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One year ago, some people were shocked that the forest industry and conservation activists agreed to lay down arms and instead join hands to solve problems together. It was a marriage of unlikely partners - 21 large companies and nine leading environmental groups. The marriage contract called the Canadian Boreal Forest Agreement (CBFA) detailed immediate conservation wins and set out an ambitious program of joint work.

The CBFA embodies two rather simple ideas: first, that we need to conserve both the forest and the jobs that depend on it rather than choose between them; and second, that conservationists and business should work together to figure out how to do this. Neither idea is particularly counterintuitive. Few people today seriously entertain the thought that we need to choose between industry and environmental protection. And most are tired of the overheated rhetoric that characterizes yesterday's polarized debates.

It took bravery on both sides to step out of expected roles, but it is bravery inspired by enlightened self-interest. The conservation groups understand the power of forest industry as partners in pursuing adequate protection of the forest and the forest industry understands the power of the conservation community in the pursuit of market advantage for their forest products. And everyone understands that figuring things out together is more practical than trying to resolve issues through shouting matches.

It is now a full year since the CBFA came into force. With the initial honeymoon over, the shape of the marriage is emerging. The conservation and market measures set out at the beginning are holding. Ideas and plans for win-win solutions for jobs and the environment have been generated. First Nations and provincial governments have been approached for guidance and support.

It has not been all smooth sailing. Despite impressive work, progress against agreed milestones has been slower than anticipated. Not everyone has welcomed the new marriage. Outside of the CBFA, some forest industry leaders and some environmentalists remain deeply attached to their positions of confrontation and righteous indignation. Some First Nations worry that if conservationists and industrialists agree, then their legitimate authority as governments is somehow undermined. It is not. The CBFA has at its core a deep respect for the rights of First Nations and acknowledges the primacy of government to government relationships.

However, the signatories to the CBFA remain deeply faithful to their vows. As in any such partnership, they are committed to a degree of give and take and hard work aimed at learning and growing together. No one is surprised that tensions have emerged. What is surprising is that after a year of intimate partnership, the industry and the conservation community continue to work together in finding solutions.

The story of the CBFA is not just about former adversaries finding a community of purpose. More than half a million Canadians depend on a competitive forest industry for their livelihood. At the same time, the boreal forest is the largest wilderness area on the planet. Finding win-win solutions for jobs and conservation matters to all of us and sets Canada apart as a global leader focused on delivering positive, pragmatic solutions to difficult problems. The Canadian Boreal Forest Agreement has set us on that path. And one year in, the marriage is holding.

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