BC Timber Sales Sustainable Harvesting Practices and Old-growth Management

The Province of British Columbia is a world leader in sustainable forest management with leading-edge environmental practices. Ninety-four percent of British Columbia is provincial public land. Managing 94 per cent of the land and forest resources allows the Province to determine where, when and how forest resources can be used. In British Columbia:

- Approximately 60% of B.C.’s 95 million hectares of land is forested.
- About 23% of forest lands are classified as old forests.
- Old-growth forests are generally defined as trees more than 250 years old on the coast and in the interior wet belt, and trees more than 140 years old in the rest of the interior.
- B.C. has 10 million hectares of old forest that are already under some form of protection or are not considered available for harvesting.
- About 3.75 million hectares of old forest remains available for harvesting.
- Each year, about 0.35% of B.C.’s forests are harvested; of this, 27% is considered old.

To learn more, visit Managing our Forest Resources.

Old-Growth Protections

Old growth is recognized for its unique ecological, economic, social and cultural values. Many legal protections and regulations ensure it will remain in perpetuity.

- Landscape level planning identifies areas of old growth necessary to support important values such as conservation of biodiversity and retaining habitat for wildlife species.
  - These areas are legally protected from harvest and designated as parks, Old-Growth Management Areas, Ungulate Winter Ranges, Wildlife Habitat Areas or other protected areas.
- At the forest stand level, harvest planners must identify and protect riparian areas, wildlife tree retention areas, culturally important areas and features, wildlife habitat features and exceptionally large trees. Regulations require a minimum of 7% of each cutblock area be retained as stand-level reserves for wildlife and other values.
- B.C. recently introduced new regulation to protect exceptionally large, individual trees when they are discovered during harvest planning. These trees are surrounded by a 56 m radius (nearly one hectare) protected area.
  - BCTS has been voluntarily applying a best management practice (BMP) for the protection of exceptionally large old-growth trees (aka Legacy Trees) in its coastal operations since 2017. See BCTS Best Practices for Coastal Legacy Trees.
- Large Cultural Cedar (LCC) are protected by regulation as a cultural heritage resource. In some areas, BCTS has gone well beyond legal requirements and worked with local Indigenous Peoples to develop detailed procedures to identify and protect these trees for future cultural use such as longhouse construction, canoes, carving, etc.
For more information on old-growth designated areas and special tree protections, visit Forest Tenure Administration.

Ecosystem-Based Management

- Ecosystem-Based Management (EBM) is an adaptive approach to managing human activities that seeks to ensure the co-existence of healthy ecosystems and human well-being.
- The Great Bear Rainforest, Haida Gwaii and Clayoquot Sound Biosphere Reserve are examples of large areas on the coast where significant biological and cultural values are recognized, and EBM is implemented to ensure commercial harvesting is secondary to other values. For more information, visit Haida Gwaii Land Use Planning and the Clayoquot Sound Watershed Plans.
- The Great Bear Rainforest legal order establishes targets for the retention of approximately 70% of the natural range of old-growth forests in this area over time. This includes recruitment of younger forests to old growth where targets are not immediately achievable.

Continual Improvement

- While British Columbia does have numerous protections in place for old growth, government operates under the principle of continuous improvement and is always looking to enhance management of forests.
- As part of this approach, the B.C. government committed $16 million over three years (2018-19 to 2020-21) to work collaboratively with Indigenous governments, communities, and stakeholders to modernize land use planning. See Modernizing Land Use Planning to learn more.
- Recently an independent panel was tasked to engage with Indigenous Peoples, communities, stakeholders and industry across the province and to provide recommendations to government to improve old-growth management.
- Recommendations from the panel will inform a new approach to old-growth management and has already led to creation of additional protected areas. To learn more, visit A New Approach to Old Forests.

BC Timber Sales Certified Forest Management

- One hundred per cent of BC Timber Sales’ operations are certified under the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) Forest Management Standard.
- The SFI Standard exceeds the stringent legal requirements in B.C. and requires harvest planning and operations meet objectives such as Conservation of Biological Diversity, Protection of Special Sites, and Recognize and Respect Indigenous Peoples’ Rights.
- BCTS staff, contractors and licensees must be qualified and trained in principles of sustainable forest management and follow operating procedures.
- BCTS Business Areas are audited annually to verify conformance with all legal requirements and SFI requirements.
- For more information, visit:
  - BCTS Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) Certification
  - BCTS Environment Stewardship and Sustainability Report, April 2021
  - Forestry Innovation Investment: Sustainable Forest Management in BC