknown, but are judged to have some potential for major or irreversible negative consequences, then it is better to avoid that action.

A fourth point might reasonably be that ecology admits of no borders. The worldwide migration of people and animals, and the portability of pollution, means that we can no longer imagine BC without also considering what is occurring in other parts of the globe.

"An unsustainable economy can be strong in the short term, but an economy that took advantage of the opportunities to save energy and develop new, cost effective sustainable products and business models would be truly enduring, in part because of the immediate opportunities to market these technologies and practices."

—Mossadiq Umedaly, Chair, Xantrex Technology Inc.

WILL OUR ECONOMY CONTINUE TO BOOM?

In the short view, our economy is booming but all signs suggest that in the longer term, we will have to exercise significant caution to maintain any balance in the economy/ecology relationship.

The world's economic systems are complex enough on their own. But in addition to being intricately intertwined, they are irrevocably bound up with the earth's ecology. If there is a difference between the two systems—between economies and ecologies—it is that economic systems tend to be self-correcting. While the elements of a sustainable ecological system are often allusive, it is easy to describe the elements of a sustainable business: it is one that is as likely to thrive and profit tomorrow as it was yesterday; it is one in which the business person is careful to maintain the quality and supply of input

and is adaptive to the changing demands of the market. Failure to meet these conditions results in immediate "feedback"—the business begins to collapse.

In the weave between ecology and economics, however, there are two complications that make it difficult to understand or define balance. First, distance often separates economic users from their ecological sources, making it hard to track the effects of consumption. Second, there are ecological costs, such as the production of pollution, that are not taken into account in the current economic system. It is because of these "externalities" that the economy and the ecology appears to be out of balance. That, in turn, leaves a challenge for policymakers to try to forge a balance, despite the weaknesses of the existing system.

There is also the problem of short-term decision making. There is, for example, currently a huge crisis in the BC Interior as the Mountain Pine Beetle is devastating stands of timber so vast that 80 per cent of the lodgepole pine forest is or will be infected. The massive damage can be seen from outer space. The short-term implication, however, is a relative economic bonanza. The forests, though dead, are still valuable as timber as long as they are cut quickly, creating the ultimate—and predictable—boom and bust cycle, in which mills will be overwhelmed with available timber until the wood disappears and then starved for more than a generation as the land takes time to recover, unless strategic actions are taken by government.

According to the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment Report referenced earlier, humankind already has a footprint that exceeds the earth's long-term capacity to sustain itself. And if every one of earth's six billion people consumed at the rate of the average North American, we would need the equivalent of three to five planets to sustain that lifestyle.

One further complication of the ecological/ economic imbalance is the economic disparity that exists between individuals and between regions in the world. The easiest way to calculate this disparity—at least as it affects the earth's environment—is through the concept of the ecological footprint: “the measure of how much land and water area a human population needs to produce the resources required to sustain itself and to absorb its wastes, given prevailing technology.”¹

Given the enthusiasm in the emerging economies of India and China to “catch up” to North America, it is clearly urgent that policymakers in BC and beyond seize the challenge of finding balance. To that end, and in the absence of perfect mechanisms to describe the interaction between ecological and economic systems, it is perhaps useful to work from a set of principles.

One set of guidelines, developed in Sweden to help guide development, is called The Natural Step. It includes four principles:

1. *Eliminate our contribution to systematic increases in concentrations of substances from the Earth's crust.*

- Substitute minerals that are abundant in nature, for those that are scarce
- Use all mined minerals efficiently
- Systematically reduce our dependence on fossil fuels

2. *Eliminate our contribution to systematic increases in concentrations of substances produced by society.*

- Systematically substitute compounds: replace persistent or unnatural compounds with ones that are more abundant or break down more easily in nature
- Use all substances, produced by society, efficiently

3. *Eliminate our contribution to systematic physical degradation of nature through over-harvesting, depletion, foreign introductions and other forms of modification.*

- Draw resources only from well-managed ecosystems and systematically pursue the most productive use of both of those resources and land
- Exercise caution in all kinds of modification of nature

4. *Contribute as much as we can to the goal of meeting human needs in our society and worldwide, going over and above all the substitution and dematerialization measures taken in meeting the first three objectives.*

- Use all of our resources efficiently, fairly and responsibly
- Plan and act in such a way that the needs of all people on whom we have an impact, and the future needs of people who are not yet born, stand the best chance of being met.

The resort municipality of Whistler adopted The Natural Step principles for its planning model and Canmore, Alberta is the most recent of Canadian communities to commit to these guidelines.

Another, broader guiding principle is that of intergenerational equity—a shorthand for the moral commitment to share good air and water not just with our neighbours, but with our descendants, as well.

¹ Rees, William and Wackernagel, Mathis. *Our Ecological Footprint: Reducing Human Impact on the Earth*. Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers, 1996.

LESSONS FROM DEEP HISTORY ON ECOLOGY AND ECONOMY RELATIONSHIPS

To inform and challenge our thinking further, this year's distinguished guest Ronald Wright provided a conceptual framework for the dialogue, drawing from his book, *A Short History of Progress*. He told a number of chilling stories of societies destroyed by shortsighted actions. And he raised a number of provocative and thoughtful questions: Where will growth lead? Can it be sustained? What kind of world are we bequeathing to the future? He challenged delegates by asking: Are we, as a species just like the ice age hunter? Clever enough to drive woolly mammoths over the cliff 100 at a time, but not wise

enough to slow the cull in the face of a dwindling population? Can we be wise? What would such wisdom look like?

Wright's requiem scenarios produced a sense of urgency among the delegates. Could it be that there is only just a short window within which to reverse possible devastation? And what will it take for our citizens and leaders to take seriously the interconnection between ecology and the economy, to abandon policies that favour short-term economic prosperity while bankrupting our ecological capital?

A SHORT HISTORY OF PROGRESS

Historian, archeologist and author Ronald Wright delivered the 2004 Massey Lectures, one of Canada's premier public lecture series broadcast annually on the CBC. The lectures were then published as *A Short History of Progress*, an account of humankind's record of advance—and decline—from the time of the hunter-gatherer to the present day.

The patterns Wright reports in the book are not wholly optimistic. On the contrary, Wright describes the book as “a police profile on a repeat offender called homo sapiens.” From the earliest days, Wright finds that humans have fallen into what he describes as “progress traps,” instances in which apparent advances in human practice or technology lead to short-term success but long-term collapse.

The first example he gives is of early hunters who, in numerous instances, refined their technique to the point that they wiped out their prey. It was often the same, Wright says, “homo sapiens show up and the big game go missing.”

Progress traps became more complex—and more devastating—as humans learned about agriculture and began to form themselves into civilizations: large, complex societies based on the domestication of plants, animals and human beings. For example, in Sumer (now Iraq), residents built one of the first great civilizations on the strength of irrigated agriculture. Unfortunately, over the course of several centuries, the irrigation plan—over flat, hot and poorly drained land—poisoned the soil with a salt covering so toxic that even now, 4,000 years later, nothing can grow.

Many other progress traps followed similar patterns. City states would rise and prosper; populations would explode, overwhelm the natural environment and ultimately collapse. In most cases, the people caught in these traps did not have the technological knowledge to be able to anticipate a pending disaster.

Wright found an exception on Easter Island, the English name for the Polynesian island of Rapa Nui. Residents there destroyed the viability of their habitat in pursuit of a statue cult. In the relentless effort to build bigger and more impressive offerings to their gods, the residents cut down every tree on the island, compromising its fertility and exhausting the material previously used for boat building. Even in a constrained environment, in which they had to have known they were cutting the last of their trees, they still destroyed their own garden, even as they used up the wood that once gave them access to food from the sea. The result was inevitable.

Wright asks now whether humankind is faced with a similar challenge—whether population explosion, record consumption and anthropogenic forces like climate change have put us at risk once again. And he counsels caution:

“Our civilization, which subsumes most of its predecessors, is a great ship steaming at speed into the future. It travels faster, further, and more laden than any before. We may not be able to foresee every reef and hazard, but by reading her compass bearing and headway, by understanding her design, her safety record, and the abilities of her crew, we can, I think, plot a wise course between the narrows and the bergs looming ahead.

And I believe we must do this without delay, because there are too many shipwrecks behind us. The vessel we are now aboard is not merely the biggest of all time; it is also the only one left.”²

² Wright, Ronald. *A Short History of Progress*. Toronto, ON: House of Anansi Press Inc., 2004.

WHERE ARE WE GETTING IT RIGHT?

The delegates were aware that speaking in terms of doom and gloom is not a motivating strategy particularly among people who are precontemplative about changing their relationship with the environment and the economy.

The following were identified as places where British Columbians were getting it right:

- Reducing our energy use through Power Smart Strategies

- Developing new sources of green energy
- Developing models of shared governance of the economy and ecology through such organizations as the Fraser Basin Council
- Developing new sustainable communities such as the South East False Creek Project in Vancouver and Dockside Green in Victoria.

IMAGINING DIFFERENT FUTURES FOR BRITISH COLUMBIA

“We have a rare opportunity to do so much right.”

—Donna Morton,
Executive Director,
Centre for Integral
Economics

Thinking forward 30 years, the delegates broke into small teams and brainstormed different projected courses of action based on the continuation of current trends and on a set of assumptions defined below. Building scenarios is a well-known approach for contemplating possible futures in a complex world and, in doing so, identifying what’s necessary now to achieve the best future possible.

Looking toward 2035, all teams worked with these assumptions:

- BC’s population would increase 36 per cent. Demographers forecast a population that is older and more diverse, with many new immigrants. Current trends also suggest the population will continue to concentrate in urban areas and that disparities between wealthy and poor will increase;
- Greenhouse gases would continue to increase and average temperatures continue to rise. This would affect the BC ecology: for example, causing unprecedented water shortages in the Okanagan and floods in the Fraser Basin as glaciers continue to melt.

The scenario teams were instructed to imagine three future economic trajectories: **high growth**, **low growth** and **business as usual**. The low growth scenario built in a catastrophic incident that kills at least 20 per cent of the population. Then, the teams reformed into two larger groups: one group imagined a future characterized by the **worst possible** outcomes of current trends; the other group searched for a **right balance** scenario.

Five Possible Futures for British Columbia

1. Mass Condos Averted: The High Growth Vision of the Future

The High Growth group began by discussing a vision most dire—imagining the worst in a world where the population has increased by the United Nation’s highest estimates: 36 to 40 per cent. In their first draft, the group saw high-rises stretching from Coal Harbour to Hope.

But Landscape Architect Judith Reeve said, No! Why not imagine natural-systems based planning: human scale housing in tight clusters that would protect green space and preserve increasingly valuable agricultural land? BC Hydro Vice President Bruce Sampson—well versed in startling predictions about

future energy complications—began imagining the advantages that BC could reap from its abundant clean energy and its experience with energy conservation. Mossadiq Umedaly, former CFO at Ballard Power Systems and the Chair of Xantrex Technology Inc., pointed out that BC also has a significant advantage in developing smart energy systems—innovations that can help reduce our own energy footprint while fuelling a growth industry for export.

Amir Alibhai, the Arts Programmer at the Roundhouse Community Arts and Recreation Centre in Vancouver, imagined a rich, inclusive cultural life at a level very close to the people—a life that celebrated diversity even as it reached across cultural barriers. What may have been a high growth nightmare was mediated by the wise action of these futures thinkers.

2. *Slow Boil Interrupted: Low Growth Scenario*

The Low Growth group also began with a bleak outlook. Peter Williams, Professor with the School of Resource and Environmental Management at Simon Fraser University, invoked the image of the frog in the shallow pot of water heating on the stove: by the time he realizes he should have jumped out, it's too late.

In this case, we are the frogs, ignoring climate change, consuming energy and increasing our population beyond the earth's capacity to sustain. This group also imagined a climate shift that caused BC forests to retreat, giving way to much less-productive grassland. It imagined a steady economic decline, hastened by a gathering energy crisis.

But in this scenario, the frog gets a warning that stirs him to action—there is flu pandemic in 2020 that kills as many as a third of the people in some high-population countries. It devastates Asia and Africa and wreaks havoc among the young in BC.

The calamity shocks people into action, putting the notion of sustainability of both an ecological and economical nature on every agenda. Governments change tax regimes, supporting development that

is innovative and has a light ecological footprint. As transportation becomes prohibitively expensive, local agriculture becomes more necessary, and more profitable. And again, the group imagines BC becoming a world leader in sustainable energy technology and in demand-side management—in energy conservation.

In every scenario the IMAGINE BC delegates developed, the tourism industry, as we know it collapses, either from fear of travel or from the increasing expense. But led by Carol Seable, President and CEO of Fairmont Hot Springs Resort Ltd., in the East Kootenays, the Low Growth team imagined a revived tourism industry, more local and based on wellness and culture. That wellness focus also extended to the health care system, which becomes much more prevention-based.

3. *The Uncertain Squirrel: Taking the Business as Usual Route*

The bleakest view—of these five groups at least—came from the Business as Usual team. This was the “modification” scenario, in which the BC people and governments never really look ahead, but continually try to adapt with short-term solutions. Again there are crises in energy and climate. There is a real estate crash in 2015 that leaves the best neighbourhoods in the hands of a small population of wealthy Canadians and a larger proportion of rich economic migrants from abroad.

The poor—by far the majority—are left in overcrowded and socially calamitous and low lying communities, which are critically undermined by rising ocean levels and flash floods from the Fraser River. Those floods, however, also become a thing of the past, as the US has begun drawing fresh water from myriad Canadian sources—by agreement where possible, by force where convenient. US migrants also drive up the BC population as conditions south of the border deteriorate even more quickly than here; the only social institution still standing in America is the army.

“We need to go in a good way upon this earth.”

—Cheryl Matthew, Executive Director Centre for Native Policy and Research

Under such duress, in this scenario, government in British Columbia is focused and resourceful. Donna Morton, the Executive Director of the Centre for Integral Economics, imagined an innovative coalition—including centrist Liberals, business-savvy New Democrats and pragmatic Greens—that becomes a global innovator in tax policy, making polluters pay and giving incentives to businesses and individuals who contribute to the economy without placing an additional burden on the environment.

First Nations Treaties have all been settled and some lucky communities are thriving. But delegates Mavis Erickson, a lawyer with the Prince George firm of Wagstaffe, Gosh and Co., and Cheryl Matthew, Executive Director for the Centre for Native Policy and Research, recognize that many other bands still struggle—for lack of capacity building before treaties took effect and, in certain instances, because the parties were not careful enough to protect the rights of aboriginal women.

In this scenario, too, culture is strong, based mostly in community pageantry that celebrates the diversity of cultural traditions. Only the wealthiest high-tech workers can afford to attend concerts or the ballet.

4. Dark Times

The year is 2035 and the world economy has collapsed—devastated by a double blow from a crash in the energy market and a sharp rise in extreme weather events. The economic revolutions in India and China both ended suddenly—and badly—in the 2020s after a succession of droughts gave rise to a series of food riots that destroyed social order in both countries. That, in turn began a cycle of desperation, civil disorder and war that has affected the whole earth.

In this dystopian time, British Columbia—so blessed with natural resources and a rich variety of ecological zones—has fared relatively well, although it is all but unrecognizable to anyone over the age of 25. As the world temperature has increased, BC’s forests have suffered a devastating decline—pushed

by heat and insect infestation to the north and west. What was once celebrated as Canada’s only desert, near Osoyoos, is spreading through the Okanagan toward the Cariboo. The interior has become so dry that climate scientists warn that three more decades will reduce Lake Okanagan to a puddle, incapable of supporting irrigated agriculture.

Populations have also marched north, as wealthy refugees from the world over—but especially from the US—have flooded into the area, inflating the price of usable land beyond the reach of most Canadians.

BC’s social institutions are in disarray—the few people who can afford to pay taxes can also afford to resist. Education and health care are entirely private. There are still some well-defended transportation corridors, but because of the crippling cost of energy and the severe income disparity, the only private vehicles tend to be brand new, outrageously luxurious—and armour plated.

For most people, “buy local” is no longer an environmental slogan, it’s the only choice—but shortages abound. Crop failure is chronic. Animal protein is unaffordable and the fisheries have collapsed entirely (salmon went first, followed by almost every other edible species). Dogfish is a delicacy.

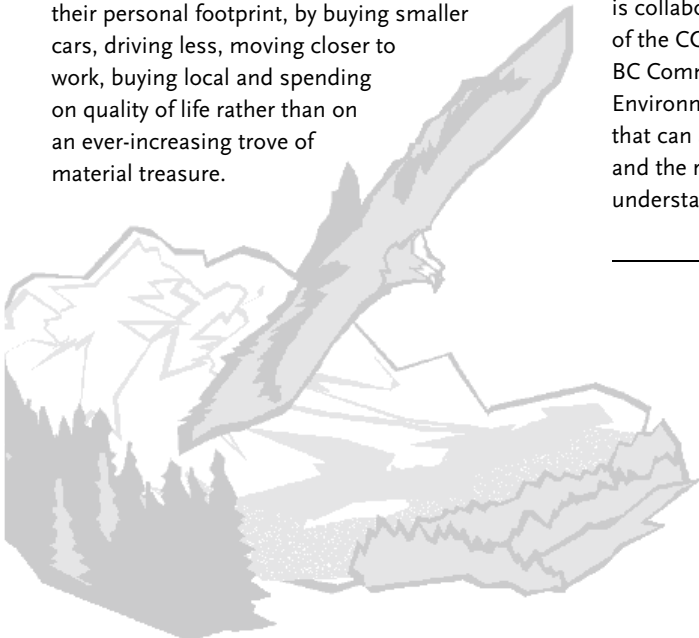
You can play out the details of this bleak future indefinitely, but it’s not easy. The delegates all found that the mind recoils; the heart longs to posit solutions that will save us and save our children from such a fate.

After testing this path of despair, delegates all agreed that a pure dark vision of the future is likely unjustified. No matter what unfolds in the coming decades, British Columbians will work hard to make the best of it.

All of the previous scenarios were built quickly and with exceedingly flexible assumptions. But no matter how the assumptions were adjusted, two fundamental drivers seemed to arise again and again. First, any future that does not include a significant variation from humankind's current course appears to end badly. As the already cited United Nations Assessment has confirmed, human consumption of natural resources is outstripping the planet's capacity to regenerate, and the surging economies of China and India are only increasing that unhealthy appetite. BC Hydro's Bruce Sampson captured the collective sentiment saying that if we are to avoid disaster, "we must find a way to modify our standard-of-living aspirations while reducing our ecological footprint."

5. *The Right Balance: Guided by Eagles*

This scenario, heralded by Alcan Manager of Corporate Affairs and Community Relations Colleen Nyce, adopts all of the best planning, taxation, innovation and conservation policies of the scenarios above. In this scenario, the BC public adjusts its actions—and welcomes appropriate leadership from government—without waiting for a catastrophe to catch their attention. Individuals make repeated, cumulative decisions to reduce their personal footprint, by buying smaller cars, driving less, moving closer to work, buying local and spending on quality of life rather than on an ever-increasing trove of material treasure.



Governments at every level bind themselves to ecologically conscious planning regimes, striving always to extend capacity while reducing consumption and waste. And both governments and consumers encourage the private sector to create product and service innovations that lighten the impact on BC's changing environment. Businesses that don't comply pay heavy taxes. Those that *do* comply thrive by selling their products or business models to an international community that is desperate for this kind of innovation.

Delegate Charles Campbell, a former editor of the Georgia Straight and a contributing editor to theyee.com, imagined that profits from this economic success, and especially the windfall profits from the energy bonanza, should underwrite initiatives to create a more sustainable economy, particularly in the energy sector. This set off a debate over whether the money might also be diverted to education, research and skills training or to social nourishments like arts and culture. Perhaps both.

Bill Bourgeois, professional forester and President of New Direction Resource Management Ltd., suggested throughout IMAGINE BC's Bowen Island session that the key to achieving the "right balance" is collaboration and dialogue. A veteran of the CORE process of the 1990s—the BC Commission on Resources and the Environment—Bourgeois has seen the fallout that can arise over environmental conflicts, and the resolutions that can be built on mutual understanding and mutual interests.

Three planning principles

1. *There is a surprising similarity in the DNA of all living creatures on earth: we should cherish that which we all have in common.*
2. *There is only one biosphere: we must take responsibility for its health and sustainability.*
3. *In total, there is no more—and no less—matter on earth than has existed since the beginning of time: in that finite environment, anything we take, we take from someone else.*

—Milton Wong, CEO of HSBC Asset Management

MAKING NEW CHOICES: WHO DECIDES? WHO LEADS?

“All British Columbians are passionate about the beauty of this environment and that passion provides a platform to build a consensus.”

—Bruce Sampson
Vice President, Sustainability
BC Hydro

“The best success often comes from targeting big, relatively responsible exemplars who have an interest in preserving their good reputation and who, by their actions, tend to lift the standards of their whole industry. Lobbying, moral suasion, outright threats; we have to use them all. We need to look beyond the BC horizon. We can’t really draw a line around our own utopia—global problems are our problems. We just have to hope that we can develop solutions here that will be replicable.”

—Dermot Foley
Vice President, Strategic
Analysis, Real Assets
Investment Management Inc.

Inspired with a sense of urgency emerging from the possible futures, delegates welcomed a larger group of guests (see Appendix II) for an evening session dedicated to the question: What would it take to get decision makers to rethink the relationship between the ecology and the economy?

This, once again, gave rise to a host of subsidiary questions: Who *are* the decision makers? Is it sufficient to lobby individuals for change or are the challenges so overarching that government must intervene to direct individual action? If government intervention is necessary, at what level? For example, if the problems are global, how can the solutions be local?

At one level, it seems clear that we are all decision makers; everyone can take actions that increase or reduce his or her personal footprint on earth. At the same time, many of the challenges are beyond the capacity of individuals to affect. The cooperation of governments, businesses and international agencies will ultimately be critical to finding a right balance. Good policy makes the healthy choices the easy choices for its citizens.

Conversely, though, governments cannot, or will not, move far in any direction without the support, or at least the acquiescence, of a willing population. So any attempt to encourage action must be aimed broadly at public education—at public dialogue—as well as specifically at appropriate levels of government.

On that question—which level of government is most appropriate?—the consensus is that the government closest to a problem should have the responsibility and the resources to address specific problems. But this, too, gives rise to a host of new questions: for example, how can a local government, with few resources and relatively little staff expertise, make appropriate policy to control the actions of a generously resourced multinational corporation operating in its jurisdiction? And if local governments cannot practically get the resources to manage their affairs, how can we avoid the imposition of simplistic solutions designed by governments that are bigger and better resourced, but well removed from the local environment? How do we prevent the creation of generalized policy measures that don’t fully account for widely varying local ecological conditions?

Two other issues arise in discussing how best to engage individuals or policymakers. First, it seems clear on one hand that people are most often driven to act by crisis or by the threat of crisis. For example, absent high gas prices or an imminent threat of an energy crisis, many people opt for the comfort of increasingly large vehicles, disregarding or ignoring the idea of waste or the potential long-term effect on the environment. Only when gas prices escalate, or the public discussion returns to the question of a long-term fossil-fuel energy shortage, do people turn away from sport utility vehicles and begin shopping for efficient small cars or hybrids.

But just as we seek to identify an appropriate level of government, we must also be aware that there is an optimum level of alarm that can be raised to good effect. If people fear that a crisis is inevitable, or so large that their actions are irrelevant in trying to prevent it, they will turn away. The threat itself becomes de-motivating.

The second issue is much more positive in its implications. At a time when reducing the human footprint is a critical goal, BC is particularly well-equipped to take a leadership role. The province has extensive experience with clean and renewable energy and is a leader in energy conservation. It is also a leader in researching alternative energy systems.

Far from being a limiting factor on our economy, the aggressive pursuit of conservation and alternative energy has the capacity to create jobs and economic wealth, especially as our expertise and technological advantage becomes increasingly valuable on the growing world market.

There are rich multi-sectoral, public and expert driven dialogues and debates to be had over the potential for BC’s future, over the flexibility of BC’s economy and the resilience of the global biosphere.

Guiding Principles for “The Right Balance”

- Celebrate success where people are moving in the right direction
- Relearn traditional knowledge for sustainable practices
- Develop and sell BC’s innovative ‘green’ technologies
- Apply natural systems planning in all planning and development
- Make arts, culture and creativity a central strategy for public engagement
- Settle treaties with First Nations communities
- Shift taxes (eg. make polluters pay; build in incentives for people and companies that “do the right thing”)
- Move more lightly on the land
- Control/lighten ecological footprint
- Apply “The Natural Step” principles in business practices
- Use the precautionary principle and don’t take action if the effects are unknown
- Identify indicators to assess progress towards change
- Develop and implement collaborative decision-making structures

“Trinity, Newfoundland is an example of the kind of action that a local community can take to shift the economy. Trinity, a Newfoundland village of just 281 people, was devastated by the collapse of the East Coast cod fishery, virtually its only economic input. Yet the town has recreated itself as a theatre centre, just as the nearby community of New Bonaventure has found renewed life as a film centre.”

—Amir Alibhai, Arts Programmer, Roundhouse Community Arts and Recreation Centre

FINAL THOUGHTS AND INVOCATIONS

The conclusion is clear: no one wants to spend any time thinking about a future that’s all bad. But if we don’t think about it—if we spend no time whatever planning beyond the next quarter, the next political term or the next international sporting event—the future will be bad. As Canadians—as British Columbians—we have a huge capacity and a rich natural advantage. It is urgent that we marshal our resources in a way that will make the “right balance” not just an imagined future, but also a likely one.

We question whether our current course is leading us in that direction. Some of the changes necessary to move us off a problem-plagued business-as-usual track will demand a coordinated and integrated effort among the many organizations and people of goodwill throughout the province. Now.

As British Columbians, we are inherently optimistic and we revel in our diversity—culturally, economically and ecologically. We are wealthy beyond measure, coddled and buffered by the rich natural environment that surrounds us. Do we have the capacity and clarity to reverse the troubling trends or will we miss our opportunity to be truly great—to prove worthy stewards of the treasure that is British Columbia?

Using our imagination, our ingenuity and the entrepreneurial spirit evident among the IMAGINE BC delegates, we invoke the image of the eagle, known for its soaring grace and, especially, its extraordinary vision. We urge British Columbians together to look sharply to the future, to consider what principles and practices will serve us—and serve our children—for generations to come.

“We need to get people to work together in a collaborative way; and to get them to apply what we already know.”

—Bill Bourgeois, President, New Direction Resource Management Ltd.

QUESTIONS TO GENERATE FURTHER DIALOGUE

Requirements for ongoing frank and informed dialogue:

neutral space

regional engagement

intersectoral involvement

public participation

shared decision-making

creative communication

strategy

Q. What are the catalytic actions necessary for citizens and leaders in all sectors and all walks of life to wake up to the current state? How can we revive an interest in the central questions that connect us to the planet, the country, the province and to our own communities—i.e., “Where does the water go? Where did it come from?”

Q. What roles must education, arts and culture, and dialogue play to engage our society in urgent conversations—to bridge our differences and forge consensus? As much as we need a new story, do we need new language to talk about the need for change?

Q. How do decision makers and citizens engage with each other to examine and understand the relationship between ecology and economy?

Q. Where are we getting the balance between the economy and ecology right and what can we do to track, map and amplify these successes?

Q. What are the shared values needed to guide our decision making today?

Q. What reforms to governance structures will help make better decisions for the ecology/economy balance? For example, the Fraser Basin Council was cited for its collaborative governance, as was Sweden’s Environmental Objectives Council.

Q. What about a provincial “expert-citizen” assembly on genuine, systemic, integrated and participatory sustainability?

Q. What new narrative do we want to create for the province?

Q. What will it take to make a significant shift to reduce the ecological footprint and sustain a vibrant economy?

THE NEXT STEPS FOR IMAGINE BC YEAR TWO DIALOGUES

The following activities are planned:

Policy Dialogue with an invited group of policy makers from four levels of government, the delegates and senior leaders in academia, non-governmental organizations and business.

Regional Community Dialogues organized in five areas of the province to occur between March and May 2006. Local groups will also engage in scenario building and discussions about important policy actions in the ecology/economy intersection.

Public Dialogue scheduled for March 30, 2006 at SFU’s Morris J Wosk Centre for Dialogue in partnership with CBC Radio’s BC Almanac, preceded by a week of broadcasted dialogue on the current relationships between BC’s economy and ecology.

IMAGINE BC Years Three to Five

Year Three: *Learning and Culture*

Year Four: *Community and Health*

Year Five: *International Futures Symposium and publication of IMAGINE BC stories and outcomes.*



Appendix I: *The 2005* IMAGINE BC *Delegates*

Amir Alibhai

Arts Programmer, Roundhouse Community Arts and Recreation Centre

Bill Bourgeois

President, New Direction Resource Management Ltd.

Robert Butler

Research Scientist, Environment Canada's Canadian Wildlife Service; Adjunct Professor, Biological Sciences, Simon Fraser University

Charles Campbell

Freelance Journalist

Mavis Erickson

Barrister and Solicitor, Wagstaffe, Gosh and Co.

Cheryl Matthew

Executive Director, Centre for Native Policy and Research

Donna Morton

Executive Director, Centre for Integral Economics

Colleen Nyce

Manager Corporate Affairs and Community Relations
Alcan Primary Metal – BC

Judith Reeve

Landscape Architect and Urban Designer
Toby, Russell, Buckwell & Partners Architects

Bruce Sampson

Vice-President, Sustainability, BC Hydro

Carol Seable

President and CEO, Fairmont Hot Springs Resort Ltd.

Mossadiq Umedaly

Chair, Xantrex Technology Inc.

Peter Williams

Professor, School of Resource and Environmental Management
Simon Fraser University

Distinguished Guest

Ronald Wright

Novelist and Historian
Author of *A Short History of Progress*

Project Team

Joanna Ashworth

Program Director, Dialogue Programs
Simon Fraser University

Nancy Hall

Co-Facilitator

Freydis Welland

Onsite Coordinator

Richard Littlemore

Writer

Appendix II: *Special Guests*

List of guests to the October 12, 2005 dialogue and dinner who helped inform thinking about the role of decision-makers and change

Lisa Barrett

Mayor, Bowen Island Municipality

Priscilla Boucher

Director, Community Leadership Strategy, Sustainable Group
Vancity

Hank Bull

Executive Director, Vancouver Centre for Contemporary Asian Art

Brian Dolsen

Special Advisor, 2010 Legacies Now

Dermot Foley

Vice-President, Strategic Analysis, Real Assets Investment
Management Inc.

Patricia Gallagher

Director, Continuing Studies in Science;
Adjunct Professor, Biological Sciences, Simon Fraser University

Cheeying Ho

Executive Director
Smart Growth BC

Jamie MacDonald

Policy Advisor to the Honourable Stephen Owen
Western Economic Diversification Canada

Rudy North

President, Director
North Growth Foundation

Peter Pearse

Professor Emeritus, Economics and Forestry
University of British Columbia

Milton Wong

CEO, HSBC Asset Management

NORTH GROWTH FOUNDATION



Western Economic
Diversification Canada

Diversification de l'économie
de l'Ouest Canada

IMAGINE BC is a series of annual dialogues presented by Simon Fraser University's Dialogue Programs, Continuing Studies that has set out to change the way British Columbians think and talk about the future of their province.

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MORRIS J. WOSK

Centre for Dialogue

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