



B.C. Forests: Extending the Gold Rush

Janet Sumner: 0:00

Welcome to *The Clear Cut*. Hi, I'm Janet Sumner, Executive Director at Wildlands League.

Kaya Adleman: 0:08

And I'm Kaya Adleman, Carbon Manager at Wildlands League.

Janet Sumner: 0:14

Wildlands League is a Canadian conservation organization working on protecting the natural world.

Kaya Adleman: 0:21

The Clear Cut is bringing to you the much-needed conversation on Canadian forest management and how we can better protect one of Canada's most important ecosystems, as our forests are reaching a tipping point.

Janet Sumner: 0:40

Okay, so we can start on our introduction for the episode that we had with Richard and Tegan from STAND. It's a non-profit environmental group that was started in Canada I believe it was formerly called Forest Ethics and a good friend of mine, Tzeporah Berman, was one of the original founders, if not the original founder, I can't remember the exact history of it. I think this is a really important conversation we're having with Tegan and with Richard. It's wide-ranging. You're going to benefit from this. We talk about biomass, we talk about wildfires. What else do we talk about?

Kaya Adleman: 1:21

We talk about the state of old growth in BC.



Janet Sumner: 1:25

Old growth in BC, the way that pellets are shipped around the globe. We have a good conversation with Tegan about her experience at [The Conference of the Parties](#), or what's commonly called the COP. It's a climate COP Conference of the Parties. It's all the signatories to the Climate Agreement. We also have a nature COP. We had that here in Canada last year. This is to talk about the climate COP. It's overlap with forestry and how biomass is becoming an engine for the energy transition and what that means for Canada's forests. What were your other big things that you're looking forward to in this conversation, Kaya?

Kaya Adleman: 2:11

I think when I started out at Wildlands League and I was just getting my feet wet in the very complex, many-issued story of forest management in Canada, the one piece of the puzzle that I think shocked me the most was the biomass piece and the fact that we're We'll hear more about this, but the idea that we're shipping wood pellets around the world and treating that as a carbon-neutral form of energy was very mind-blowing to me. I think you were saying, Janet, too, when we were talking about this many, many months ago, that this is something that we tell people who aren't entrenched in the issues, and that's also the very what. That's crazy. I didn't know that. I think, hopefully, that's also a takeaway that many of our listeners will get from this conversation as well.

Janet Sumner: 3:10

Yeah, this is. I'm looking forward to it. So, without further ado, we're going to open up the box that is Tegan and Richard and have a good conversation with them and learn a lot more about forestry in British Columbia and old growth in biomass and the COP.

Okay, well, today we are blessed to have both Richard Robertson and Tegan and I do not have your last name, but you're going to tell me what your last name is in a minute and Kaya and I are really pleased to be here ever having this conversation with you. I'm very glad that we could all get together at the same time in the same place and have this conversation. So let me just start by asking each of you to introduce a little bit about yourself. Tegan, can you start with your last name for me and tell me a little bit about yourself and how you came to be working with STAND, et cetera.



Tegan Hansen: 4:07

Thank you, Sure, thank you. Yeah, my name is Tegan Hansen. I'm the senior forest campaigner at STAND.Earth and I came to this work in an interesting way. I'm based currently most of the time here on the (Musqueam), Sḵw̱x̱wú7mesh (Squamish), and sə́lilwə́təł (Tsleil-Waututh territories in Vancouver, British Columbia, but I spent a lot of my time in the area where I grew up, which is the West Kootenays, Ktunaxa, Sinixt and Syilx territories, and actually what first inspired me to be involved in this work was learning how to snowshoe in Kootenay Pass, tracking a herd of mountain caribou with a local biologist, and that was a really profound experience, in part because that herd at the time was severely endangered and now actually has disappeared.

Tegan Hansen: 4:58

They have been extirpated or gone locally extinct and in through the course of kind of my life I've worked in farm, animal welfare, worked with farmers on certifications, I've done a lot of community organizing around climate justice and I came to no stand when I was organizing in Vancouver against the Trans Mountain Pipeline and supporting an Indigenous led resistance project called Kroquo Sautuk or the Watch House, and got to know the folks at STAND in the work they did and saw this real opportunity to bridge all of these worlds together, which often, I think in settler society we hold a bit separate between wildlife and food and land and human rights and climate justice and all these things which never felt that separate for me. And so in this work that we do on forest, being able to bridge those worlds and hold them together and I've been at Sands now almost five years, which is a little terrifying to think about and in that time I've mostly focused my work on our campaigns around old growth and defending old growth forests here in British Columbia. Yeah, that's me.

Kaya Adleman: 6:11

Wow, thank you for that.

Janet Sumner: 6:12



That's pretty incredible. So you started out by following a herd of mountain caribou and you ended up at stand. What a beautiful story arc Okay. Okay, that's great. I mean it's terribly sad that that population has become extirpated. Obviously that's a very sad story. Richard, do you want to give us a bit of your journey, and I can tell you're not from here.

Richard Robertson: 6:42

Yeah, people here tend to say, oh, you have an accent, don't you? And I'm like, yeah, I do, and so do you. But yeah, I'm from the UK originally. I moved here 10 years ago and with my wife actually, my wife, Angeline, works for STAND as well so we always end up seem to follow each other through our careers in various organizations. So we actually met in Germany. We worked for the Forest Stewardship Council in Bonn, and so I was working, both working very internationally in forestry and, yeah, I was working on national standards in sort of 40 odd countries, including Canada, and organizing people to try and try and align their forest standards. And so, yeah, I have a lot of experience in terms of internationally where forestry lies and how things turn out when forest industry comes along and starts doing work in the forest.

Richard Robertson: 7:44

So, yeah, impacts on indigenous peoples and on the environment is a big thing for me, and so, yeah, it's been a great privilege to come and live here. I've lived here for 10 years now. We have two children. They're quite young. We live on the Sunshine Coast to live on the territories of the Sechelt (shíshálh) nation and we would live right on an inlet and the Sechelt inlet and it's beautiful out there and we see, we see forestry going on around us and you can see the impacts, but also there's some really beautiful forests still here to explore and we love to go foraging, particularly for mushrooms in the right season, and, yeah, just get the kids outside and enjoying, yeah, the amazing bounty that is still, fortunately, here and that's what I'm inspired by and excited to help to further protect and enhance into the future.

Janet Sumner: 8:46

How did you come to work on forestry in in Europe? What was the path there? You're six years old and you thought, oh, that's what I want to do, or like, what was the?



Richard Robertson: 8:58

sort of yeah, I mean I come from now, I look back at it and we live. I lived and grew up in a very degraded forest environment but there was some very small. There are still some very small indigenous forests, native forests in the UK and they're like semi natural is how they're referred to. And so, yeah, where I lived and grew up there was a river valley and some, some, some native forests left there. I'd go walking with my dad on the weekends. We get out and I think that's why my passion started.

Richard Robertson: 9:33

And then I studied geography very broad subject and I got very interested in ecology through that and worked for a wildlife trust in the UK. So I was out in the forest from then in my 20s a lot of the time making charcoal, trying to to enhance forests there for wildlife. I had a door mask project going. The door mask species is very rare and in some some forest close to extinction there, so that was a little project I had going. But yeah, from from that I found I had an aptitude, if you like, for working with people bringing different interests together and working on forest standards, and that's how I ended up working on the UK forest standard and from there working internationally with with FSC.

Richard Robertson: 10:24

I thought I'd always like live in the UK and my passion was for these small forests there. But yeah, it's been such a great privilege to work internationally. I've been to the Congo Basin and I've been to Borneo and and all kinds of places in South America, Brazil, so I've seen a lot of tropical forests and Australia as well amazing forest there. So I've been so privileged to see the forests I have around the world. But at the same time I've been quite disappointed and disillusioned by the forest industry, and to come here and see how forests have been been managed here has also been. Yeah, it's been heartbreaking at times to see just how devastating some of the forestry here has been, and so that's that's kind of where my passion has come from, and I'm fortunate now to be working first down on this biomass campaign in particular.



Janet Sumner: 11:20

Okay, that sounds like an interesting journey from a door mouse to working and he can start working on following caribou. Caribou door mouse.

Richard Robertson: 11:30

Yeah, and don't just speak. It seems to be a common language between us.

Janet Sumner: 11:34

Yeah, it's a thread, okay, and you can choose who or how you want to answer this, but I just want to get a sense of a shape of the STAND campaign on forest. I know STAND does a lot more than forest and forestry, or STAND.Earth does a lot more than forest and forestry, but maybe you could zero in on just your campaigns and your thinking around forest etc. So it's not just forestry but forest. So I'll maybe just let either one of you pick up the baton and talk about that.

Tegan Hansen: 12:13

Sure, I can give it a go and Richard, feel free to jump in after. So STAND, as an organization actually was known as forest ethics for a long time, has a history of really focusing on forest issues through campaigning on corporate sourcing policies. I think there was a time when the early team at stand saw a real lack of action from provincial and federal levels of government on forest issues and saw an opportunity to build power by leveraging corporations and leveraging their need to appeal to customers as a way to change policy when governments were slow to move. And so over the years that's taken on certain campaigns from the Clayoquot Sound and the Great Bear Rainforest, but has really changed form, I think, as has been needed and called for over the years. And the change to stand was a reflection of, first of all, the organization broadening from focusing on forest to focusing on planet and climate and people more broadly. And so now the organization campaigns from a range of topics, from forests here on the West Coast of this continent to Amazonia Forest work with Indigenous federations in Amazonia to work against fossil fuels. That's rooted in local community policy opportunities in our safe cities campaigns to working on coal use in the fashion industry and fast fashion and so really the scale is broad and I could go on.



Tegan Hansen: 14:06

There's a lot of campaigns being run at STAND, but they share in their values, kind of principles around supporting impacted communities, doing work that really speaks to people in place and planet. And so forest while the organization is more than a forest campaign organization, certainly I think forest campaigning is at the core of the identity of stand still and specifically in the Pacific Northwest where we really have our basis, so especially in British Columbia and then also through Washington and Oregon to some extent. But our forest campaigns are really focused on British Columbia, which is where Richard and I live. And so since I started at stand, the focus has really been on old growth forests and on expanding this biomass campaign that Richard leads, because the biomass sector represents one of the fastest growing threats to forest here in British Columbia and also around the world really, but increasingly in other places in Canada.

Tegan Hansen: 15:15

And for old growth, the focus, I mean old growth has been a source of land resistance since colonization started here and old growth has also been a campaign that people you know you'll talk to people in BC who've been forest campaigners and they've been working to try to protect old growth for decades, and I think there's still sort of some public misinformation and you still talk to people who are shocked that [it's perfectly legal](#) to go cut down a 200, 300,000, 2000 year old tree. And even though we have very few of those, you know beautiful, big tree old growth forests that we can find remaining in the province, they're still under threat, and so we've seen an opportunity with the government we have, with certain steps that are being taken, to try to do a really big push with an enormous amount of other organizations and grassroots, and first especially First Nations, led efforts around the province to protect old growth, and so that's been a driving focus of STAND's work as well over the last few years.

Janet Sumner: 16:23

And I just asked a clarifying question on that, just to bring all of our audience along how do you define old growth or what would be the definition that you have for old growth? We don't need to pay attention to anybody else's definition right now. Absolutely. How would you define it?



Tegan Hansen: 16:37

Well, we use the [provincial definition](#). So British Columbia has a really specific definition for old growth, and that is when you look at a stand of trees, a number of those trees have to be 250,000 years of age or more in coastal or inland rainforest ecosystems and in drier ecosystems in BC, which is the majority of the province, 140 years or more. So that is the specific definition of old growth, and that's not to say those are the only forests that are valuable. You might hear us use things like natural or primary forests to describe forests that haven't been industrially logged or degraded, and those are also really essential. But when we talk about old growth in the context of British Columbia, that is, specifically we're talking about those forests where trees are either 250 years old or more, or 140 years old or more.

Janet Sumner: 17:30

So I'm just trying to do the math on that. So that's trees like from the 17 something or other, or 18 or 1900 years.

Tegan Hansen: 17:39

Yeah.

Janet Sumner: 17:40

You know, that's a lot.

Tegan Hansen: 17:43

They have seen a lot and I was in and I was really fortunate to visit a stand, a cedar, a small cedar grove on the coast this past summer and the trees hard to age them. They had some heart rot which means the center of the tree has kind of worn out. I guess you could say you could think of it, but the trees could have been anywhere from 800 to 2000 years old and they've been flagged to be logged. So you know that's, you think of those trees and what they've seen and you know the evidence of cultural use going back who knows how many generations from First Nations. It's really astounding to think



of those trees not just as a collection of wood but as a being that has, like, existed and withstood so much and has fed this deep, rich ecosystem. That is why there's, you know, such an abundance of life on this coast and this in this place.

Janet Sumner: 18:37

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Kaya Adleman: 18:49

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Janet Sumner: 19:06

Okay, Richard, I just want to turn to the biomass campaign, and you and I've had other interactions on degradation etc. So we can also talk about those as well, but maybe just fill us in on the biomass campaign.

Richard Robertson: 19:23

Sure, yeah. So for people who don't know what biomass is, it's trees biomass. Actually, to take a step back, biomass is a term that refers to anything that's been grown in terms of like woody material, leaf material. It could be waste material, but [our campaign](#) is focused on forest biomass and the issue here is that trees have been taken whole trees have been taken here in BC and they are being converted into pellets and then they're being shipped all the way to the [United Kingdom](#), most famously, but also we now find a lot of them maybe 70% are actually being shipped to [Japan](#) and they're being burned in what were coal-fired power stations and surprisingly I think this is the piece that people are always surprised by that this is then seen burning. That this is basically burning these forests is [seen as a climate solution](#), and this is a big solution for the countries who are part of the United Nations and who are trying to meet their global responsibilities or their global commitments for reducing carbon emissions. So actually,

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in Europe and the UK, this renewable energy source, as they term it, is actually making up almost more than half of all the renewable energy. So solar wind, which are now becoming so much more prevalent and so much more affordable, are not as big in terms of the UK, for example, and their measurements of their achievement towards net zero. And yeah, that means, then, that the forests here are now being exploited for this purpose, and so it's a new threat, if you like. And it's not only is it causing or enabling forestry to go deeper into the forest that already been exploited, but it's also emitting a lot more carbon into the atmosphere right at the forest level. So we're cutting forests that should be carbon sink and should be storing carbon, and then, add to that, we're then burning this, these forests and these trees, in what was a coal fired power station, and emitting carbon to the atmosphere, and then going back to looking at the forests here. What they're expecting is that they then grow back and that, therefore, the rationale is that it's carbon neutral. These forests are not going to grow back in the state. They're not going to go back for tens or hundreds of years, and they're never going to grow back to the same majestic state that we see them today, and their ability to store carbon, therefore, has been severely degraded. And yeah, so it's like on those three counts, this is really not a renewable source of energy, but, unfortunately, the international climate and carbon accounting rules have gone down this path and allowed for countries to not properly count the carbon that's being emitted by their forest industry at a country level. So they're not really looking at the soils, they're not looking at all the dead wood that could be slowly decomposing in the forest and not emitting so much carbon. They're instead saying, oh, you could take all of that material and burn it in a coal what was a coal fire power station somewhere overseas, and at that level as well, they're not then counting all of the emissions they're putting into the atmosphere. In fact they count it as carbon neutral. So the burning still is like retrograde in terms of the power stations themselves.

Richard Robertson: 23:40

The whole industrial revolution we came through using forests for power, for making iron and all the rest, and for then powering all kinds of industrial processes. And then people realized, oh, there's coal, we could use that, and it's we're. Our forests are running out, let's switch to coal and oil. This is a retrograde step and to be using the precious forests we have here. I think also the forest industry here.



Richard Robertson: 24:08

Forest workers who hear about this are also shocked that the resource that they feel they've been building up is then being cut, converted to pellets and burnt elsewhere as some kind of false renewable energy solution. So that's the situation we're in, and, yeah, there are a lot more angles to this. And the thing that's, I think we and other groups such as such as the Wildlands League and many others that have [signed on to a letter](#) recently, have come up against as the subsidies that governments are giving to this industry. Without the subsidies, it would appear that this whole industry would be would not be profitable. So not only have we got this subsidized renewable so-called renewable energy solution, but without the subsidies it would not be profitable, it would not be a solution at all. Wind, solar storage of electricity they're all coming up and they're all becoming very affordable, and yet governments are turning to this biomass as the solution that they're looking to, and so that's where we're really kind of scratching our heads and trying to find ways of letting people know that this is not the way to go. And yeah, we're going to degrade our forest even further if we go down this path.

Janet Sumner: 25:40

Sorry, that's terrific. I'm going to maybe spend some time unpacking that a little bit, but I just wanted to understand does the biomass campaign overlap with the old growth campaign?

Richard Robertson: 25:52

Yeah, that's a great question. We are certainly looking to do more of that and get more evidence that certainly we've done a lot of research already to show that whole trees are coming out of forests here in British Columbia and going into the pellet industry. Tegan, maybe you could talk a bit more to the potential links and things. You've gone and seen some of the work that's been done in terms of the CLIFLs and the pellet mills and what's been in our experience then.

Tegan Hansen: 26:28

Yeah, it's such an interesting question because of course everything is connected and certainly I think you can see the chain. The industry has shifted in BC and that itself is a



connection that underpins the campaign. So in British Columbia, you know, we're still seeing such a boom and bust economy. Some people have called it the continuation of the gold rush economy and communities are still really suffering from the impacts of mills that continue to curtail their shifts or shut down completely after having taken all of these resources from the local lands and then kind of shutting down their operations and moving to places like the US southeast, and in there that gap that's created, communities are looking to, well, what other opportunities are there? And the concern is, of course, that pellet plants have such a different level of what they can accept in terms of fiber. So what you know traditional mill needs a certain quality of wood to turn into, you know, products like wood, products that you might expect like two by fours, as an example. Well, pellet plants can use more materials and so if a traditional mill, a big company like Kenfort West Treasure, has cleared an area of what you know they can get and make a profit off of from the forest, a pellet company might have more opportunity to go in and still log other things that weren't considered merchantable.

Tegan Hansen: 28:03

Yeah, but the thing that you know Richard was also talking about that we're struggling to track is it is really hard to get information from the province of BC, which really should be tracking things like where this would go when it's logged in a cut block. It's really hard to actually find that out without doing a lot of really expensive research. And so a third party contractor might go in and clear, cut a block and they might do it under the license of a big company or the tenure of a really big company that has a mill somewhere. But a certain number of those trees might be cut specifically to go to a pellet plant if they, you know, log more or have trees that aren't considered millable at that other mill. So that's one piece that makes it quite difficult to track and we have, you know, heard of cases where places that were marked as old growth were awarded a license to a pellet plant through BC's auction systems, so BC timber sales. We've heard those stories but again, it's hard to track because when we've inquired about it, companies will often claim that they'll sell the big trees to a mill to mill for things like again, like your, two by fours, so without actually being there on the land all the time and following these tracks and I mean it's a lot more complicated than that but you can't actually tell where things are going. And so that's one challenge that we've encountered with pellet plants.



Tegan Hansen: 29:37

Now I have gone and visited, like Richard said, I've gone and visited cut blocks that were logged by a pellet company north on the daycast territories, north of Prince George, and I've seen pellet plants in Burns Lake in south of Prince George, in these communities where you have a pellet plant and a huge yard just full of logs and you walk the perimeter of that log yard and you can see all logs of all different species, some that look totally healthy, some that are bigger than you'd expect, some that you're kind of shocked to see that they're about to be ground up and turned into pellets, some that you'd be shocked to see in any log yard because you'd think that that tree should have been left standing. And that's the reality. And then I think the other and we can talk more about this. The other thing we've been talking a lot with our partners and around BC is well what the province is signaling some very concerning trends around their response to wildfires and we've, of course, just had the worst wildfire season on record in British Columbia and we're already getting signals, with the winter that we're having, that there's going to be potentially another record breaking fire season and some of the subsidies that pellet plants get from the government of British Columbia are gear from what we can tell. Again, it's hard to get information, but from what we can tell they're geared towards fireproofing quote unquote fireproofing communities so, which involves sometimes harvest.

Tegan Hansen: 31:22

And what we're really worried about is that, without good oversight and with really dubious science and with a province that's still struggling to admit that, yes, well, climate change is a huge factor into why we're getting the fires we're getting, forestry and the practices of logging that have gone on in this province for the last number of decades is a huge reason why we're getting the fires that we're getting and the severity of fires and the size of fires, and the province is still reckoning with that and struggling to admit its complicity in that.

Tegan Hansen: 31:53

And so, seeing, with a lack of oversight and the increased logging that's also going to feed pellet plants, you know, under the guise of fireproofing and without being able to evaluate are these good practices or not, and sometimes they might be good practices



and very often they might not be. That is a huge concern for us and, with the frankly, with so little old growth left and with the downturn in that sector, it is a place where we're worried about the ramifications and there's an inevitable overlap in our campaigns, because the provincial response to old growth and to revising, hopefully, its management of old growth for us, in partnership with First Nations, will likely have some profound implications for the wood pellet sector.

Kaya Adleman: 32:44

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It seems or at least in my understanding of the overlap between the two issues is that the justification for using wood pellet as biomass for renewable energy in air quotes is that the pellets are a byproduct of like mill waste and from what you're saying, that's ultimately not always the case, or it's hard to determine whether or not that is the case.

Richard Robertson: 33:40

Yeah, well, it's getting easier to determine whether that's the case. The industry the industry certainly takes a lot of what they call mill waste. But then if you say your say the pellet mill is right next door and this happens, a lot is right next door to a sawmill. 50% of the saw log is is termed waste. So this or the sawdust or the, or the kind of the I've got the term now David where you take the, the outside of the log off, you square it off. So yeah, my forestry terminology is right. Yeah, okay, so the so a lot of a lot of the log itself in terms of the sawing process, the milling process, ends up being termed as waste and the, the pellet industry, is then taking that material. So 50% of the log, and that clearly is not waste, that's going in back into the system and it's, it's turning over a profit, or at least a subsidized profit in the case of pellets. So it can't be discounted and treated as waste in this way, and so then we're. So that's some of the material that's going in.

Richard Robertson: 35:06



Clearly, then the, the mills, are complicit and the UK, in their sourcing, is out, holds them to be complicit. They turn this as residues. So even if the, the pellets are made from this waste or residue material, their responsibility according to the UK sustainability criteria is to still look and say where did this, where did this would come from? Did it come from what we might term a high conservation value forest and all growth forest? And this and the likelihood of that happening when you're sourcing from a, from a log yard or that, where there's logs coming in from a huge area and and the soulmail is taking in everything that they can get and legally taking all growth forest is very high. The chances of you getting all growth in there is super high. So that, yeah, trying to trace that back and to demonstrate from a forest to the pellet, this is all growth forest is, is clearly very difficult thing to do, and not only for us but also for the industry. Trying to try to show, oh yeah, we're all sustainable, we're doing the right thing. I don't see how they can show that and that's that's a big gap in their sustainability claims, if you like, and I think that's something that we in the future would would certainly like to look more deeply into.

Kaya Adleman: 36:30

Do you think other developed countries who are looking to source biomass from Canada choose to do so because of the image that Canada is a leader in sustainable forest management and that they feel safe doing so? There's the underlying assumption that it will satisfy any sustainability guidelines or requirements that those countries might have individually.

Richard Robertson: 37:01

Yeah, I think so. I think the way that Canada has been selling itself as having a sustainable forest industry and we are seen as a very green country in terms of our forestry, yeah, that's certainly been a factor in countries like the UK and now Japan taking timber from here and believing that it's sourced from forests that are going to go on forever, and they're certainly not going on forever in the state that they were, even a few decades ago.

Richard Robertson: 37:36

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We've seen a huge amount of degradation in the forests here. That's the real picture and that's the picture that we and partners, engos around the country are trying to paint and depict. Unfortunately, yeah, the government is still trying to define for themselves what degradation is, but they're coming up against Europe, which European regulators are saying now that they will not accept wood from degradation and deforestation. So those two things together. Also at the recent COP, which we might want to talk a bit more about, there was mention in the papers that came out of that, the announcements, the agreements that they made, that forest degradation was not acceptable and that biomass was also had to look to that and understand yeah, this is not the way to be going.

Janet Sumner: 38:47

I'm going to geek out a bit with you, Richard. Right now I want to just talk about biomass and some of the carbon exchanges. And so we've worked a little bit on biomass and I'll just be very clear Wildlands League is of the opinion that biomass can work in very limited situations. For example, if you're truly using mill waste, maybe heat the mill that you're working in. That's when you could say biomass, because it is a waste product that was produced by that mill and you were going to use it. You'd still have to go back and prove that the forest that you harvested was being sustainably harvested, which is another question entirely.

Janet Sumner: 39:33

But just to put that on the table, we're not ideologically opposed that biomass can never, ever, ever, ever work. We're just saying that there's some clear definitions around that. So somebody cuts a tree down, it goes to a mill. Some of the planning of that plank to get it to be square from a round tree creates some waste, and that waste in the sawdust goes where? Because I'm assuming it's kind of wet wood. Is that correct? Where does that go?

Richard Robertson: 40:14

Yeah, so there are lots of different potential uses for that so-called waste.



Janet Sumner: 40:23

But doesn't it have to get dried out at some point?

Richard Robertson: 40:25

That's true. Yeah, so that's another aspect of the industry as well Drying pellets. It varies as to how they dry pellets, so different pellet mills will do it in different ways. But sometimes they use gas, so they're emitting. Yeah, they're using a high carbon fuel to dry, so do we?

Janet Sumner: 40:50

count that? When we look at the pellets like, is that carbon that was used to dry that fuel source? Does that get counted into the carbon equation?

Richard Robertson: 40:58

Internationally they're supposed to, yeah, so, from the mills here. So there's one big company actually, which we haven't named yet, and that company is Drax. So Drax is the name of a tiny little village, originally in Yorkshire, and that is where one of the biggest I think is the biggest what was the coal-fired power station in Europe is situated, and it's bigger than actually that in terms of megawatts it's bigger than anything in here in Canada and in the US from what I've seen. So it's a huge facility. They're taking all the pellets from here to there.

Richard Robertson: 41:41

In terms of greenhouse gas emissions and in terms of the UK's sustainability criteria, they're supposed to measure every single operation that might add to or subtract from more likely add to the greenhouse gas emissions. So the drying process itself should be counted within that. And, yeah, there's some evidence recently published to show that they're not reporting very well on this and therefore the regulations aren't being very well enforced in terms of the drying processes and the emissions that are coming out of some of these mills. And then they have to ship it, and then there's the shipping.



Janet Sumner: 42:29

So that's got to require some emissions. Is that counted as well?

Richard Robertson: 42:35

That also should be counted. Yeah, that's also added into the equation. And so, yeah, from here to the UK. Well, if we fly, it's 6,000 miles, right, is it miles or kilometers?

Janet Sumner: 42:52

I don't know I haven't mentioned it lately, but that's a heck of a flight.

Richard Robertson: 42:57

Yeah, but if you, in order to take the pellets, they have to go around and down through the Panama Canal or wherever the route, and it's more like 12,000 kilometers, so it's a long way to go and there's a lot of emissions involved in that process as well. So yeah, the drying process, the cutting in the forest process and the emissions that come from that, it all should be and generally is accounted for in that process, but still, at the other end, they don't count the emissions at the coal stack, if you like, so at the power station.

Janet Sumner: 43:37

So then it gets to Drax, they burn it and the emissions that come out of the smoke stack are not counted.

Richard Robertson: 43:45

That's what you're saying they're not counted. They're not counted as neutral at that point.

Janet Sumner: 43:51



And it's also assumed to be neutral at that point, because you're going to be able to regrow the forest right, that Canada's forest and forestry is sustainable, so we basically sustain our forest, so it's no problem.

Richard Robertson: 44:03

That's the assumption. Yeah, and sadly, from the work we've done on forest degradation and the state of the forest report, the alternative that we launched, that's clearly not the case. We've been trying to point that out that these forests are not going to grow back in time either. The assumption yeah, if we're looking at 2030 to be carbon neutral as a grand kind of in the grand scheme of things, a grand target, 2030, the forest that we're taking from right now, there's no way that they're going to grow back in. What is that now? Four or five years, six years?

Janet Sumner: 44:43

So you've cut down a let's talk about a young tree. In BC terms, You've cut down a 200-year-old tree. You've turned it into how let's, you've shipped it around the planet. They've burned it. It's carbon neutral and if there was, if the assumption was correct that you could regrow in a sustainable way and that tree was to come back, carbon neutrality for all intents and purposes would be reached in 200 years.

Richard Robertson: 45:14

That's the assumption, but then the science further shows that taking those large trees out, those large trees and this is something that science has not been fully clear on until fairly recently more recent research would say that a large tree is actually absorbing increasingly over its lifetime. As it gets bigger, it's increasingly absorbing more carbon than a whole hectares worth of small trees that might surround it. So what we're experiencing here is our forest getting a lot younger as well. So over the landscape we've got these very young forests maybe to 60, 70 years before they come around and harvest them again. That's those trees and the soils and the ecology within there. There's no way that that's going to store the same amount of carbon as an ancient veteran tree within an old growth forest setting.



Richard Robertson: 46:15

So, yeah, the way they're accounting really does not take into account the natural state of things and this huge carbon sink that we naturally have here.

Janet Sumner: 46:30

I was trying to bait you into saying what I'm thinking, which is, I'm willing to accept your carbon neutrality if it's out to 200 years. If you want to treat these as carbon neutral, let's treat them by 200 years, which means we've well and truly missed our 2050 target. And so if you can find me a way to grow a 200-year-old tree in eight years or four years, give me a shout, because I think that's impossible.

Richard Robertson: 46:57

We're way off on our targets. You're right. It may be that certain communities and First Nations communities, who are very remote and rely on diesel, say, for example, for their power, it may be in some cases more efficient for them to be using materials that come from their own sawing and milling operations, and even in those cases, I think to think of it as carbon neutral is probably not the right thinking. It might be that it's a source of energy for them, but to think of it in those terms of this is going to grow back and we're going to become carbon neutral. Sadly, this is not really the case, and I'd hope that the government can look more to funding solar, wind-powered and ways of storing electricity that can help communities such as these. But some cases, yeah, they may still have to fall back on biomass, but then again, it's heavily subsidized and if subsidies dry up, then these communities might also be in further trouble if they then find themselves having to pay quite high prices.

Richard Robertson: 48:20

The international market, unfortunately, for pellets is growing and, yeah, the price fluctuates a lot and a lot of companies that have set up in this business. So there's two really big ones that I can think of Drax, that operate a lot here and a company called Enviva who really dominated the United States. And Enviva are on the brink of collapse financially. Their shares have fallen really dramatically over the last six months and they're now being questioned as to whether they should be on the stock exchange,



even because of the state the company's in, yeah, and these companies. There's a lot of reasons why that's happened, but these companies are very heavily reliant on subsidies, and those subsidies come from our governments and they're justified by them, as this false climate solution has been contributing towards carbon neutrality, and so, yeah, that's. The problem we're confronted with here is that it's being used almost as an excuse to keep cutting the forests, and that's really not the kind of climate solution that we should be looking to.

Kaya Adleman: 49:50

All right, Janet, that was a very, very interesting conversation that we had with Richard and Tegan, and yeah. So, as for my key takeaways, I think it's very interesting I think we've heard this too a little bit in the episode that we did with Peter Wood but kind of how the underlying frame in British Columbia is to kind of continue to log the forests in British Columbia and how there's kind of these insidious ways in which the action of continuing to log forests in BC is being posed as a climate solution. It's being treated as a way to manage in quotes for insect infestations, to be used as a way to suppress or mitigate wildfires. Now is being used as a way to offer a solution to the reliance on fossil fuels as a source of energy. So this conversation for me has been very emblematic of the ways in which we're still seeing business as usual approaches under a more polished lens that's more palatable for the public.

Janet Sumner: 51:10

It's a great rebranding exercise. Yes, right, like it's a pivot. We're going to rebrand. We're not taking trees, we're actually creating biomass. It'll help solve the energy transition and guess what? It's climate neutral. So it's actually really. It's amazing how that pivot can happen and I think for many people who are in busy lives, we think, oh great, somebody's helping solve the climate change problem and we want that, we deeply want that we have. You know, a lot of people are deeply concerned and have grief, and kids and older people and parents are concerned about the climate. They see it, they feel it, and so people who are saying that we've got some solutions. It seems like it's great news and there's a sense of relief.

Janet Sumner: 52:01



We have that same problem on, you know, mining for critical minerals, as if it's. You know, we're going to electrify all cars with these critical minerals. But heck, where do they come from, and how we're mining and what we're mining and the landscape that we leave behind. Does that have actually a carbon impact? We've got, you know, the ring of fire, or the proposed ring of fire, which is in this enormous peatland complex that contains billions of tons of carbon. Well, that's not going to be carbon neutral. Yet, you know we seem to. This rebranding exercise that industry and government seem to be able to do is very convincing. And I think the other thing that is reliant here in terms of the wood pellets is that we've had a hundred years of fire suppression, where we've been deliberately suppressing fire. So now it's like, oh, let's get in there and log it so we can prevent fires. Well, it, it, it. That's all built up because we actually stopped the natural process.

Janet Sumner: 53:00

And the other thing I found very interesting of what Richard was saying is that 50% of a saw log is deemed waste. And then the other thing that happens for me is that 50% of a saw log has an economic value because now it's getting turned into wood pellets. So we're harvesting and 50% of that log is being used for biomass. In other words, it might have not been economically feasible to take that tree down if we didn't have the marketplace for biomass. And then, yeah, I guess we're we're hearing that it's that one of the unintended consequences of the climate agreements is that we're trying to, you know, triple our renewable energy, and so that gets us into how do we get more biomass? Or people are seeing this as a market opportunity. So those are all things that struck me from our conversation.

Kaya Adleman: 53:56

Yeah, I think what was also interesting to me is this idea that the biomass that's being shipped to other countries from Canada is supposedly meeting all of these individual countries like sustainability guidelines for clean fuels, and I think that also just speaks to the kind of veneer of sustainable forest management in Canada that it's okay to take wood pellets as a source of renewable energy from Canada because it's a it's a leader in sustainable forest management.



Janet Sumner: 54:34

Well, we have a roaring second episode coming up, so I know that people will be delighted to listen to that as well, because it's it gets into the COP and other issues, and so I'm looking forward to the second part of this.

Kaya Adleman: 54:46

Yeah, me too.

Janet Sumner: 54:50

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Kaya Adleman: 55:01

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Janet Sumner: 55:22

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Kaya Adleman: 55:28

See you next time.