1

Defining concepts and spaces for the re-emergence of community forestry

INTRODUCTION

There is no shortage of places in the world where forests and their resources are subject to acrimonious, even fierce, conflicts. Across a range of jurisdictions, *community forestry* is one of the solutions being promoted. Definitions of community forestry contain the common perspective that local control of local natural resources helps to produce multiple benefits for local communities. Ideally, community forestry is different from conventional forest management and planning approaches. Community-based environmental resource management and planning seeks to achieve sustainability, fairness, and efficiency in relation to tenure arrangements, stakeholder representation, and the use of all available forms of knowledge in decision-making to support ecologically sustainable practice and mitigate conflict. In some instances, the potential for success of community forestry has been diminished by excessive expectations. However, defining a role for communities in managing local forests is a challenge for government agencies, forestry professionals, firms and communities themselves. The approach holds promise, but there are a range of dynamic factors and contextual conditions that influence the impact and efficacy of community forestry. This book provides a critical look at community forestry in North America and Northern Europe, one that seeks a more incisive look at the concept, its promise and its limitations.

COMMUNITIES AND FORESTS

Community forestry is neither a new concept nor a new practice. It represents a traditional and longstanding approach to managing human interactions with forest lands and resources, common in

developing regions and among the indigenous societies of developed regions (Poffenberger 1990; Mallik and Rahman 1994; Baker and Kusel 2003; Menzies 2004). Over about the past 150 years, there has been a slow and sporadic adoption of community forestry in North America, typically as an alternative to large-scale industrial and state-run forest management. While community interests often have had to compete with industrial interests and conventional forms of western forestry, a blend of industrial and ecoforestry methods is used in community forests in developed countries (Duinker and Pulkki 1998; Beckley 1998; Krogman and Beckley 2002; Teitelbaum *et al*. 2006; Bullock *et al*. 2009). Evidently discord among conventional industrial and community-based approaches has more to do with contrasting principles and vested interests than with actual preferences for forestry practices.

Despite resistance from conventional established interests, there has been a resurgence of community forestry in developing countries since about the 1970s, and even more recent revival in Canada and the United States during the 1990s (Mallik and Rahman 1994; Brendler and Carey 1998). This growth is part of a global trend towards increased local control over natural resources and benefits through community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) (Armitage 2005) and signals a global movement in forest governance reform. A growing body of multidisciplinary evidence now questions the sustainability of conventional forest management (and conventional environmental resource management practice and research in general) based on top-down decision-making, technical and market-based solutions, and sustained yield policies and science (e.g. Behan 1990; Ostrom 1990; Holling 1995; Hutchings *et al*. 1997; Clapp 1998; Bryant and Wilson 1998; Röling 2002). To address the ecological, economic and social limitations of conventional forest management, there is increased societal demand for more collaborative and adaptive approaches to better include multiple knowledge forms and local and non-state actors with different interests and values, as well as consideration for unique local contextual factors. Such arrangements diverge from the conventional government and industry control over forests, into the realm of forest governance – conceptualized here as the broader involvement of political actors, processes and structures that organize decisions and actions affecting forest regions and societies (see Lemos and Agrawal 2006).

Framed as a more sustainable option to industrial, centralized and top-down forest management, community forestry seems to present a "win–win" situation that can satisfy numerous needs and values. In principle, community forestry is more collaborative and

participatory as it frequently involves multi-stakeholder arrangements and seeks to incorporate multiple timber and non-timber values, as well as different, indeed competing, worldviews and knowledge, into human decisions and actions affecting forest ecosystems. Community forestry is also considered as a way to mitigate conflict over resources and territories, empower communities, implement ecologically-based forestry and environmental stewardship, and restore community and cultural links with local environs (Brendler and Carey 1998; Baker and Kusel 2003; Teitelbaum *et al.* 2006; Bullock *et al.* 2009). But community forestry cannot be everything to everybody. Definitions and expectations will vary, and these desires themselves can become the root of new conflicts as community groups deliberate what form and purpose the "new" governance structures should take. There is growing recognition among community forestry practitioners and researchers that the hopeful idealism that at times surrounds the concept must give way to more systematic examinations of actual experiences and lessons learned in various institutional and physical settings (Beckley 1998; Gunter 2004; Bullock and Hanna 2008; Donoghue and Sturtevant 2008). Implementing community forestry in policy and practice is complex and difficult work.

COMMUNITY FORESTRY, COMMUNITY FORESTS AND COMMUNITY-BASED FORESTRY

Community forestry has been widely interpreted by different people in different contexts. Local involvement in environmental resource management, and forest management and planning in particular, falls under many aliases, such as community forestry (Krogman and Beckley 2002; Belsky 2008; Flint *et al.* 2008); community, town or municipal forests (McCullough 1995); indigenous and Aboriginal forestry (Parsons and Prest 2003); community-based natural resource management (Armitage 2005); community-based conservation (Berkes 2003); and co-management (Armitage *et al.* 2007). In general, these terms are used to describe certain institutional conditions that facilitate greater local control over and responsibility for decisions affecting the use of nearby forests, and how and where various forest-derived benefits are distributed. More specifically, the main goals of community forestry are as follows:

1. To enhance local control over decisions affecting forests deemed by communities to hold unique local significance for economic, social and ecological reasons (Belsky 2008; Bullock

Figure 1.1 Community forestry advocates host a public workshop at Lakehead University in northern Ontario, Canada, to create space for public deliberation on the need to reform the provincial forest tenure system (photo R. Bullock).

et al. 2009). Typically, community forestry is implemented to produce more democratic and participatory decision-making processes that include citizens more directly than was previously done under industrial forestry regimes. Community forestry also seeks to improve the diversity, quality and quantity of forest-derived benefits that are generated and their distribution, as opposed to the usual primary sector jobs and revenue streams through timber harvesting and export. While full and direct participation by all residents in decision-making is often considered the ideal (e.g. in a cooperative structure), many communities pursue the desire for better representation and equity through elected shareholder boards that include a range of local stakeholders thought to represent different local values and interests of social groups within the community or region (e.g. conservation groups, indigenous peoples, local government, cottagers, recreationalists, local business and forest industry). Land ownership and tenure are important issues to consider in the local control debate (Figure 1.1). However, advocates see several possible spaces where community forestry could enable local control and benefits ranging from fee simple ownership of private forest land by a community, licensed tenure over state-owned public lands, or partnerships and mixed ownership models that

create a variety of arrangements (M'Gonigle 1996; Duinker and Pulkki 1998; Anderson and Horter 2002; Krogman and Beckley 2002; Teitelbaum *et al*. 2006; Belsky 2008). Direct and substantial local control is, however, considered essential.

2. To enhance local economic stability through forest-based economic development (McCullough 1995; Gunter and Jodway 1999). Community forestry is frequently pursued to create formal employment through forestry operations and tourism, and/or enhance opportunities for harvesting timber and non-timber forest products (such as for food and fuel) to supplement residents' livelihoods. There is usually

(a)

Figure 1.2 Contrasting examples of forest-based local economic development. (a) Local economic diversification through wood value-added processing and tourism promotion in Wawa, Ontario, Canada. Former forest worker turned artist and studio owner, Spike Mills, converted his passion for wood carving into a full-time occupation in 2007 when Weyerhaeuser closed its nearby oriented strained board facility, dropping 132 full-time jobs. Though surrounded by northern Ontario's vast public forests, most Crown wood is licensed to major companies (albeit non-operating) and there is no community forest in Wawa. Instead, Mills purchases timbers for his "Faces of Gitchee Goomee" from a private woodlot owner.

(b)

Figure 1.2 (cont.) (b) A two-person crew harvests cord wood destined for local use and export to Quebec. Freedom Town Forest, New Hampshire, USA (photos: R. Bullock).

an emphasis on maintaining a working forest that can promote local employment and local use, and on diversifying local economy through investment in value-added processing (Krogman and Beckley 2002; Teitelbaum *et al*. 2006; Belsky 2008) (Figure 1.2a and b). At its root, community forestry is linked with local economic development and the recirculation of resource and benefit flows within communities, or groups of communities within a region, to improve forest community self-reliance and sustainability. A commitment to the local contrasts greatly with hinterland models that historically have seen most benefits from resource development flow to core and urban regions, both domestically and abroad, while locals are left with the consequences of forest and capital extraction. According to M'Gonigle (1997: 39) moving away from a conventional "centralist" to a new "territorial" model of community forest development would emphasize economic value rather than volume, modes of production that are labor-rather than capital-intensive, and transition from corporate bureaucracies to local decision-making structures.

Figure 1.3 An example of ecosystem-based forest management by a community forest in Creston, British Columbia, Canada. The Creston Valley Forest Corporation uses selective harvesting techniques in its mountainous operating area (background) primarily to protect water quality and quantity for domestic and agricultural consumption (foreground) that supports a lucrative orchard, brewing and tourism industry. Such techniques can preserve viewscapes and aesthetics (pictured here) as well as generating timber revenues and maintaining caribou habitat in the high country (photo: R. Bullock).

3. To enhance sustainable forest management through improved stewardship and ecologically sensitive forestry practices that respect multiple timber and non-timber values (such as timber, water, soil, air and wildlife) and protect cultural, recreational and aesthetic values (Figure 1.3). Internationally, research aimed at evaluating the success of community forestry has tended to focus heavily on ecological sustainability as a key measure (e.g. a community forest's ability to improve actual forest conditions and address degradation) (Padgee *et al*. 2006). In developed regions, the erosion of ecological services, and increasing privatization and subdivision of open spaces into ever-smaller plots (parcelization) threaten local access to forests and forest-derived benefits. Many community forests emerge as residents, landowners, community-based

> conservation organizations and indigenous communities respond to local environmental degradation, and related social conflict, caused by industrial forestry operations on both public and private lands (Baker and Kusel 2003; Belsky 2008; Bullock *et al*. 2009). In locales where ecosystem protection and conservation are high priorities, ecoforestry and ecosystem-based management and planning are often attractive for community forest groups, as these approaches offer more ecologically sensitive options, integrate multiple values, and have been endorsed by both indigenous and non-indigenous peoples (Hammond 1991; Slocombe 1993; M'Gonigle 1996; Silva Forest Foundation 2003).

Scholars distinguish between *community forests*, *community forestry* and *community-based forestry*, though the terms are frequently used interchangeably in broad reference to some form of local involvement in forestry decision-making and practice (Krogman and Beckley 2002). In the broadest of interpretations, forestry cooperatives, planning processes with unusually high public participation and research-oriented bridging organizations such model forests are also equated with and researched as community forestry. Semantic differences are often based on varying levels of and distribution of control and benefits, ownership and access, and on the actors involved, as well as whether development and/or conservation values are pursued. However, in developed regions the terms community forest and community forestry are usually reserved for situations where a certain forest land base is collectively owned and managed by its governing political or administrative entity (Belsky 2008; Danks 2008). For Krogman and Beckley (2002: 112) a *community forest* specifically refers to "an entity that has an explicit mandate and legal decision-making authority to manage a given land base for the benefit of a local community," creating a high level of institutionalized community control and benefit. As seen in Chapters 3 through 7 of this volume, community forests in Canada and the United States can include forests owned and managed by a municipality, conservation authority, conservation commission, indigenous community or non-government organization.

While the term *community forestry* also "implies ownership or some type of tenurial arrangement related to [a particular parcel of] forestland" (Danks 2008: 186), others assert that community forestry could be achieved without actual community ownership under conditions where communities and forest managers form a partnership to

enhance local benefits relative to previous levels (Krogman and Beckley 2002). Others further classify sub-categories of community forestry according to underlying motivations and contexts. Community forestry serves multiple purposes: as *social forestry* to address deforestation in developing regions; as *small-scale industrial management* aimed at generating economic profit; and as *ecological forestry* which emerges as a response to environmental degradation caused by conventional industrial forestry operations from "outside" the community (McIlveen and Bradshaw 2009). Community forestry is very much about constructing "political space" (St Martin 2001; Pinkerton *et al*. 2008) that is oriented toward local control over resources, distribution of benefits, and decision-making.

Community-based forestry is a still broader concept that, while definitely aligned with the principles behind community forests and community forestry, takes an additional step back to include various potential stakeholders and institutional arrangements. Community-based forestry basically connotes heightened local control and local benefits, as well as local knowledge and technical inputs, and can include small private holdings such as family forests and farms, local government owned forests, and/or situations in which communities and/or non-government organizations share in decision-making and benefits through co-managing public forests with senior governments (Danks 2008). According to Belsky (2008: 219) community-based forestry "usually involves communities and their allies collaboratively interacting to increase their involvement in sustainable public forest land management."

To further complicate matters, *urban forestry* is sometimes equated with community forestry. For example, Gerhold (2007: 2) uses the terms *community forest*, *city green* and *urban forest* interchangeably with reference to the management of "trees, lower vegetation, open grass spaces, and associated wildlife within a municipality or adjacent to it." Lawrence *et al*. (2009) note that in the United Kingdom, community forestry has a strong urban foundation linked to city revival. However, McCullough (1995: 199) distinguishes urban community forestry whose "proponents emphasize care for trees and woodland parks that shade city streets or furnish open spaces" and where the production of wood products "is at best only an incidental part of this program." M'Gonigle (1998) argues that at best such municipal programs represent very limited forms of community forestry, where local representatives have a low level of control over meager forests and are relegated to tree planting. However, the proper management of urban

forests does contribute to soil and water improvement, to shade and ground cover, to aesthetics and to recreation, and can include mechanisms for public involvement – all of which are values that are in keeping with traditional community forests and forestry as outlined in the above sections. Urban community forestry comes from a tradition of urban planning and landscape design where managerialism and technocracy still prevail, rather than grassroots natural resource development and stewardship intended to promote community economic and social development (see Kuser 2007). Although nuanced, urban community forestry refers more to the technical approaches for managing trees in the green belts of built environs, whereas present-day community forestry is more closely related to grassroots movements for civic environmentalism and improving local social equity and wellbeing (Baker and Kusel 2003: 5–6).

With all of this in mind, in our book we use the term *community forest* to refer to the land base and associated entity responsible for management decisions. As *community forestry* implies human–forest interactions and the purposeful manipulation of local forests for local human and environmental benefit – that is, what people "do" when involved with community forests – we use community forestry to refer to the broader governance initiatives, institutions, economic relationships and environmental resource management practices that shape, and are shaped by, community interactions with forest ecosystems.

COMMUNITY(IES)

An additional challenge for conceptualizing and implementing community forestry is the inconsistent definition and application of the core concept *community* (Beckley 1998; Flint *et al*. 2008; Harrington *et al*. 2008). While community forestry research now acknowledges the futility and danger of broad-brush analyses and generalizations across local contexts, there is still a need for clear understanding to avoid the ambiguity that often surrounds the concept of community, and to avoid romanticism and indiscriminate usage. Indeed, using the "community" or "local" label to promote environmental resource management and conservation initiatives is impactful. Much like "sustainability," the "community" or "local" label has an inclusive and comforting ring. If you are interested in community, you must be interested in "doing the right thing," making the term perfect for use by various private, public and civic organizations when they want to persuade the public.