

Co-Management

Background

Sharing power, benefits, and responsibility

Co-management is a social and institutional experiment. It involves the genuine sharing of power, management responsibility, and benefits between two or more groups with interests and values related to joint resources. It can involve Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal groups, government and non-governmental organizations, as well as industry. Co-management can arise from formal or informal agreements. It can have a regional geographic focus, such as the Gwaii Haanas Agreement or the NorSask Forest Management License Area. It can target particular species, as in the case of the Porcupine Caribou Co-Management Board, or involve multiple species, as does the Wildlife Management Advisory Committee for the Yukon North Slope. However, all co-management arrangements share several common features. They:

- ◆ involve two or more parties with interests and values in a common area or resource,
- ◆ attempt to balance relationships, and
- ◆ require sharing of management responsibilities and benefits.

While each arrangement has a different outlook and approach, they share a common goal - the maintenance of healthy regional environments and communities. Currently, it is not clear to what degree and under what circumstances co-management is workable, and what the prospects are for achieving its goals.



Alternative Models of Joint Forest Management

Joint ventures - where forest harvesting and management initiatives are undertaken by two partners (often First Nation and industry) and each party contributes capital to the venture. They allow groups to combine their resources and capacities, and benefit from development. These can result in conflict between business and social objectives.

Community forests - are locally controlled and managed for multiple objectives and community benefits according to an ecosystem management approach. The three key features of community forests are local control, commitment to sustainability, and benefits for local communities. Community forests share many of the same promises and challenges as co-management.



Why Co-management?

Recent political and legal developments in Canada encourage cooperation among government, industry, and First Nations. Co-management is seen as a means of enabling this cooperation. It offers an important approach to the future stewardship of resources and is intended to blend knowledge and value systems, gain greater community support, and enhance the effectiveness of resource management. Co-management arrangements have met with mixed success depending on their structure, operations, and membership, as well as the severity of challenges they face.

Levels of Power Sharing

Think of co-management in terms of a ladder with power sharing decreasing as you climb down the rungs. At the bottom rung, decision-making authority and community input are minimal. At the *Informing* stage, the community is informed about decisions which have already been made. At the *Consulting* level, community input is solicited but not necessarily heeded. At the *Cooperation* level, the community begins to have input into management; there is recognition and appreciation of each party's abilities and needs, and the development of mutual respect. At the *Communication* level, two-way communication is initiated; while government retains all decision-making power, local concerns do influence management. Co-management, as it is generally understood, does not begin to occur until level five, *Advisory Committees*. At this level, there is an agreement to share power and to take joint action on common objectives. At the *Management Board* level, a common vision and shared goals are implemented. The highest level is *Partnership or Community Control*, with joint decision-making, equal partnership, and community participation.



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The content and structure of forest co-management in Canada varies widely and is still in the process of being defined. Co-management is proving to be a dynamic and evolving process.

Co-management Benefits

- improved communication and understanding between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal groups
- an effective dispute resolution mechanism
- increased local involvement in management resulting in higher quality decisions
- fairer management process
- increased local commitment to management decisions and their implementation
- increased self determination and cultural autonomy
- community based development
- decentralization of decision-making
- local capacity building and employment

Co-management Challenges

- maintaining a balance among diverse values
- uniting different ways of working, knowledge, and belief systems
- institutional barriers
- previous land allocations
- vested interests
- building trust
- concerns about abuse of the process
- inadequate allocation of necessary time, effort, financial and human resources
- ensuring equality for partners
- cross-cultural communication

