Three Landholder Contact Programs in British Columbia

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ABSTRACT

Landholder contact (LHC) has become a popular environmental tool in British Columbia and elsewhere. In LHC programs, representatives of an environmental organization or agency visit rural landholders for the purpose of encouraging improved land stewardship. This may take the form of environmental education, assistance with restoration, facilitation of contact with stewardship resources, non-binding stewardship pledges, voluntary land management plans, legally binding management agreements, or conservation covenants (easements). This paper describes an evaluation of the effectiveness of three rural LHC programs two years or more after initial contact, including the process used in these programs and the results of interviews and site visits with a sample of landholders in each program. Both attitudinal and behavioral outcomes of LHC programs after two years and likely ecological consequences were assessed. For purposes of habitat protection, is LHC a viable alternative to either regulation or land acquisition?

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An important piece of the environmental puzzle is the stewardship of private land for wildlife habitat protection and the amelioration of negative downstream environmental consequences. The traditional method for encouraging stewardship has been the use of government regulation and penalties. Municipal land use bylaws, provincial water and fisheries laws, and federal wildlife and fisheries laws have been used to prevent or punish inappropriate land use practices. To be effective, these strategies require a substantial commitment to enforcement and they seldom encourage positive stewardship actions such as restoration. They often tend to be reactive rather than preventative.

More recently, there has been increasing use of conservation covenants/easements to enforce land stewardship. Both governments and private Land Trusts have used these legal tools to protect environmental values in perpetuity. As with regulation, covenants and easements require the holder to make a substantial commitment to monitoring and enforcement. An advantage of easements over regulation is that easements can include positive restorative actions and they can be designed for the unique features of each piece of land rather than the "one size fits all" quality of regulation.

A third approach to stewardship has been through environmental education. Governments and private organizations produce educational materials, courses, workshops, and media campaigns to teach land stewardship to the general population or to targeted landholders.

There is some evidence that behavior change is a complex, multi-stage or multi-dimensional process involving education, emotional/spiritual change, public commitment, technical knowledge, regulation, and incentives[2]. Some landholder contact (LHC) programs have tried to address stewardship with this multi-faceted approach.

[2]Gardner, G.T., & Stern, P.T. (1996). *Environmental Problems and Human Behavior*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.Gardner & Stern.

Direct individual contact with landholders provides a means to individualize educational, incentive, and regulatory interventions for each landholder. LHC provides a vehicle for using different tools and techniques to encourage behavior change towards better land stewardship.

LHC programs in Canada were pioneered in Ontario about ten years ago[3] and early programs in British Columbia were modeled on the Ontario initiative. An influential handbook was created for British Columbia in 1997 based on the experience in several stewardship projects, including the projects reported in this paper.[4] This paper reports on interviews done in May 2000, with landholders who began participating in three different stewardship projects prior to 1998. The three projects were in different biogeoclimatic zones and different types of communities and used different methodology in their LHC programs. This exploratory qualitative study examines the strengths and weaknesses of these LHC programs from the perspective of participating landholders and the biological and community consequences of their actions.

THE PROJECTS

Trust A

The area served by Trust A is flat farmland, wetland, and estuary in the lower Fraser region with an area population of about 96,000. While the area is mainly farm and pasture, it is under great pressure from urban sprawl. The trust was created when funds became available to ameliorate habitat loss resulting from a major development project. The money was earmarked for land stewardship and placed in trust to provide funds in

[3] Hilts, S., Moull, J., Razadki, J., and Van Patter, M. (1991). *Natural Heritage Landowner Contact Training Manual.* Guelph, ON: The Natural Heritage League, University of Guelph.

[4] Duynstee, T. (1997). *Landowner Contact Guide for British Columbia.* Victoria, BC: Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks.

perpetuity to implement farmland stewardship programs that would provide habitat for raptors, herons, songbirds, small mammals and many other species of wildlife.

Interested landholders were recruited with advertising and through word of mouth and were asked to make a long-term commitment to reserve land for habitat use and to create and maintain hedgerows or grass margins. Financial costs were shared between the farmer and the Trust. The Trust paid for the design, materials and establishment of hedgerow and field margin projects and provided up to $300/acre/year for areas removed from agricultural production. The trust also assisted with subsequent maintenance costs such as weeding and pruning. The landholders were required to sign a "Letter of Agreement" for 5 or 10 years, with the option to renew for an additional 5 or 10 years.

Trust B

This coastal community of about 70,000 people is a bedroom community to larger centres. Forestry, fishing, and farming were the traditional industries in the region. In recent years forestry and fishing have been declining and retirement housing and tourism have been on the increase. Mixed farming remains an important part of the economy.

Three projects were conducted during the study period aimed at lowland/wetland landholders, holders of property with streams, and holders of tidal foreshore property. The primary objectives of all three projects were to provide landholders with stewardship information and support to encourage them to take some form of positive action either through doing restoration or through not taking a harmful course of action.

Landholders were contacted through initial telephone calls and mailouts or during community presentations and workshops. On-site visits were provided to interested landholders. Using a model of stages of change[5], workers attempted to match the

[5]Scull, J. (1996, 1999) Applied Ecopsychology. Papers given at workshops in Duncan and Nanaimo, British Columbia, and at the Land Trust Alliance of British Columbia, Nanaimo, BC.
Prochaska, J. O. (1995). An eclectic and integrative approach: Transtheoretical therapy. In A. S. Gurman and S. B. Messer (Eds.) *Essential Psychotherapies: Theory and practice.* New York: Guilford Press.

intervention to the readiness of the landholder. If the stewardship representative felt the landholder was ready to take action, a management plan was offered to help map out and inventory the natural features of the property and to set conservation goals for the landholder. Stewardship pledges were made by landholders to indicate commitment to stewardship without resorting to a legal agreement (such as through a covenant/easement).

Trust C

The project took place in a community around a lake in the interior of British Columbia which has been a summer retreat for about 50 years. About 1400 residents live there all year. Most of the area was extensively logged and is now second growth. The land is not suitable for ranching or farming and is used mainly as summer cottages and camping/recreational property. During the past 15 years the area has seen a vast increase in summer recreation.

Volunteers and paid staff organized a number of neighborhood meetings to discuss local stewardship issues. For landholders who expressed an interest, a "walkabout" was organized with private landholders. The staff and volunteers who visited properties helped identify local plants and other important aspects of the property (habitat potential, wild life trees, riparian zones, etc.) to help raise awareness of the natural value of the land. Color maps of the property were produced identifying these features.

RESEARCH METHODS

Sampling

The names of all landholder cooperating in a land trust project two or more years before were provided by the Land Trusts. A random set of ten numbers was generated

using a web-based random number generator[6], and the landholders were chosen by applying the number set to the list of names. The landholders were then contacted by Trust staff and asked if they would participate in the research project.

The population for Trust A consisted of 66 landholders. Of the ten landholders contacted, seven agreed to participate. The list for Trust B was 177 landholders. Of the 10 landholders contacted seven agreed to participate in the project. The Trust C project consisted of 10 landholders, 8 of whom agreed to participate. One landholder was unable to meet the researcher during the contact time, so 7 participated..

Data collection

The landholders were contacted by the researcher to arrange appointment times. The landholders were told that the interview would take no longer than one hour. At the beginning of each interview rapport was established and the landholder was told that their names would not be released in the research. Therefore the landholders' names do not appear in the data. The landholders were then asked 11 questions designed to allow open answers. The researcher kept notes of the landholders' responses. In most cases the landholders were happy to show off their property and the state of their involvement with the three Trust projects.

Data reduction

Data reduction followed procedures developed by Linda Hill[7]. The interview transcripts were entered into a database, with one proposition per record. These were then coded into categories and sub-categories by the three authors. One author (the interviewer) then made another pass through the data, harmonizing the three classification systems and reclassifying statements when appropriate. The number of

[6] http://www.random.org

[7] Hill, Linda. (1998) *Community-Based Participatory Research*. Duncan, BC: Building Bridges Consulting, http://www.island.net/~bridges.

statements in each category and sub-category were then counted and a list of all the responses prepared.

The results are presented in terms of the number of responses in each category, the number of landholders giving these responses, and a sample of typical responses in each category. While no comparative conclusions can be drawn from these results, they provide an indication of the range of responses elicited from landholders with a minimum of pre-classification or prompting by the researchers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The statements from the interview process were classified into three subgroups -- views about the LHC process, attitudes towards stewardship, and environmental behaviour.

The LHC process

Table 1 shows the percentages of process-related statements for each project. Looking first at evaluative comments, in can be seen that the percentages of positive comments are fairly evenly distributed among projects. The positive comments from Trust A referred mainly to financial benefits. “At least we're getting paid for the damage that the birds do,” “It helps us fund wise,” “ I would guess that the hedgerow that they put in here cost the trust at least $12,000,” “There will be a protection of the habitat and a financial improvement for us.” In contrast, the positive comments from both Trusts B and C referred to habitat and environmental benefits as well as to the LHC process. “In the back of my mind the Trust gives me support, because they think the way I do.” “It brings awareness to people who would otherwise be left unaware.” “Anytime you can make people more aware of these sorts of things it is in everybody’s best interests."

There were larger differences between the projects in negative evaluative comments, with stewards in Trust A being more negative. “They are supposed to keep the hedgerow up but they come here just to count birds.” “They count birds, that seems to be

the most important." "They are getting free money and attaching strings to it." Financial incentives do not necessarily promote positive attitude change and the prescriptive nature of the program may tend to create resistance. This is a common result in research on attitude change[8]. Many of the negative comments about Trusts B and C were related to the projects' apparent lack of clear goals and objectives: "I'm not sure what they were doing here," "What were they intending to do?"

The neutral comments, while informative and important, tended to be general or to contain suggestions that were not classified as positive or negative. "You need to go and contact the people next door. That's where this kind of thing is needed." "I said to Robert at the time, "what can you do for me."" "The place had already been logged."

Trusts B and C had educational programs, so it is not surprising that numbers in the "educational outcomes" line were higher than for Trust A. There was also a difference in the quality of the responses in this category: In Trusts B and C the landholders expressed that they had learned from the trust staff. "I became aware of weeds and the toxic nature of some of these introduced plants." "They taught us about the bees." The landholders from Trust A typically commented about what they had taught trust staff. "We taught them about livestock." "We taught them about farming."

Attitude change

Frequencies of comments about attitude change are shown in Table 2. There was a clear difference in the number of landholders predisposed toward land stewardship. This highlights the differences in the operation and methods of the Trusts. Trusts B and C recruited landholders by identifying a need and then contacting individuals who were interested in conservation on their properties. By providing financial remuneration to landholders for becoming involved, Trust A was successful in recruiting many landholders who had little predisposition towards stewardship.

[8]Cialdina, R. B. (1993). *Influence: Science and practice, 3rd edition*. New York: Harper Collins.

The “positive attitude change” line shows comparable degrees of attitude change among the three projects. For Trust A, nine of the 13 comments classified as positive attitude change referred to the financial motivation. If statements about financial incentives are removed, there were greater positive attitude changes in programs B and C.

In the “Negative attitudes towards stewardship” line it may be seen that few landholders with Trusts B and C expressed negative attitudes towards stewardship. In contrast, most landholders in Trust A displayed negative attitudes towards stewardship. These attitudes were expressed as, “People [in the trust] were more concerned about the birds than the farmers,” “Our attitudes toward the [trust] has deteriorated,” “There are too many fingers in the pie.”

The “No attitude change expressed” line tends to be somewhat high due to the landholders tendency to first answer that their attitudes had not changed, and then go on to discuss a number of attitude changes.

Behaviour change

Table 3 shows the respondents’ behavioural changes toward enhancement and conservation. The landholders' comments were classified as to whether they demonstrated a behaviour that altered their property (enhancement), or a behaviour that prevented an alteration (conservation). Landholders in Trust A described more enhancement behaviours than did landholders in Trusts B and landholders in Trust B demonstrated a greater number of enhancement behaviours than did landholders in Trust C. Landholders in Trust A were financially motivated to enhance their land. The difference between Trusts B and C may have resulted from the different land uses in the two communities. There was little difference among the three projects in reports of conservation decisions.

Becoming involved with community and environmental activism tended to be distributed evenly among the trusts. However, landholders in Trust A commented mainly on their activism within the trust. “We allow the [trust] to bring people in to show them.”

“We have made an agreement with them that is not binding.” In contrast, the landholders in Trusts B and C commented on their activism within the greater community. “I talk about, and promote the Trust to everyone.” "We go out to the schools and publicly promote awareness if the natural things.” “I stopped the neighbor from turning their property into a dirt bike arena.” “We encourage lots of other people to try to save this area from the developers and commercial interests.”

The line marked “unaffected” includes comments that expressed no behaviour changes, as well as landowners who initially responded that they had made no behavioural changes and subsequently discussed behavioural changes that they had made. This tendency to say, "Yes, but..." and "No, but..." created a challenge in data interpretation.

CONCLUSIONS

This kind of qualitative research is only useful as an initial exploration of the themes raised by land stewards. However, some tentative generalizations and hypotheses can be drawn from these data:

1) Financial incentives are effective in producing land enhancements.

2) Educational programs and financial incentives seem to be equally effective in encouraging passive conservation.

3) Both financial incentives and educational approaches produced a shift in values towards stewardship, but financial incentives also gave rise to some negative attitudes.

4) A common negative comment about the educational programs was that they lacked clear goals and focus -- this concern should inform future stewardship education projects.

5) The educational approaches were effective in drawing people into more neighborhood and community involvement in environmental issues.

6) The educational approaches mostly worked with people who shared some ecological values. The program with financial incentives was able to reach a wider range of landholders.

Table 1

The LHC process

Evaluative comments	A Resp.	A Lh.	B Resp.	B Lh.	C Resp.	C Lh.
Positive comments	41% (31 / 75)	7	36% (50 / 140)	7	37% (40 / 107)	6
Negative comments	35% (26 / 75)	6	19% (27 / 140)	4	24% (26 / 107)	5
Neutral comments (suggestions)	12% (9 / 75)	5	19% (26 / 140)	6	7% (8 / 107)	3
Educational Outcomes	11% (8 / 75)	4	14% (20 / 140)	6	20% (22 / 107)	6
How we got involved	1% (1 / 75)	1	12% (17 / 140)	7	10% (11 / 107)	7
TOTAL COMMENTS	75		140		107	

Table 1. Proportion of responses and number of landholders responding to each theme related to attitudes about the landholder contact process. There were seven landholders in each category.

Table 2
Attitude Change

	A		B		C	
	Resp.	Lh.	Resp.	Lh.	Resp.	Lh.
Predisposed towards stewardship	5% (3 / 58)	2	30% (21 / 69)	6	35% (12 / 34)	4
Positive attitude change	22% (13 / 58)	6	25% (17 / 69)	3	21% (7 / 34)	3
Negative attitudes towards stewardship	36% (21 / 58)	5	7% (5 / 69)	2	0% (0 / 69)	0
No attitude change expressed	24% (14 / 58)	6	33% (23 / 69)	5	29% (10 / 34)	6
Neutral comments	12% (7 / 58)	6	13% (9 / 69)	5	15% (5 / 34)	3
TOTAL COMMENTS	58		69		34	

Table 2. Proportion of responses and number of landholders responding to each theme related to attitudes about conservation and land stewardship. There were seven landholders in each category.

Table 3
Behaviour Change

	A		**B**		**C**	
	Resp.	Lh.	Resp.	Lh.	Resp.	Lh.
Positive changes Enhancement	20% (13 / 66)	5	14% (13 / 94)	6	8% (4 / 53)	4
Positive changes Conservation	21% (14 / 66)	7	28% (26 / 94)	7	34% (18 / 53)	5
Became more involved in community environmental activism	18% (12 / 66)	4	17% (16 / 94)	4	19% (10 / 53)	5
Unaffected	36% (24 / 66)	6	41% (39 / 94)	7	40% (21 / 53)	6
Neutral Comments	5% (3 / 66)	2	0% (0 / 94)	0	0% (0 / 53)	0
TOTAL COMMENTS	66		94		53	

Table 3. Proportion of responses and number of landholders responding to each theme related to conservation and stewardship behaviours. There were seven landholders in each category.