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Resource Values Assessment: Old Growth

State of Knowledge:

- Managing for old-growth forests is a critical component of implementing measures to conserve ecosystems and species biodiversity because it is difficult to reproduce once lost.
- In 1999, the Landscape Unit Planning Guide identified retention of old-growth forest as a priority for biodiversity planning. It recommended developing objectives for old-growth retention by establishing spatially located and mapped Old Growth Management Areas (OGMAs) that will ensure retention and/or recruitment of old-growth structure over time.
- An alternative approach is to develop non-spatial objectives for old growth retention, such as setting a target percentage for old-growth retention within a geographic unit.
- Within timber supply areas there is management for old-growth forests through OGMAs or non-spatial objectives or a combination of both.
- The *Order Establishing Provincial Non-Spatial Old Growth Objectives* came into effect June 30, 2004, and helped confirm the extent of timber harvesting opportunities, while conserving biodiversity values and species associated with old-growth forests.
 - In Prince George TSA, the *Order Establishing Landscape Biodiversity Objectives for the Prince George Timber Supply Area*, a non-spatial order, replaced the provincial order in October 2004.
 - In the Cariboo, the spatial Land Use Order (June 2010) also covers other conservation/recreation values.
 - In Kamloops TSA, the *Kamloops LRMP Higher Level Plan Order* (1996, amended 2009) provides general direction regarding old growth and biodiversity attributes, and a new *Land Act* spatial OGMA order is expected to be approved this year.
 - In Merritt, in addition to the provincial non-spatial order, current operational practice includes avoiding timber harvesting within draft spatial OGMAs mapped through a multi-year process that involved First Nations (2003 to 2004).

Current condition:

- Prince George TSA: 27,600 hectares in OGMA; 4,900 hectares in Guidance OGMA; and the *Landscape Biodiversity Objectives for the Prince George Timber Supply Area* applies.
- Lakes TSA: 90,100 hectares in OGMA; Williams Lake TSA: 402,700 hectares in OGMA; Quesnel TSA: 151,000 hectares in OGMA; Morice TSA: 0 hectares in OGMA (*Provincial Non-Spatial Old Growth Objectives* applies); 100 Mile House TSA: 155,600 hectares in OGMA; Kamloops TSA: 189,914 hectares in draft OGMA (92,000 hectares in THLB); Merritt TSA: 112,500 hectares policy-approved draft OGMA (45,500 hectares in THLB).

Risks:

- Reduce ecosystem resilience and limit options to respond to unforeseen and changing environmental conditions such as those associated with climate change, and disturbances such as wildfire and mountain pine beetle.
- Recruitment of appropriate habitat and attributes would take over 140 years, and recruitment of specific old growth stand structure elements such as large trees and snags could take over 200 years.
- Habitat fragmentation and connectivity reduction.
- Old-growth reliant species (e.g. bird species, invertebrates and fur bearers) and ecosystems will be lost; some may not recover. Shift from specialist species to generalist species. Loss of some species at risk.
- Demand in treaty talks for increased land transfer to ensure protection of First Nation rights (Cariboo)
- Loss of some botanical and culturally important forest products.
- Loss of recreation and tourism values in areas used by communities and lodge owners/guide-outfitters.

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