

Contribution to the conversations on planning for The 707 Community Park
April 25, 2009:

FOREST MANAGEMENT

The topic of this discussion group was “Do the Minimum / Let the park heal”. This note argues the case that “the minimum” might not preclude doing something to “help the park heal”.

Most people are familiar with the concept of the recovery of a forest after a severe disturbance in a series of what are called seral stages. The severe disturbance we think of most often is clear-cutting, but there are others. For example, disturbance caused by severe weather, insects, disease, the introduction of new species, and the extirpation of others. A seral stage is a temporary stage in the recovery of an ecosystem that is characterized by a particular biotic community. Following the most severe disturbance, which includes disturbance to the soil, the usual starting seral stage is dominated by herbs and shrubs. Foresters identify as many as six of these stages—herbs & shrubs; pioneer hardwood; early conifer; mid conifer; late conifer; and climax shrub/byrophyte woodland. Each of these stages has its attractions and each offers in varying degrees opportunities for harvesting non-wood forest products such as berries, plants, game, and mushrooms, and each has its own kind of biotic community.

Left to itself, a severely disturbed forest will go through a number of seral stages before reaching its climax phase, but this is often a slow process. What modern forestry and the new post-Clayoquot generation of foresters has learnt is how to accelerate or slow down the natural succession, how to prolong a chosen stage, how to revert to an earlier stage, how to skip a stage, and so on. The tools used to accomplish this include thinning, selective tree removal, planting or facilitating natural re-stocking, manipulation of species composition, mulching, and control of fires, animals, drainage, and soil conditions.

All of these techniques are labour intensive, expensive, and very likely not affordable except on a small scale with a plentiful supply of volunteer labour. However, this is not such a drawback as the purpose of such management techniques applied to 707 would be to diversify the forest, not to make it all the same. The “park” is a “forest” and I think we should at least see what foresters have to offer in the way of planning, even if there is ultimately no will, or no resources to implement their suggestions.

Reference: Ecological theatre on Gabriola—managing our forests, *SHALE* 16, pp.3–21, July 2007.