



# **Whither the Regional District? Rural communities and land use in a new relationship.**

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- Brief introduction to Regional Districts
- Regional District of Mount Waddington
- Recent Projects and Initiatives
- Key Challenges and Issues

# David Douglas (2005) on local government:

*Journal of Rural Studies 21 (2005) 231–246*

- Local government is often the centrepiece of rural political systems.
- Interventions to reconfigure local government are therefore quintessentially rural development initiatives.
- They serve to supplement, neutralize or detract from other development initiatives.
- Rural development in a spatial system of multiple communities, cultures and governance systems is challenging.

- There is no integrated theoretical framework for rural development.
- Local government is often seen as an entity that is there for governance, not economic production – but how do we define governance?
- **Question:** If Regional Districts are the centrepiece of BC's rural political system, how can they be better utilized or empowered to foster sustainable regional development?

# Regional Districts in BC

- Unique in Canada. Principle statute: Local Government Act.
- Provide local government services to unincorporated areas.
- Provide area-specific services across municipalities and unincorporated areas (regional and subregional).
- Hybrid federal system: election and appointment.
- Board of Directors Headed by Chair
- Board of Directors acts through resolutions and bylaws (weighted, unweighted and stakeholder voting).

- Delegated authority: Advisory Committees and Commissions that advise or oversee particular services.
- **Land use planning and growth management**
- Responsible for land use planning and development approval for private land in electoral areas.
- Exercised through a planning service, electoral areas must participate. Municipalities can voluntarily participate.
- OCPs, zoning bylaws, development permit bylaws regulate how development in electoral areas may occur.
- Regional growth strategies, Advisory Planning Commissions, Local Community Commissions

# Planning Authority

- Unless by agreement, Regional Districts do not have regulatory authority over planning and land use management for the region as a whole.
- Municipalities have authority over land within their boundaries.
- Property owners and developers must respect regulations and bylaws.
- With some exceptions, RDs do not have authority to approve subdivisions (provincial).
- Building Inspection powers: generally included, but up to local government to enforce.
- Consulted on Crown land referrals

# Crown Referrals

- Applications for use, sale or lease of Crown Land submitted to a fractured list of government ministries and agencies based throughout province (e.g. ILMB, Energy and Mines, Ministry of Tourism, Nanwakolas Council clearing house, Frontcounter BC, Health Authorities, Ministry of Environment).
- Agency refers applications to RDs and other agencies (including First Nations) with policies and regulations that apply (or simply a declared interest).
- RD staff provide comments and recommendations in light of local zoning, bylaws and other policies for Board or Electoral Area Director (advisory committees first in some cases)
- Application is supported, supported with conditions, decision is deferred or it is not supported.
- Response is submitted to agency, which makes a decision and notifies the applicant.

- Crown referrals a huge data resource for RDs and EDOs.
- Regional Districts typically zone Crown Land within their jurisdiction, which can be enforced as soon as a transfer of tenure occurs (to private).
- Bill 30 in 2006 indicated that Crown Land zoning could be removed from Regional Districts expeditiously.
  - Formally rendered Regional District zoning bylaws for independent power project applications on Crown Land redundant.

- Special Use Permits (SUPs): non-exclusive authority to a company or an individual to occupy and use an area of Crown Land, within the Provincial Forest (e.g. regional parks, industrial needs).
  - Over time, long-standing SUPs would often convert to other tenures, when zoning bylaws and regulations would then apply.
  - SUPs much less onerous and expensive than licenses of occupation for communities and local governments.
  - Future of SUPs unclear.

## ● **SMART GROWTH**

- Some Regional Districts have followed these principles in their Regional Plans for years.
- The philosophy assumes that corporations and government departments linked to the local land base will naturally “feed” rural communities.
- Stakeholders often under pressure to do the opposite. Consequence can be residential absenteeism and cottage development of communities.
- Highway Strip developments alive and well in the minds of many influential developers – antithesis of Smart Growth, but they happen anyway. Not permitted in RDMW, but...
- Such developments contribute very little to the rural taxation and demographic bases if primary and secondary sectors in decline or static.

# First Nations considerations

- Local government is not recognized in the federal constitution as a specific order of government – a provincial responsibility.
- BC Community Charter provides provincial recognition of municipalities, but not to Regional Districts.
- Treaty Advisory Committees (TACs) are the nexus for local government involvement in treaty negotiations.
- Confidentiality rules at TACs preclude ability of local government representatives to relay information back to communities they represent – effectively closed sessions.

- Negotiations are so protracted over so many years that local government representatives with key confidential knowledge are lost to the electoral cycle.
- Post treaty environment will almost certainly bring a restructuring of local governance structures and land use policies and controls.
- Communities may first be made aware of full implications only when an Agreement in Principle (AIP) is announced (a very late stage).
- “Side table” opportunities since 2003.

- Are unincorporated OCPs even examined at the main tables? Contradictory indications on this.
- Formal agreements possible outside of the treaty process.
- All First Nation members within Electoral Areas entitled to vote since inception of Regional Districts in the 1960s.
- Long history of service agreements with First Nations (e.g. water and solid waste).

# Regional District of Mount Waddington



Northern third of Vancouver Island and large area of adjacent mainland from Knight Inlet to Cape Caution.

- 13,177 feet, at the head of Knight Inlet.
- Alfred Pehdrill Waddington – early BC unity pioneer and proposer of a road to Bute Inlet and a railway bridge from across Seymour Narrows to Vancouver Island.
- Fitting that a figure of controversial development politics came to have his name associated with the North Island and adjacent mainland.



## Demographics

Municipalities: 7, 358

Port Hardy (3,521)

Port McNeill (2,544)

Port Alice (821)

Alert Bay (472)

Unincorporated: 4, 172

AREA A: (1, 956)

AREA B: (155)

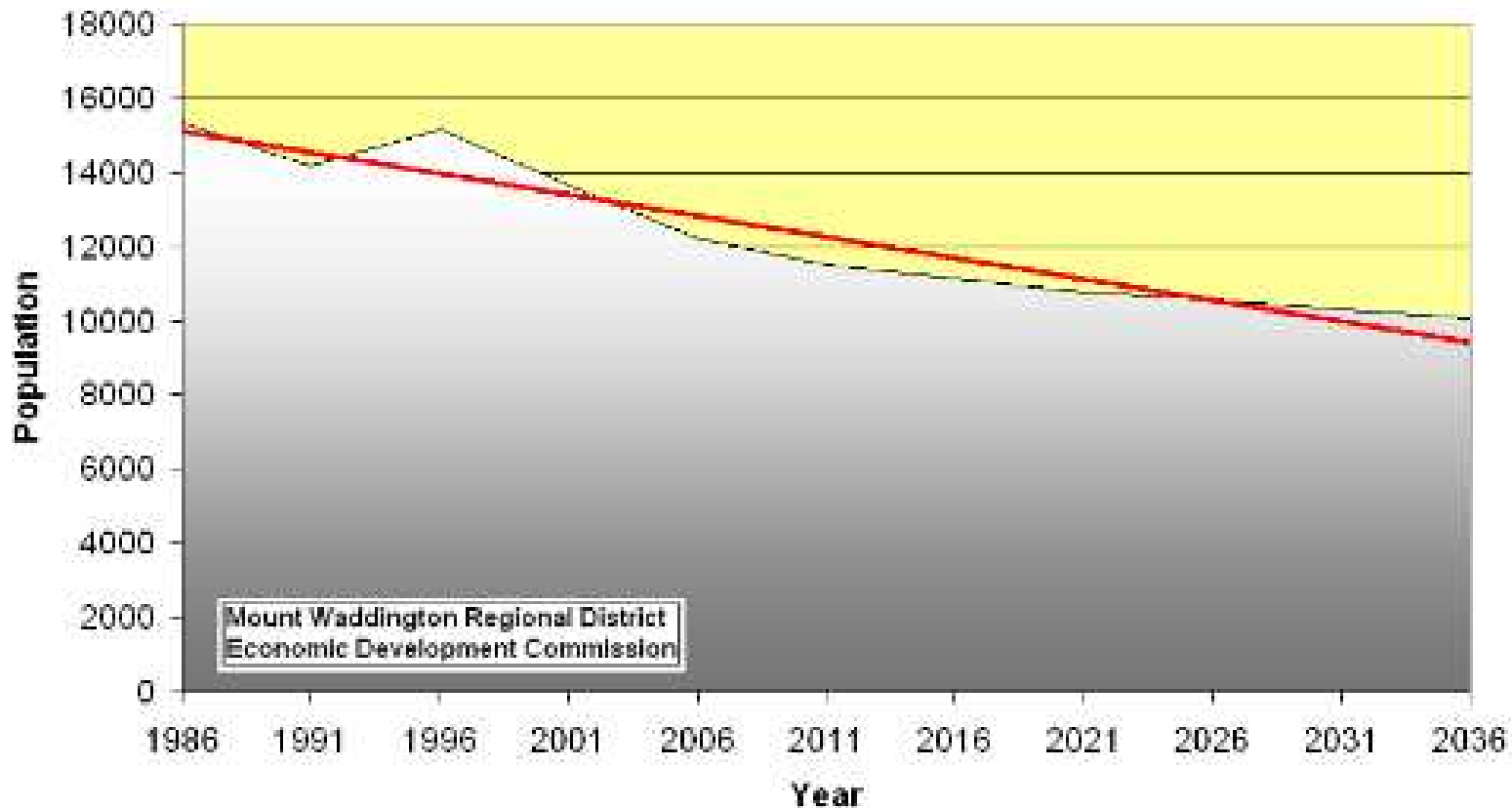
AREA C: (1,757)

AREA D: (304)

Source: Statscan 2006 figures,  
adjusted by RDMW for accuracy.  
Includes First Nations demographics in  
totals.

**RDMW office:** Port McNeill,  
approximately 2 hours north of  
Campbell River.

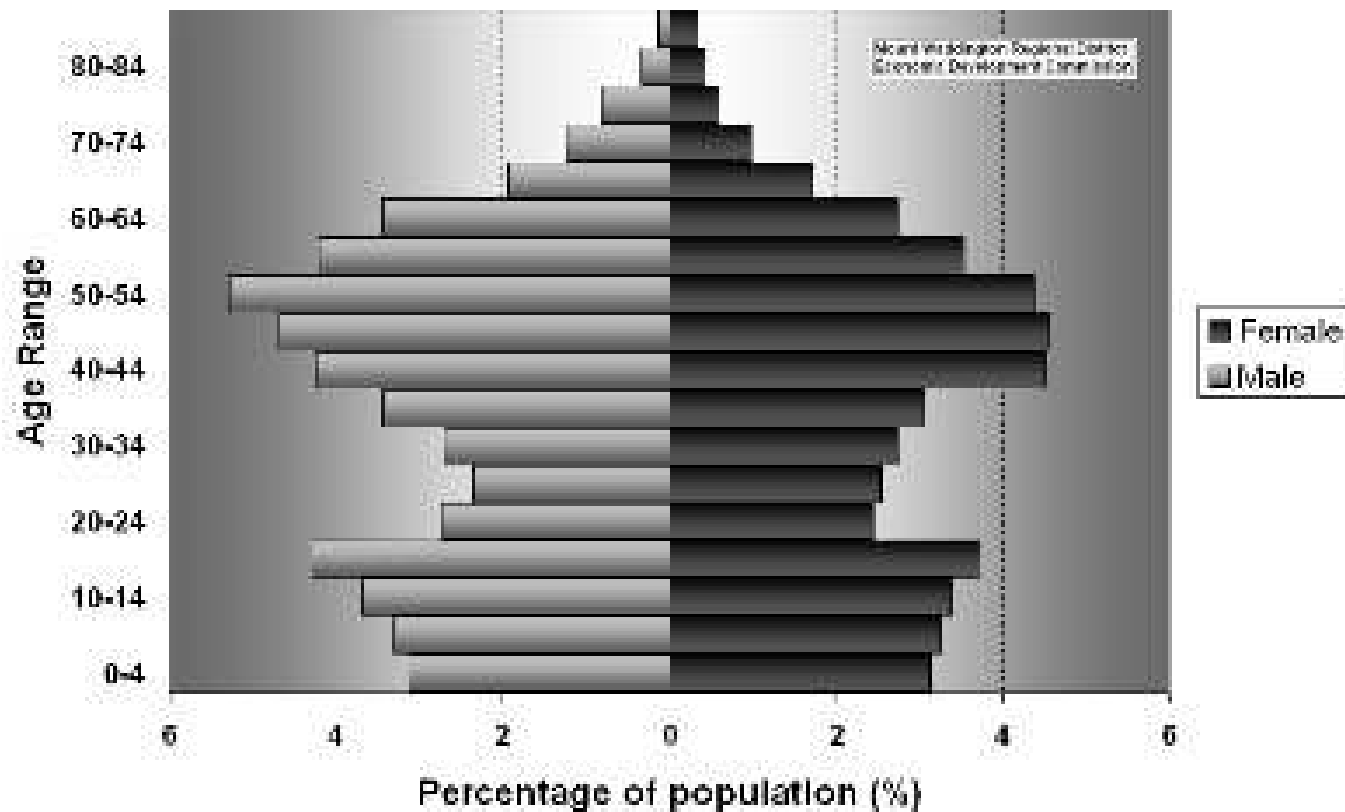
## Mount Waddington population estimates and projection (1986-2036)



**This trend means that the North Island has more in common with Atlantic Canada than most of growing Vancouver Island.**

**"Island wide" development approaches common, but problematic.**

Mount Waddington Regional District 2006 (Census): Population Pyramid



**Demographically healthier than some more populous and affluent rural regions.**

## MOUNT WADDINGTON REGIONAL DISTRICT ABORIGINAL POPULATION ESTIMATE 2006



First Nation	Population	Total %
'Namgis	632	30.3
Whe-la-la-U*	183	8.8
Kingcome	187	8.1
Gilford	55	2.4
Hope Island	5	0.2
Quatsino	234	10.1
Fort Rupert	305	13.2
Tsulquate	482	20.1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,083</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Mount Waddington Regional District, 2008.



**Mount Waddington Regional District  
Economic Development Commission**

**Local Government  
Elected Officials**

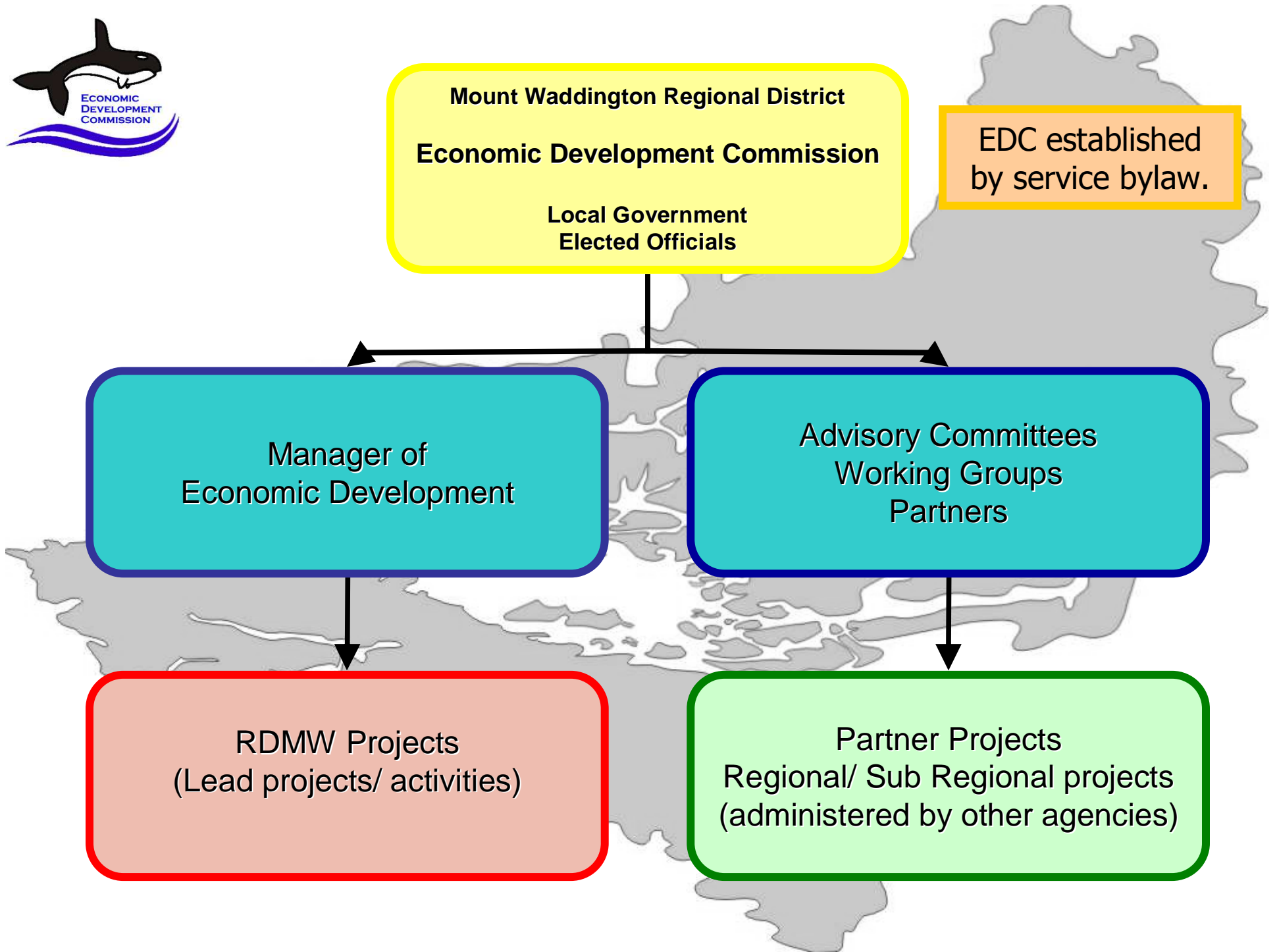
EDC established  
by service bylaw.

**Manager of  
Economic Development**

**Advisory Committees  
Working Groups  
Partners**

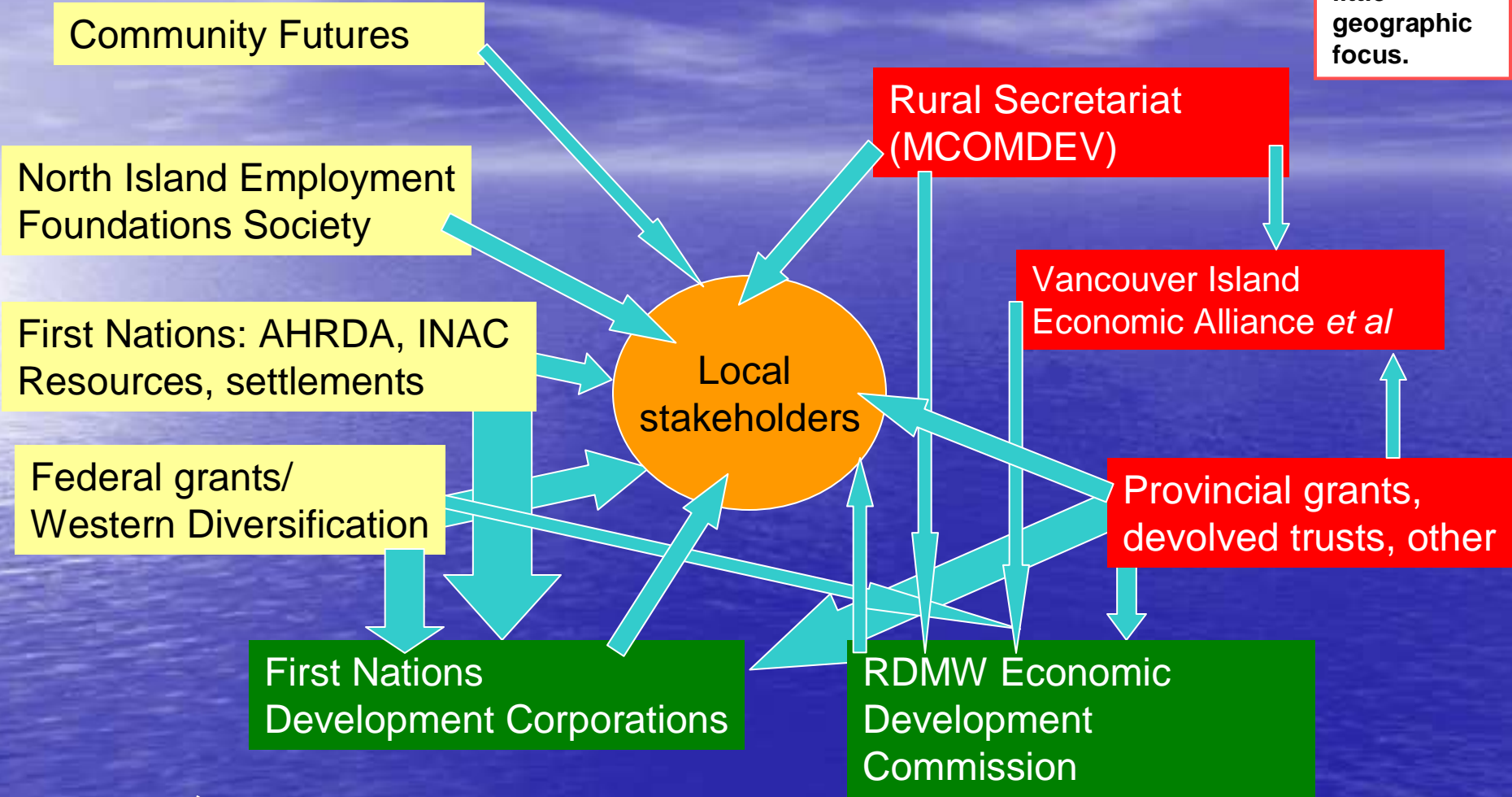
**RDMW Projects  
(Lead projects/ activities)**

**Partner Projects  
Regional/ Sub Regional projects  
(administered by other agencies)**



# The North Island – how does regional development work here?

Multiple points of delivery, little geographic focus.



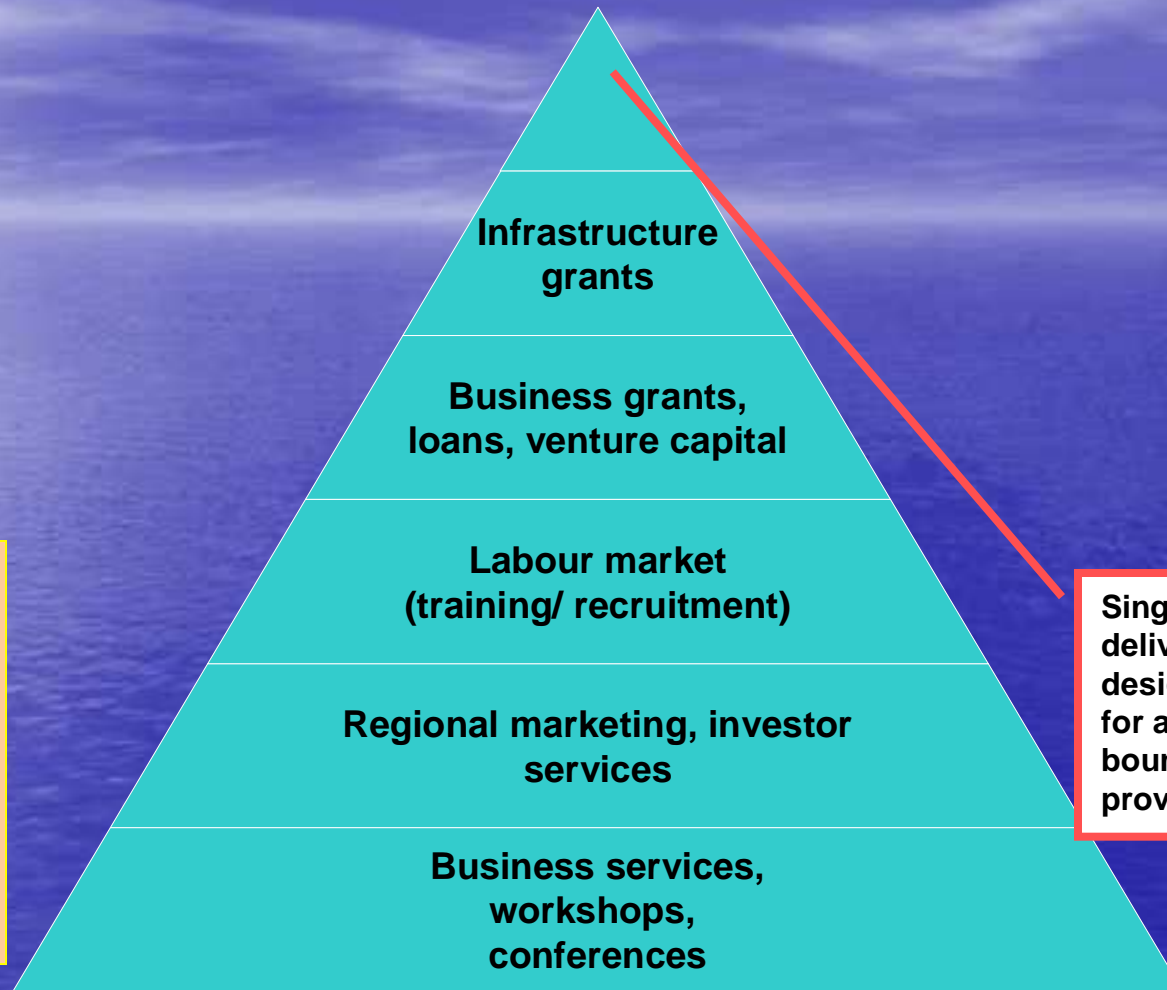
→ Flow of advisory, facilitative or financial resources

Planning authority is unevenly divided between several tiers of government.  
Proponents work closest with the most influential tiers.

## European-style, one-stop rural development

Local boards provide strategic guidance mostly. Local government usually has some, but not dominant representation.

Expenditures accountable to central or regional government.



Project approvals based on strict programming criteria determined by central government(s), interpreted by staff.

Single point of delivery and designated budgets for a geographically bound, sub-provincial area.

Local government remains empowered and influential through strong planning authority. Major project proponents therefore require local governments to be on-side.

# Socioeconomic challenges

- Demographic stagnation has gone unabated since the 1990s. Tax base flatlines thanks only to retirees and absentee home ownership.
- Region's future remains tied to the resource base despite "transition" (room for incremental tertiary sector growth around seasonal tourism).
- Resource base development tied to polarising local and provincial debates (e.g. fish farms).
- Gradual attrition of key public institutions that encourage in-migration (education).
- Corporate mergers and acquisitions (and public sector equivalents) lead to higher-salary skill set attrition.
- Socioeconomic data deficit – qualitative and quantitative; bad existing methodologies.

# Major Employers

- Western Forest Products, Neucel Cellulose, Marine Harvest Canada
- Top 3 represent more than 50 per cent of the regional workforce.
- Orca Sand and Gravel – 48 (prior to recessionary conditions)
- Two wild fish processors (50+)
- Public sector and SMEs



# Investing in Amenities

- Mount Cain Ski Hill and 7 Hills Golf Course are financially supported by RDMW.
- If you lose key amenities, you lose the ability to attract and retain particular kinds of skilled professional.
- Economic value is indirect, not direct revenue.



# Aquaculture

- Long standing development issue within RDMW.
- Three First Nations have royalty deals with MHC linked to Port Hardy plant productivity.
- 2 major players – only one provides socioeconomic benefit of significance to local communities.
- Broughton Archipelago – RDMW's jurisdiction. 20+ farm sites. Many more outside the Broughton.
- Aquaculture Advisory Committee formed in 2007 in collaboration with Agriculture and Lands.
- Goal was regionalize and broaden stakeholder discussion around Crown Referrals and advise Board on aquaculture policy.

- Useful dialogue, but intensely political in absence of tangibles to review. Many provincial sidetables on the matter that do not involve the communities dependent on the sector – undermines committee MAL helped create.
- Consequence: in 2009, when new aquaculture referrals arrived, Board voted to immediately return referrals to exclusive purview of staff and impacted rural directors.

# Salmon Farms in the Broughton Archipelago, March, 2008

Lease      Operating Company

-  19 **Marine Harvest**
-  9 **Mainstream**
-  1 **Greig**

**Active Sites: Lice Control Measures**

- Recent Use of "Slice"
  -  4 **Marine Harvest**
  -  2 **Mainstream**
- Harvested Prior or During March
  -  4 **Marine Harvest**
  -  2 **Mainstream**
  -  1 **Greig**
- Monitored
  -  **Marine Harvest**
  -  3 **Mainstream**

Other sites are inactive.

Data Sources: CGIS, Google Earth, BC Ministry of Agriculture, Marine Harvest, Mainstream, Living Oceans.



Mapping model was later copied by industry and ENGOs alike.

# Independent Power

- Enormous number of Crown Referrals since 2003 – over 5,000 MW of potential on paper.
- RDMW could be energy capital of Island and Coast (wind, run of the river, tidal, biofuel).
- Problem: North Island transmission capacity: 130MW
  - Gold rush based on faulty transmission policy premise?
- This is a BC wide problem, but no region stands to gain more socioeconomically from alternative energy jobs if transmission investment is made.
- More MW and jobs potential in Peace River, but proportionate potential to transform regional economy not as significant.
- Approach: RDMW maintaining Crown referral database, policy and advocacy.
- IPP Map



# Tourism

- RDMW at the forefront of tourism marketing for the North Island.
- North Island Tourism Plan will be supported by four AHRT (hotel tax) bylaws.
- Tourism marketing will have a sustainable revenue flow for the first time.
- Required a huge regional collaborative effort at the Regional District level to be achieved.
- RDMW investing \$74,000 of taxation requisition into this over 2010 and 2011.

# TRANSIT

- Mount Waddington transit launched in 2008 – first time such a service had existed.
- Seed grants secured by RDMW, necessary bylaws for maintaining a regional service of this scale required substantial collaborative planning and agreement.
- First Nation participation key to success.

# PARKS AND TRAILS

- As the future of forestry is debated, so is the future of many popular and key parks and trails (non provincial).
- RDMW engaging in a Regional Trail Inventory and Plan (top 20 potential projects).
- Substantial stakeholder consultation underway.
- Relevance for tourism and residents alike extremely important.
- Concerns Crown Land – First Nation buy-in will be essential for initiative to progress.

# Community Economic Development

- Current crisis laying bare the under capacity of small communities to engage in meaningful CED and integrated land use planning.
- Many communities look to local government to access a whole host of grants that are currently coming on-stream from make-work to job creation to fire hall upgrades.
- Local government only has so much capacity to do this in rural BC.
- Is it time for the old Atlantic Canada model of community development corporations in transition BC?
- RDMW are examining approaches that will successfully enhance the CED agenda in the region.

# Other initiatives

- Mount Waddington Health Network (advisory): yielded substantial policy shifts and subsequent positive healthcare changes and investments.
- North Island Post Secondary Education Committee (advisory): working to define the post-secondary education future for the North Island.
- MOU (2008) with North Island Employment Foundations Society: collaborating on workforce development initiatives.
- Solid Waste Committee: advising on landfill policy, recycling and related costs for the entire region (highest cost service within the Regional District).
- First Nation participation and membership always considered key.
- Regional asset mapping project; working with ENGOs.

# Building Governance Capacity Project

- Partner: Winalagalis Treaty Group
- Rationale: There is no reason to wait for treaty AIPs for local governments and First Nations to work together on communication protocols and collaborative planning wherever possible.
- When: over the course of 2009, it is hoped that a broad framework agreement will be negotiated and that smaller, bilateral issue-based agreements will be developed from that.
- Why: Communities in RDMW often sit in the middle of land claim areas that are partially or wholly likely to be part of a settlement.
- Even small land use expansions or changes in and around community footprints subject to intense scrutiny as a consequence.
- Has significant and largely unintended consequences for communities.

# Winter Harbour (unincorporated)

- 2008: WFP put extremely large area of adjacent private forestry land up for sale (rural zoning). Potentially prime residential/ fishing lodge development area.
- Community, concerned by potential long term local service cost implications (residents /developers using community services without paying taxes), moved to take the land into its OCP.
- First Nation consultation process of OCP amendment means that OCP cannot be expanded unless assent is granted. Process stalled.
- Community ability to plan around potentially dramatic local service cost escalation hindered.

## When working together yields results

- One more example: Census 2006
- Extensive errors uncovered in regional profile, consequences for accuracy as well as various public levies and grants.
- RDMW, Village of Alert Bay and 'Namgis First Nation worked together to trace errors and informed Statistics Canada.
- Consequence: Census '06 cannot be changed, but RDMW are being consulted on maps and communities for Census '11.
- RDs have not been consulted on the census data collection boundaries since 1996.

# Key challenges

- Regional Districts in rural resource regions are facing challenging times as a recognized order of government.
- The progression of various initiatives and programs have laid out a rather uncertain operational context in terms of:
  - Strategic development planning
  - Rural development policy and advocacy.
- What should the RD's future role be?

# Key Issues

- Crown referral system in a state of permanent flux.
- A growing need for formalized public bilateral consultation between RDs and First Nations.
- Challenges to “Smart Growth” philosophy that stem from non-integrated community and land use planning processes within a region.
- Discordant provincial policies: major obstacle to consistent, integrated planning.
- The role of local government in sectoral policy discourse must be discussed.
- Regional Districts have one of the few institutional capacities to apply regional perspective and experience to questions of rural services, economic change or resource allocation – can this capacity be better supported?

# Questions?

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