



David Suzuki Foundation

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History

by Tara Cullis, President



The 1980s were a decade of ferment and rich growth in the environmental movement in British Columbia. Struggles led by native leaders were linked with others across the nation, and brought new awareness of the relationship between indigenous peoples and environmental issues. This awareness spread to many high-stakes battles going on around the globe. By the end of the decade, I resigned from Harvard to return home and work on how a significant difference might be made.

David's radio series It's a Matter of Survival came on the air at the zenith of public interest and receptivity. David received 17,000 letters from this radio series alone and his mail became increasingly urgent. The call for a new, solutions-based organization was beginning to materialize as we considered the potential of creating a new vehicle for this public concern.

In November 1989, David and I hosted a meeting of a dozen top thinkers at a lodge on Pender Island. By the end of the weekend we knew something significant would come from this small group of concerned people. We anticipated launching an institute, and a foundation to raise money to fund it. It wasn't long before the sense that an historic event had taken place was proven correct...

In September 1990 we were incorporated. David hosted a second weekend conference in November of that year, I rented an office and opened our doors on January 1, 1991 and then David and I accepted an offer from a travel agent to host a fundraising trip to Alaska. Proceeds from the 125 people who joined us paid for our first mail-out which in turn launched the Foundation.

We quickly built a solid infrastructure to support the initial International Projects we were about to embark upon. These projects included working with the Kayapo people of the Lower Amazon, the Ainu of Japan, and with OREWA in Colombia. As well we commissioned reports on a dam research project in Australia, worked with the Hesquiat people of the west coast of Vancouver Island, and with indigenous peoples of the Amazon at the Rio Summit of 1992. All projects were with traditional peoples and communities and involved alternative models of economic and community development.

In 1992, we hired more staff and set up an excellent volunteer Finance Committee, which worked with our fundraiser to plan how to build our assets. Soon we were moving into monthly donor programs and all the infinite complexities fundraising entails. Volunteers swarmed in whenever we did mail-outs, often delivering the bins of envelopes to the Post Office late into the night. By October 1992 the board had developed 10 project categories, and the conviction that eventually 50 cents of every project dollar had to go to effectively communicating the results of our research.

The following year our small but intensely productive staff expanded and we moved from our cramped offices to the wonderful ecologically friendly building at 2211 West Fourth Avenue. Throughout the winter and spring we developed alliances with publishers, we welcomed a visiting International Scholar, we began our first major projects, and commissioned our first Reports. To increase our effectiveness we restructured our organisation - the Institute amalgamated with the Foundation under the name The David Suzuki Foundation; and the Foundation Board was expanded to include persons experienced in the main project areas. The new streamlined organisation turned a corner in our history, ready to take on larger and more complex issues.

The new Fourth Avenue offices saw the launch of report after report. First came the proceedings on our excellent Social Change Conference, Tools For Change. This was quickly followed by our report on sustainability: Living Within Our Means; then our first Forestry report, Chopping Up the Money Tree; our first Fisheries reports, Fish On the Line, and Fisheries That Work; and our first book, Dead Reckoning, by Terry Glavin. The long months and years of planning were at last bearing fruit.

All this work meant we needed more help. Talented volunteers appeared at our door, anxious to support us in this work, and in 1995 we hired a Volunteer Coordinator to coordinate all that talent. Alliances with the local Musqueam band began to flourish in

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1996, providing the groundwork for the Musqueam Watershed Restoration Project which was launched on Earth Day 1997. The increased number and scale of projects lead to the appointment of a Communications Director and more staff.

In 1997 our productivity continued to increase, and we published a third Fisheries Report, Net Loss, and stepped up work on a huge Climate Change Project. Its publications came thick and fast: A Glimpse of Canada's Future; The Role of Government; Taking Charge: Personal Initiatives; Keeping Canada Competitive; and Canadian Solutions. We took on the new medium of full-page ads, and geared up to attend and influence the Kyoto Conference on Climate Change. Meanwhile, our work in Forestry and Fisheries led us to research and then launch an equally ambitious project, Pacific Salmon Forests; our all-out attempt to protect the forests and fish of our own home by nurturing healthy communities within healthy ecosystems. Our second book, The Sacred Balance by David Suzuki, was published, and well launched.

The need to accommodate our growing staff and volunteers in these large project areas, and to expand the bookkeeping, accounting and fundraising staff to make their work possible, led to a move to a larger, brighter office space within the building. Our Pacific Salmon Forests Project blossomed; our communications team was enlarged; we published an additional book and new reports in both of our major project areas; a number of key contract positions were identified in both projects and fundraising, and many more excellent people were hired. The new Pacific Salmon Forests Project titles included *LastCall: The Will to Save Pacific Salmon*; *Sacred Cedar: The Cultural and Archaeological Significance of Culturally Modified Trees*; and *Set Adrift: The Plight of British Columbia's Fishing Communities*. On the Climate Change side we introduced *Taking our Breath Away: The Health Effects of Air Pollution and Climate Change* and our first French language report *À couper le souffle: Les effets de la pollution atmosphérique et des changements climatiques sur la santé*. Through it all, volunteers have sustained the organisation and ensured that beneath the changes the steady beat of the heart of the Foundation continues, stronger than ever. Because of them, our dedicated staff, and our grassroots donors across the country and the world, the Pender Island dream of 1989 is now reality.

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