

# HOMES

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PHOTO COURTESY OF TARTAN GROUP

A sketch of Hamlet Balsam House, one of three European-style hamlets proposed for the 405-hectare Elkington Forest at Shawnigan Lake.

## SUSTAINABILITY

# A friend of the forest

## Island developer is on a mission to save land threatened by clearcutting

SUZANNE MORPHET  
For Canwest News Service

When Doug Makaroff shows people pictures of an area around Shawnigan Lake, he says they're shocked.

"I do this overlay and it's on a 20-foot screen and people cannot believe the amount of timber that's been taken out of the south Shawnigan watershed," the Victoria developer says.

"What they see is the south end of Shawnigan Lake turned into chocolate milk after every major rain event," he adds, referring to the runoff and erosion that comes with clearcutting.

Makaroff is still a developer, but instead of trying to find pieces of land to do a real estate deal on, he's looking for land that's threatened by clearcutting and suburban sprawl, so he can save it.

He's found just such a property adjacent to the area at Shawnigan Lake that's been scraped raw. Elkington Forest is about 405 hectares. It was purchased by the Elkington family in 1945 and used for a summer retreat. Their cottage sits on a lake in the middle of the property and is the only "development" in a sea of green.

In a perfect world, Elkington Forest would be added to a neighbouring wilderness park reserve, but that wouldn't compensate the Elkingtons for the \$5 million to \$6 million worth of timber on the land. Instead, Makaroff has borrowed an idea from a group on Cortes Island, who banded together a few years ago to save 60 hectares from being clear cut.

Makaroff calls it the 85/15 model, where 85 per cent of the property is



PHOTO COURTESY OF TARTAN GROUP

An artist's sketch shows Oak House, a model home designed for a sustainable community in Elkington Forest at Shawnigan Lake.

placed under protective covenants that will allow logging, but only at a sustainable pace. The wood that's harvested will be processed at a mill on site and turned into value-added products such as high-end doors and windows. The remaining 15 per cent of the property will be developed for housing, farm and forest businesses and tourism. Makaroff says it's the only model he knows of where real estate serves the purpose of conservation.

"We want to create this as a model of sustainability ... where the houses will be LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) standard, the timber will be FSC (Forest Stewardship Council certified), we want people to come in and really become part of the pioneers that help establish the culture of

sustainability."

Gord Macdonald, managing director of Macdonald and Lawrence Timber Framing, likes the proposal so much he plans to move his business to Elkington Forest and says some of his employees would like to live there.

"It's a real no-brainer. This is the sort of development that we should be doing around here. It keeps the integrity of the land, it keeps the place beautiful and still provides a way to develop sensibly."

Macdonald's company has been working with the architect on five model home designs for Elkington Forest. He's impressed with the vision that Makaroff has come up with, where the 77 homes will be grouped in three clusters, like European-style hamlets. "There's garden space

and communal space and green space for kids to play, etc. and all of the gardens open onto the forest and trails," he says.

The homes themselves will be built as much as possible with wood from the property.

They'll also have a 'light' environmental footprint. Makaroff notes that none of the houses—even the top-dollar, custom built ones with a view—will be bigger than 4,000 square feet, including basement.

"They are not monster homes," he says, adding that the first five model homes will be up to 2,900 square feet. "We're really encouraging a verticality in the architecture and an arts and crafts style, very simple form and shape, with lots of popouts, gables, bay windows, those kinds of things."

Each of the post and beam model homes will feature a great room with exposed timber frame, and knee brace and arch brace craftsmanship. They'll be priced at about \$153 per square foot.

Makaroff wants people who buy into the project to be able to live and work at Elkington Forest, hence, all of the owners can have a home office, a rental suite or they can operate a bed and breakfast. "What we really don't want is for this to become a commuter suburb for Victoria."

There will also be about a dozen organic hobby farms with three to four acres each.

To pull off his vision for a sustainable community, Makaroff had to apply to the local regional district for the land to be rezoned to something called Community Land Stewardship, which allows for live/work arrangements.

The elected representative on the Cowichan Valley Regional District board for Shawnigan Lake, Ken Cossey, says Elkington Forest is "a great project" that has generated lots of community support.

"Instead of the developer coming in and telling us this is what's going to happen, and then try to convince us, the developer this time around came up, said 'what would you like to see happen?' and then worked with the community on it."

But at least one resident isn't convinced the developer has the best interests of the community at heart. Realtor Richard Hughes calls the proposal "a lot of spin and packaging to do an end-run around the community plan."

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# Cortes Island project saved 60 hectares

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"What this is about is a business opportunity, somebody's going to make a big buck," he says, adding the community is turning its back on forestry. "Everywhere you look we're losing forest land. ... It's time on this Island that we stood up to the government giving away our forest land."

John Bloxall wholeheartedly agrees with protecting our forests — he was one of the first people to buy into the Cortes property called Everwoods — but he says the status quo isn't working.

"Leaving it the way it is, as standing forest, is actually not an option. I can understand people think it's nicer that way, but is it going to stay there?" he asked on the phone from his home in Washington, D.C. "If you leave it to the forest industry, it will get clear cut and turned into lots."

Bloxall is excited that the model he and others used to save 150 acres of forest on Cortes Island is being replicated at Elkington Forest. Bloxall can't say the model is perfect — it's yet to be really tested. This will be his first summer in his new home on Cortes and other buyers have yet to build — but he doesn't think it's as utopian as it might sound.

"We see this as a solution in relatively populated areas ... where there's the willingness of people to pay the price you need to pay if you want to live in a standing forest." Bloxall notes that the price is bound to be higher than living somewhere that's already been clear cut, "because the guy who did the clearcut has taken a lot of money out already."

Not only that, but at Elkington Forest, Makaroff has made sure the land with the highest conservation values is left as forest. "We did an awful lot of work, one of the most extensive ecological baseline assessments," he says, noting that they've identified 70 plant and animal communities on the property, including 11 threatened species.

"I had to unlearn an awful lot of what it means to be a developer, to look at what's the highest conservation value here and not what's the highest real estate value."