The Clayoquot Sound UNESCO Biosphere Reserve: A Brief History

The Clayoquot Sound UNESCO Biosphere Reserve officially came into being in 2000. The designation for the region was not a result of one action, person or organization. Rather, the idea of a biosphere reserve designation was floated on many fronts and began to gather momentum in the 1990s. The milestones noted below are not exhaustive, yet point to some of the key initiatives and actions that coalesced to result in the UNESCO designation.

1970  UNESCO creates the Man and the Biosphere (MAB) program, out of which comes the idea of an international network of biosphere reserves. These sites promote sustainable development based on local community efforts and sound science. They are places that seek to reconcile conservation of biological and cultural diversity and economic and social development through partnerships between people and nature. Biosphere reserves are seen as ideal places to test and demonstrate innovative approaches to sustainable development.

1978  Canada gets its first biosphere reserve: Mont Saint-Hilaire in Quebec.

Fall, 1984  Land-use disputes begin in Clayoquot Sound when local First Nations, individuals, and organizations, including the Friends of Clayoquot Sound, resist proposed logging on Meares Island.

1988  Dr. Philip Dearden, a professor in the University of Victoria’s Department of Geography publishes a paper, *Protected Areas and the Boundary Model: Meares Island and Pacific Rim National Park*. (Canadian Geographer, 32(3), 256-265) which discusses the idea of a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve designation for Clayoquot Sound.

1991  The Clayoquot Biosphere Project is formed "to understand, protect and restore the diversity and integrity of the Clayoquot Sound ecosystem.” The not-for-profit organization also supports efforts to “establish United Nations Biosphere Reserve status for the Clayoquot Sound region.” (Note: This organization is different from the Clayoquot Biosphere Trust. The Clayoquot Biosphere Project operated until 1999.)

April 22, 1993  The Commission on Resources and Environment (CORE) releases a report that makes nine recommendations. Recommendation 4 states: The government supports the designation of the Clayoquot Sound area as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, to include a federal Model Forest, with activity in the area to be evaluated against Canadian obligations under the UNCED Biodiversity Treaty.

June, 1993  The Clayoquot Biosphere Project hosts a two-day workshop which explores the concept of a biosphere reserve with Clayoquot Sound communities.

March, 1994  The First Nations of the region sign the Interim Measures Agreement (IMA) with the Government of British Columbia. Through this process, the Central Region Board (CRB) is formed. One of the CRB’s responsibilities is to establish a panel to explore the idea of a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve for Clayoquot Sound.

1996-97  Community forums and meetings are held to discuss the idea of a Biosphere Reserve. In June 1997, the CRB begins a draft proposal to UNESCO.

1998  Formal deliberations begin and a Nomination Working Group is formed to oversee the draft nomination document. The group includes local mayors, the chair of the Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District, and First Nations leaders.

January, 1999  Nomination document sent to UNESCO.


May 5, 2000  Dedication ceremony for the Clayoquot Sound Biosphere Reserve, held in Pacific Rim National Park Reserve.