


A NEW FUTURE FOR OLD FORESTS

# From review to action

A Report Out on Actions Toward Resilient  
Ecosystems, Communities and Economies in B.C.

A photograph of a forest floor. In the foreground, there are large, vibrant green leaves, likely from a maple tree, and several ferns. In the background, several large tree trunks are visible, their bark showing vertical ridges and some moss or lichen growth. The lighting is natural, suggesting a sun-dappled forest environment.

**This plan represents the efforts of many, from a diversity of organizations, communities, geographies, sectors, industries, identities, approaches and ways of knowing.**

**The Province of B.C. gratefully acknowledges what was shared in the development of this plan to shape the vision and the commitments contained herein.**

## The natural laws of our lands

Creation stories teach that humans were not given the instincts to know how to live with Nature's laws in the way that deer are given the instinct to migrate annually for spring birthing, summer feed, or winter shelter and sustenance.

Instead, humans were given memory and voice to share our creation stories back to time immemorial. The stories pass on lessons for how we must conduct ourselves in a way that allows us to live in harmony with all of creation – our land, water, air, flora and fauna. The land laws, protocols and practices reflect the richness of who we are and are passed from generation to generation.

Our ancestors do not know the world today, but they lived in harmony and cared for our generation by living within the laws and creation stories that were passed on to them. Therefore, we are passed on the responsibility to carry the knowledge from our past and apply it to our present environment for the well-being of our future generations. You cannot talk about the land without talking about everything, about creation.

### PERSONAL STORY

As translated to English and shared by a member of the Nlaka'pamux Nation.

**“From the stories that are shared with us,  
we will take what we need to know and  
what we are ready to know.”**

WISDOM SHARED DURING THE DEVELOPMENT OF THIS PLAN

# Introduction

## When we know better, we do better

The state of our forests tells us about the past, the present and the future. Through their very existence, forests reveal the events and the interactions that have shaped them, from sun and rain to humans and fire. Their stories tell of how they grew and aged, of how they renewed themselves – and they also warn us of what may come.

The voice of our forests is growing louder and more urgent, calling out past practices in managing the

land and issuing warnings about the impacts of the climate crisis. There are stark signals, like catastrophic wildfire, and more subtle ones, like the decline of western red cedar across coastal B.C.

The message, however, is clear: B.C.'s forests and ecosystems require a new kind of stewardship – *active* stewardship – so that they may be restored and remain resilient for generations to come.

## What got us here, won't get us there

The review of old forests in B.C., *A New Future for Old Forests*, gave us a clear picture of the challenges we face today and why those challenges exist. In particular, it emphasized that governments in the past had not fully adopted recommendations for improvements in stewardship.

The review underscored the result of this failure as a high risk of loss of biodiversity in many ecosystems, risk to the economic benefits and jobs for communities due to uncertainty and conflict, and widespread lack of public confidence in the system of managing forests.

The Provincial Government (the "Province") accepted the review's 14 recommendations

in full and is responding to address the underlying issues and to ensure that those with the deepest connection to the health of our forests and ecosystems are empowered to lead the change toward a better future.

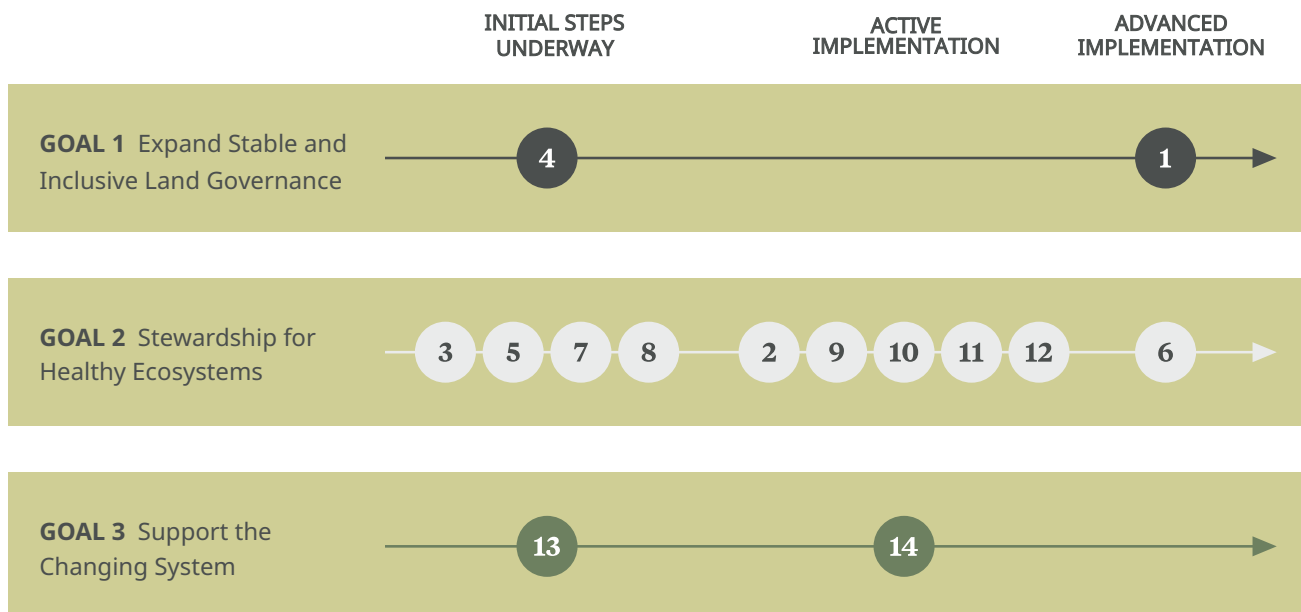
Achieving the full intent of the review is work that will span generations. This timeframe is most evident in the Province's foundational commitment to create a relationship of shared learning with Indigenous Peoples. The way forward requires that we work directly with First Nations in good faith – to earn and build trust, and to develop new systems of governance which fully respect the responsibility we all have to all Rights and Title holders in B.C.

# A New Future for Old Forests recommendations

1. Engage the full involvement of Indigenous leaders and organizations
2. Prioritize ecosystem health and resilience
3. Adopt a three-zone forest management framework
4. Adopt a more inclusive and stable governance model
5. Provide the public with timely and objective information
6. Defer development in old forests at high risk, until a new strategy is implemented
7. Bring management of old forests into compliance with existing requirements
8. Establish a more robust monitoring and evaluation system
9. Establish a standardized system for setting and managing objectives and targets
10. Update biodiversity targets and guidance
11. Improve the mapping and classification of old forests
12. Create an innovative silviculture program
13. Implement new policies through provincial and local transition plans
14. Support forest sector workers and communities as they adapt to change

## Progress on the 14 recommendations

Work has begun on every recommendation of *A New Future for Old Forests*. However, due to their scale, it will be many years until some recommendations reach full implementation. The table below indicates current progress on each recommendation.



## From recommendation to action

This plan sets out a suite of actions that are organized under three goals. Carrying out these actions will lead to a new approach to stewarding the forests and the ecosystems within B.C. – one that is more stable and more inclusive.<sup>1</sup>

Like forests themselves, the actions are complex and deeply interconnected. They go beyond the Province's ability to implement alone; rather, only through creating new partnerships and collaborations can we succeed.

A range of actions are underway to implement all 14 recommendations, from those that depend on the creation of new planning approaches and partnerships, to those that demand urgent action. There are actions that go even further than the 14 recommendations, taking the initiative to ensure successful and lasting change in the stewardship of B.C.'s forests and ecosystems.

The health of B.C. forests requires us to make profound change – from ensuring our land stewardship approach builds both resistance and resilience to the impacts of climate change and wildfire, to seeking new ways to enhance and assess the value of overall returns from our activities. First Nations, local governments and the people and businesses of B.C. are essential partners in this change to be empowered and assisted in setting and achieving local visions.

Through this suite of actions, the Province is committed to changing the paradigm of land stewardship in B.C. We will expand our understanding together with our partners so that we fundamentally change the way that we view and manage our land and resources to move toward a management model that is better suited to current and future ecosystem conditions throughout B.C.

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix for itemized list of all actions and alignment with recommendations in *A New Future for Old Forests*.

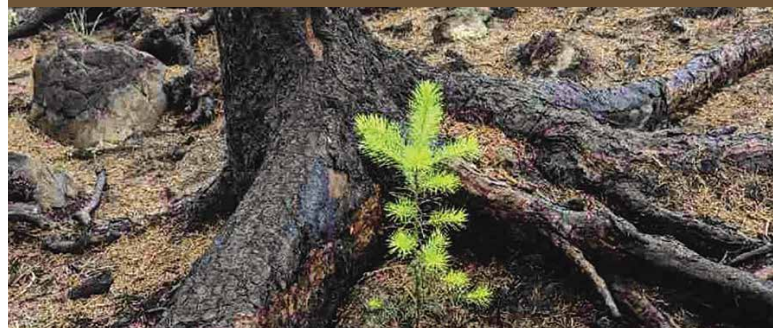
## Fire and old forests

Fire is as natural a process as photosynthesis in B.C.'s forest ecosystems. Ecosystems have co-evolved with fire over millennia and fire has been a part of many First Nations' land stewardship approach since time immemorial. First Nations speak of applying fire systematically to keep the land healthy and in balance, and to create favourable conditions for growing food and medicinal plants, and maintaining wildlife habitat, biodiversity and other values that have sustained their people and cultures for generations.

The practice of regularly applying low- to medium-intensity fire to the land, especially in the interior of the province, created diversity on the landscape and enabled old-growth forests to continue to renew themselves and exist. In the early 1900s, settlement and provincial land management policies disrupted these practices and caused ecosystem shifts in many parts of B.C.

Many old forests today have gone without fire for decades. This has undermined their resilience as accumulations of fuel on the ground and in the understory have significantly increased the risk that fires will have catastrophic stand-replacing impacts with related impacts to human health and safety. This risk will continue to grow with climate change.

Re-establishing natural fire regimes in these forests through cultural and prescribed burning and managed wildfire – enabled by amended legal regimes – will be essential to sustain ecosystem health and conserve old-growth and biodiversity values over the long term. This will require active management of fuels in some of these stands to make it safe to reintroduce low-intensity fire, and then implementing active burning programs over the long term.



# Highlights of Progress to Date

## **Leadership by First Nations**

More and more, First Nations across B.C. are leading work in forest stewardship. The Province and First Nations are working on new ways of collaborating which will enable the diverse interests of Nations to be heard more clearly and actioned. Regionally-based Provincial-First Nations government forums provide oversight and guidance to regional land management and allow co-management and co-governance approaches to be tried.

## **Collaborative First Nations Stewardship Forums**

Sixteen regional forums are now underway across B.C. to collect trusted information to support local decision making. Many are moving to design and guide implementation of co-management and shared management practices under a new forest stewardship model.

## **Biodiversity and Ecosystem Health Framework**

A new draft Framework was shared publicly that sets a new provincial vision and creates a pathway for changes in current practices. It will align stewardship goals with actions to maintain and enhance biodiversity and ecological integrity, and ensure healthy communities and economies for generations to come. The draft Framework was shared for consultation with First Nations and

engagement with local governments, industry and the public in Winter 2023-24.

## **Land Use Planning**

Nine strategic land use planning processes are active with others in various stages of preparation. Land use planning makes key decisions on how lands should be managed for ecosystem health and biodiversity as an overarching priority, and how economic activities fit within this priority. Land use planning sets high-level conservation and economic objectives that are to be met and clarifies where activities could proceed.

## **Forest Landscape Planning**

Thirteen Forest Landscape Planning (FLP) processes are underway. FLP is a collaborative forest planning and management approach which establishes clear and measurable outcomes for the management of forest values (such as old growth and timber) over a defined geographical area.

## **Old Growth “Deferrals”**

Industrial activity has now been temporarily deferred on nearly 2.44 million hectares of old-growth forests with the support of First Nations and through the cooperation of industry. Deferrals are an interim solution while the Province and First Nations work toward long-term stewardship of these areas. *continues on next page...*

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### **Silviculture Innovation Program**

A new partnership with the Bulkley Valley Research Centre will focus on deepening our knowledge of silviculture in today's changing ecosystems and ensure that knowledge is widely shared among forest and land managers. This work will directly support practitioners in designing and deploying a wider range of ecosystem-appropriate silvicultural techniques.

### **Conservation Financing**

A new province-wide Conservation Financing Mechanism has been launched with a contribution by the Province of \$150 million and a matching commitment to secure \$150 million from the BC Parks Foundation. This will fund new conservation measures to help the Province reach its goal to protect 30% of land and water by 2030, support lasting environmental protection and old-growth measures that are led or supported by First Nations, as well as the stewardship and Guardian programs required for effective management, and support for low-carbon economic opportunities.

### **Tripartite Framework Agreement on Nature Conservation**

The Framework Agreement between the Province, the Government of Canada and the First Nations Leadership Council will better align over \$1 billion of funding from provincial and federal programs to help achieve shared conservation goals. This agreement includes the federal investment of \$50 million toward identifying and conserving up to 13,000 square kilometers (1.3 million hectares) of old-growth forest areas.

### **Better data through use of LiDAR**

A major expansion of LiDAR is underway with the goal of mapping the entire provincial landbase. LiDAR produces three-dimensional maps that will generate data to inform natural resource decisions relating to forestry, wildfire and fuel management, surface hydrology, ecology, geology, wildlife habitat management and restoration, species-at-risk recovery planning and the Province's commitment to protect 30% of land and water by 2030.



Photo credits: Province of British Columbia Flickr.





# Goal One: Expand the system of stable and inclusive land governance

The actions supporting Goal One respond to Recommendations #1 and #4 in *A New Future for Old Forests*. See Appendix for further detail on progress and what's to come.

Our collective well-being relies upon creating certainty on the land. We have heard repeatedly the importance of placing decision making into the hands of those who are closest to the land, who know it and who can steward its health steadily through changes in the economy, climate and political winds.

Shifting how land is governed is a long-term commitment which the Province has made – and work delivering on the commitment has already begun. This is being achieved through collaboration between Provincial and First Nations governments that will continue to evolve so that we create governance structures which are consistent with the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. This collaborative governance means decisions and accountability will be shared between the Province and First Nations, plus the public, local communities,

local governments and other interests will have a clear pathway for participation in decisions that affect them.

Achieving this goal will require acknowledgment of and respect for the revitalization of First Nations laws and the role they play in First Nations' identities and enabling self-governance. These laws come from within Nations themselves, developed from generations of knowledge and experience in governing the interactions between people and the land.

Co-management initiatives like the Collaborative Indigenous Stewardship Framework with its regional forums, and inclusive planning like Forest Landscape Planning and Modernized Land Use Planning, help us to build our knowledge about how co-management and co-governance can ultimately function.

## Building on our work towards stable and inclusive land governance

The actions in this plan build on steps the Province has taken since 2020, including:

- **Initiating 13 new Forest Landscape Planning tables.** These tables support steps towards co-management and co-governance with more than 70 First Nations, along with input from communities, local government, industry and others;
- **Expanding Modernized Land Use Planning** which enables solutions to land-use conflicts to meet long-term economic, environmental and reconciliation objectives;
- **Continuing to invest in the many Nation-B.C. partnerships** that have been established across the province for close to a decade, and trying out new concepts and models of inclusive governance leading towards co-management, such as the Collaborative Indigenous Stewardship Framework and associated regional forums. Forums under this Framework create information-sharing structures that build trust and deepen our ability to manage lands and resources together;
- **Amending the *Forest and Range Practices Act*** to enable joint- and consent-based decision-making agreements with First Nations for Forest Landscape Planning tables;
- **Supporting and encouraging First Nations participation in co-developing forest policies** through the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Action Plan* and ministry-specific mandates;
- **Doubling the share of forest revenues flowing to First Nations** as work continues to co-develop a new fiscal framework consistent with the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*; and
- **Partnering with First Nations to co-develop a Guardians and Stewardship Training Initiative** as part of the *Stronger BC: Future Ready Action Plan* and continuing to support existing Guardians and other field-based First Nations monitoring programs so that metrics explaining the current condition of the land are being collected, analyzed and reported.



Photo credit: Province of British Columbia, Flickr: Gitanyow Stewardship Guardians, 2016

## In the next phase of our work towards stable and inclusive land governance, we will:

- **Expand working together with First Nations** through Collaborative Indigenous Stewardship Forums in all areas where it is supported by First Nations;
- **Accelerate the expansion of Forest Landscape Planning and Modernized Land Use Planning** in British Columbia where it is supported by First Nations. These planning processes bring together First Nations, communities, local government, forest-based industries and others, providing opportunities to trial and learn about various ways of building co-management and co-governance; and
- **Continue to co-develop with Indigenous Peoples** a new distinctions-based fiscal relationship and framework that supports the operation of Indigenous governments. This work includes co-development and implementation of policy frameworks for resource revenue sharing with First Nations and other fiscal mechanisms consistent with the standards of the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.



The success of these commitments requires ongoing work to build trust and form new collaborations and partnerships between the Province and First Nations and are closely related with actions contained in the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Action Plan*. See the Oversight and Reporting section on page 22 for how progress toward these commitments will be reported regularly.



## Outcomes for Goal One: stable and inclusive land governance

These actions help to build a new system of stable, effective co-management and eventually co-governance for all land and resource-related sectors that:

- **Delivers timely, durable, transparent and accountable collaborative decisions** between the Province and First Nations governments;
- **Provides for meaningful and informed multi-sector and public involvement** in planning and decision making; and
- **Makes maintaining and conserving ecosystem health and biodiversity an overarching priority** across British Columbia.

### Levels of “Co”

There are many levels of “co” in working toward co-governance. Co-governance is the formal sharing of decision-making authority and public accountability. It is built on a foundation of working relationships, policies and procedures that support collaborative processes, plans and management.



While many types of collaborative relationships can exist at any given time, the chance of creating more successful relationships increases through the process of gaining experience, and of building relationships and structures together through collaborative projects and processes. This work forms a foundation to evolve to more comprehensive co-management arrangements and ultimately move into more formal co-governance arrangements.

While the Province is working toward a foundation of co-governance with First Nations, there may also be instances where a more exclusive form of First Nations governance is desirable.



# Goal Two: Stewardship for healthy ecosystems

The actions supporting Goal Two respond to Recommendations #2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12 in *A New Future for Old Forests*. See Appendix for further detail on progress and what's to come.

Healthy forests – regardless of age – depend upon healthy ecosystems. B.C.'s longstanding approach to forest stewardship no longer aligns with societal expectations. This is a difficult reality to face, but it is a reality we must confront if we are to continue to benefit from the wealth of B.C.'s forests and ecosystems.

The Biodiversity and Ecosystem Health Framework is at the center of the change we're making. The Framework will set an overarching vision for prioritizing ecosystem health and biodiversity in

land and resource management. This approach will improve the resilience and well-being of our communities and economies, ensuring human needs are met for generations to come. Actions to realize this vision will build upon work that is successfully underway across all sectors and ecosystem types.

## Building on our work towards healthier ecosystems

The actions in this plan build on steps the Province has taken since 2020, including:

- **Increasing the area of old forest that is temporarily deferred from development in areas with high-value biodiversity** to nearly 2.44 million hectares in collaboration with First Nations and industry;
- **Collaboratively developing with First Nations a draft Biodiversity and Ecosystem Health Framework and engaging all British Columbians** to establish an overarching vision and actions for the prioritization of ecosystem health and biodiversity conservation across all ecosystems in B.C.;
- **Securing additional sources of funding for old-forest conservation** through the Conservation Financing Mechanism, the Tripartite Framework Agreement on Nature Conservation and First Nation-led forest carbon credit initiatives;
- **Updating laws and regulations** to support the shift to an ecosystem-health approach, including changes under the *Forest and Range Practices Act*, the *Forest Act* and the *Wildfire Act* since fall 2021;
- **Creating the Silviculture Innovation Program** to promote research and extension toward a wider range of ecosystem-appropriate silvicultural methods;
- **Increasing the Provincial Operational Priority for compliance and enforcement activities** relating to old growth beginning in 2021; and
- **Establishing the Future Forest Ecosystem Centre as a climate-data hub for land managers, policymakers and the public.** The Centre provides historical data and projections of the future state of ecosystems to inform long-term planning and decision making.



## In the next phase of our work towards healthier ecosystems, we will:

- **In 2025, finalize the Biodiversity and Ecosystem Health Framework** through consultation with First Nations and engagement with sector participants and the public. The framework will set out a new approach toward stewarding land and water in B.C. that is founded on the principles of reconciliation and commits to:
  - **The conservation and management of ecosystem health and biodiversity** as an overarching priority;
  - **Establishing this priority through legislation and other enabling tools that apply to all sectors;** and
  - **Creating biodiversity guidance and standards** in collaboration with First Nations that will be used to inform management decision-making processes going forward.
- **As part of delivering the framework, collaborate with First Nations and the forest sector through Forest Landscape Planning, Modernized Land Use Planning and other related planning processes** to test regional strategies for managing ecosystem health and biodiversity through a three-zone approach and to inform provincial guidance. Begin this work immediately;
- **Explore and further refine existing legislation and related policies and consider new legal tools** to facilitate better biodiversity management through forestry. Start, in 2024, by reviewing the Old Growth Management Area policy;
- **Adopt a stewardship approach to fire** that focuses on the proactive use of fire in an ecosystem-appropriate way to promote forest ecosystem resilience and reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire. This is consistent with the recommendations of the Premier's Expert Task Force on Emergencies, and includes:
  - **Expanding the use of cultural and prescribed fire** in partnership with First Nations;
  - **Adopting principles of landscape fire management and developing a toolkit from them for planning throughout B.C.** to ensure that management actions are based in the new reality of wildfire and help restore ecosystem-appropriate fire. This includes undertaking new approaches in drier ecosystem types, and mitigation initiatives that help to conserve biodiversity across the landscape.
- **In early 2025, produce a work plan for addressing the current and future ecological risks of resource roads.** This includes planning for and managing the impacts of resource roads across their lifecycles, from the type and placement of new roads, to ensuring the timely restoration of landscapes affected by abandoned resource roads;
- **By the end of 2024, review B.C.'s current silviculture and free growing framework and outline options for improvement** to align with the recommendations in *A New Future for Old Forests*, such as increased thinning and partial cutting. In the interim, update silvicultural guidance and extension material to reflect how silvicultural systems can be used to better manage ecosystem health and biodiversity;
- **Between 2024-2029, run a targeted compliance project to ensure priority old-growth areas are in compliance with legal orders,** and to report on systemic challenges which may be identified in doing so. The project will identify priorities for targeted action; and
- **Enhance provincial forest inventory mapping to better support managing ecosystem health and biodiversity, especially for old forests.** This will include procuring LiDAR data (a high-tech approach to three-dimensional mapping) covering the entire province over the next five years. As they become available, enhanced forest inventories will be used immediately in the forest landscape planning and timber supply review process. Along with supporting planning and management, the inventory will help assess ecosystem health and to set a baseline for measuring future improvements.

## Outcomes for Goal Two: stewardship for healthy ecosystems

Collectively, these actions help us achieve the vision of healthy, biodiverse ecosystems across the province, supported by a guiding vision, planning systems and forest management that:

- **Achieve agreed upon provincial outcomes for land care** that aligns with biodiversity and ecosystem health as an overarching priority;
- **Empower First Nations and local communities** to tailor approaches to accommodate unique perspectives, regional ecosystems and socio-economic conditions;
- **Create landscapes that are more resistant to catastrophic events** that risk human life and safety; and
- **Provide for a stable and sustainable flow of natural resources and other goods** that support human life, social well-being and reliable economies.



Photo credit: Ryan Jackalin, Cheewhat Giant

## Prioritizing the conservation and management of ecosystem health and biodiversity

Prioritizing the consideration of biodiversity and ecosystem health in management means that ecosystems, at the landscape and local level, will have the structures, functions, and diversity of species necessary for resilience and to provide services that humans depend on.

The continued use of forest resources, with reference to this overarching priority, will aim to better protect our communities from wildfire, flood and drought, halt or reverse biodiversity loss, and stabilize the long term timber supply. This approach respects the interconnections and relationships necessary for ecosystems to thrive.



# Collaborative Indigenous Stewardship Framework

The Collaborative Indigenous Stewardship Framework (CISF) model enables collection of trusted information needed to set objectives and inform resource management decisions. This is done through active observation, assessment and monitoring the environment by over 85 trained Guardians and technical experts, combining culturally-relevant and scientifically-sound analysis and reporting.

This collaborative work will inform processes such as Modernized Land Use Planning and Forest Landscape Planning (FLP). Several FLP tables and Timber Supply Reviews have incorporated CISF data in decision making. First Nations present data from the forums and speak to its use and origin so that Indigenous knowledge is not lost through interpretation.

## Streams – An Example

B.C. has a longstanding practice of classifying streams based on hydrological metrics to guide the type and amount of disturbance – like building a culvert or a bridge – that a stream can withstand. Through CISF, First Nations advance new ways of assessing stream health such as fish migration patterns, food security and seasonal weather patterns. The results of this work lead to tangible direction for operational forestry practices that is delivered in a culturally-appropriate way. This work has also led to more effective

collaborative decision making in many areas where multiple First Nations are involved.

## Wetlands – An Example

First Nations have been working in partnership with B.C. on wetland assessment and monitoring protocols that go beyond western science metrics and incorporate oral history, First Nations scholarship and wisdom. The resulting wetland data, along with standard vegetation and aquatic metrics, inform management decisions through shared, transparent processes. This approach will increasingly inform operational forestry practices and reflect ecosystem-focused land stewardship.



## From short-term deferrals to long-term stewardship planning

Implementing a new approach to sustainable forest management that prioritizes ecosystem health and community prosperity will take time to develop and implement. Recognizing this, the review, *A New Future for Old Forests*, recommended temporarily deferring “development in old forests where ecosystems are at very high and near-term risk of irreversible biodiversity loss” while this work was undertaken.

To support the implementation of temporary deferrals, in June 2021 the Province appointed an independent Technical Advisory Panel (TAP) of scientists and foresters to provide recommendations on priority areas for the implementation of deferrals. In September 2021, the TAP submitted their expert report to the Province which identified and recommended 2.6 million hectares of old growth be deferred.

In alignment with the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, the recommendations of the TAP were shared with First Nations Rights and Title holders in November 2021 for further discussion on how to proceed in their respective territories with the areas

recommended by the TAP for deferral.

The response from First Nations to the TAP-identified deferral areas has varied. Some First Nations supported the deferrals identified by TAP, some preferred to identify alternate areas for deferral based on their local knowledge, and others responded that they felt old growth was already sustainably managed and further deferrals were not required.

As of February 2024, nearly 2.44 million hectares of old growth (including 1.23 million hectares identified by TAP) has been temporarily deferred with the support of First Nations and with the cooperation of B.C.’s forest industry. While conversations on temporary deferrals are continuing, focus is shifting to what should happen with priority old-growth areas over the long term.

Transitioning from short-term, temporary deferrals to long-term stewardship planning requires locally-led decision making. Commitments in this plan, such as accelerating collaborative local planning processes (e.g., Forest Landscape Planning and Modernized Land Use Planning) will support this transition.

## Haida Gwaii and the Great Bear Rainforest

Historic decisions in the Great Bear Rainforest (GBR) and Haida Gwaii demonstrate what can be accomplished through the collaboration of Provincial and First Nation governments together with stakeholders and the public to conserve and maintain biodiversity and ecosystem health, support human well-being and advance reconciliation.

Planning throughout the 2000s has led to the transformation of how forest lands are co-governed and stewarded

through an “ecosystem-based management” approach unique in those areas.

Resources to support the GBR and Haida processes comes from conservation-based financing initiatives including a Coast Opportunities Fund, an endowment for First Nation-led conservation and stewardship activities, and the sale of carbon offset credits created through the GBR and Haida land use decisions and enabled through agreements between the Province and First Nations.

# Goal Three: Support the changing system

The actions supporting Goal Three respond to Recommendations #13 and #14 in *A New Future for Old Forests*. See Appendix for further detail on progress and what's to come.

This plan outlines a suite of actions that create transformational change for the forest sector and for the workers and communities that depend on it.

The Province is focused on creating a high-value forest economy and establishing a diverse and innovative economic base in B.C. This means assessing the benefits by including a wider range of economic activities that depend on healthy forests and contribute to the provincial economy, while supporting new areas of economic development and innovation.

In the wood processing sector, this means creating new production lines within existing pulp and milling operations, expanding and diversifying local production and manufacturing of higher-value wood products and investing in new and innovative bioproducts, while increasing First Nations participation throughout the sector. Together,

these strategies will generate more jobs and benefits from B.C. forests, empowering and bringing certainty to communities throughout B.C.

Throughout this transformation, those who will be impacted by change will need to have access to necessary information and the support to succeed. Close attention will be paid to how change is affecting workers, families, employers and communities, including local government. The Province will provide support as needed to respond to critical social and economic transitions.

These are profound shifts that require deliberate and constant focus on how fast and how far to change. The same commitment that has been invested through generations to create a forest economy can now be invested to move that economy to higher levels of value and return within the province.

## Building on our work towards a more resilient forest sector

The actions in this plan build on steps the Province has taken since 2020, including:

- **Establishing the BC Manufacturing Jobs Fund** to help manufacturing companies modernize, innovate and grow, especially in communities affected by economic downturns;
- **Establishing a suite of Forestry Worker and Community Support programs;**
- **Creating the Forestry Worker Support and Community Resiliency Council** in October 2022 to advise the Province on improvements to programs intended to support workers and communities, and on the need for new approaches to ensure targeted, effective responses to community needs and priorities as the resource economy evolves;
- **Launching Value-Added Accelerator tables in partnership with the First Nations Forestry Council, the Council of Forest Industries and the BC Value-Added Wood Coalition.** The tables bring together licensees, value-added wood manufacturers and First Nations to develop joint solutions for growing value-added wood processing with a focus on the flow of fibre and the investment the sector needs to be successful; and
- **Launching the Indigenous Accelerator Program** to increase First Nations' participation in the forest sector. Secondary objectives of the program include increasing utilization of residual forest fibre, diversifying the types of products made from this fibre and supporting the final stages of commercialization and scaling of these bioproducts.



*Above: Tannins from bark can be used in the production of leather. Here we see the combination of two waste streams: forestry (bark) and fisheries (fish skin) to make fish leather*

## In the next phase of our work toward a more resilient forest sector, we will:

- **By the end of 2024, engage the broader forest-based industry, communities, First Nations, local government and others to develop a roadmap to the future forest-based economy and a strategy toward realizing that vision.** This vision builds and expands on work toward Modernizing Forest Policy since 2020 that set out the transformation and transition path for the wood processing industry;
- **By fall 2024, establish a cross-sector group dedicated to identifying the right conditions to leverage new investment opportunities** in order to diversify and grow B.C.'s wood processing sector, invest in bioproduct manufacturing and scale-up participation in the forest bio-economy. The group's priorities will include expanding B.C.-based ownership in the provincial wood products and bioproduct sectors;
- **Provide transition planning and implementation assistance** to workers, employers or communities as requested, and support access to available information, funding and services. The first report-out from the Forest Worker Supports and Community Resilience Council is scheduled for public release in spring 2024; and



*Above: Wood chips transformed into cellulose foams that can be used in insulation*

- **Create an open source of information to support the work of communities, First Nations, local government and others** to develop their community economic visions and transition toward them. Improve public understanding toward more informed input into planning and decision making locally. Build this based on the information that flows from the broader forest-based roadmap engagement.

## Outcomes for Goal Three: support the changing system

These actions will support communities and the Province to lead transitions to the new, stronger stewardship system and evolved forest-based economies resulting in:

- **A higher level of understanding** about the new stronger stewardship system, managing and conserving ecosystem health and biodiversity and the evolved forest-based economy;
- **A greater capacity** among all parties to proactively and systematically plan and manage effective transitions; and
- **A stable and reshaped forest-based economy** with a range of industries capable of supporting families and communities, based on a long-term stable flow of forest resources available.

# Toward Complete Implementation

## Oversight and reporting

Carrying out the actions in this plan will generate a range of projects and initiatives that will span Provincial ministries, the natural resource sector and both First Nation and non-First Nation communities alike.

This is complex work that will take years to fully achieve. A clear and accountable way to track the progress of actions is critical to continue building trust and maintaining the momentum we have already built together.

## Measuring progress towards implementation

Measuring the progress of actions in this plan requires ongoing work with First Nations and other partners to develop metrics for regular reporting.

Some initial quantitative measures of progress that will be reported on annually include:

- Number of Forest Landscape Planning tables underway;
- Amount and status of old-growth; and
- Frequency of public release of old-growth harvesting data.

Additional quantitative and qualitative metrics will be identified in partnership with First Nations.

In addition, the Province will:

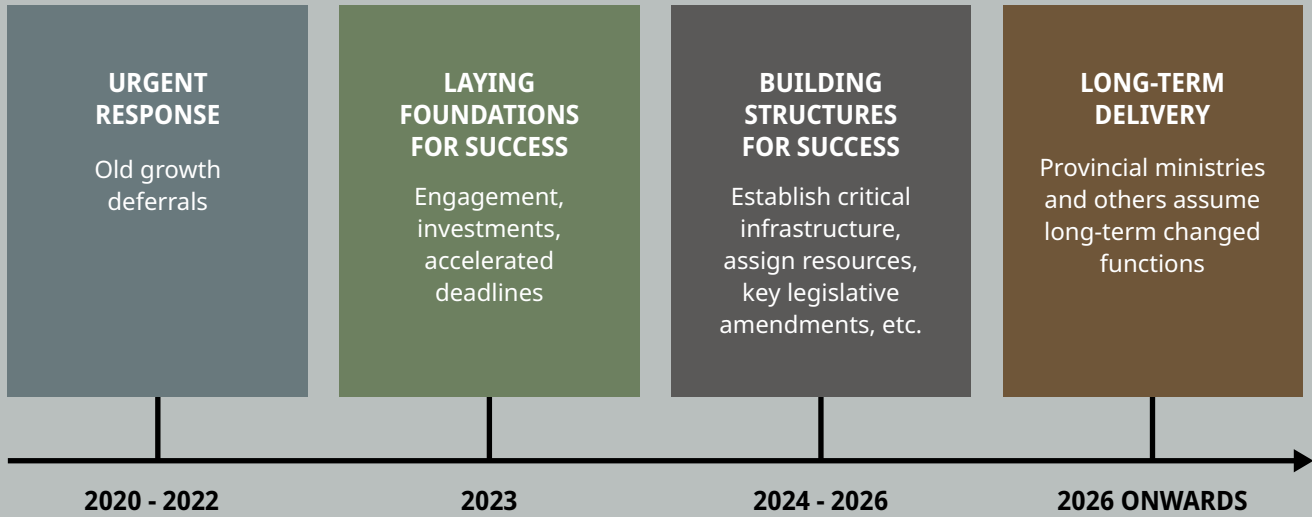
- Immediately, establish an interim committee to champion and coordinate the implementation of this plan and the development of a new framework for biodiversity and ecosystem health internally within the Provincial

government. This will include:

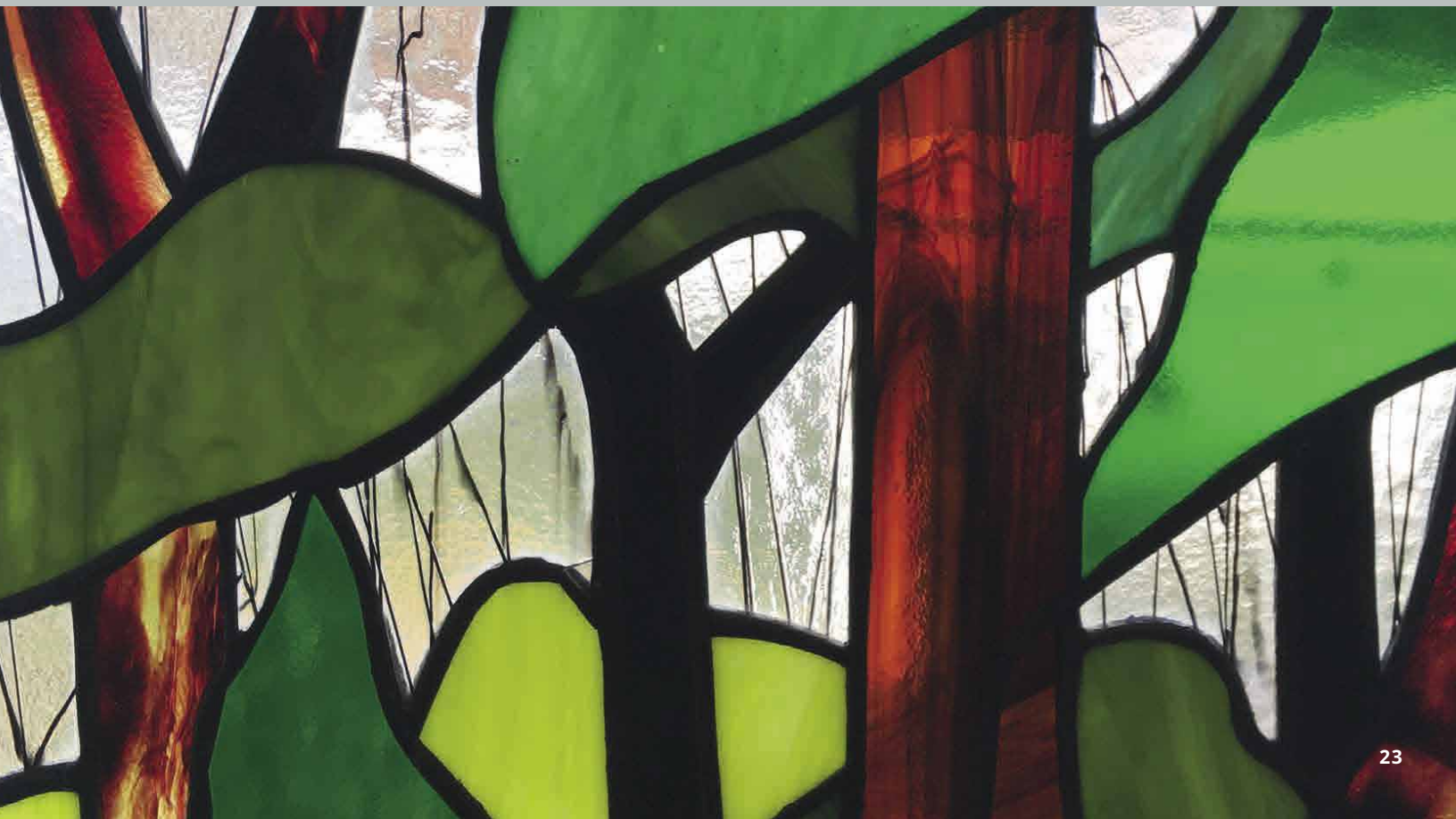
- coordinating work across ministries and agencies and helping steward policy projects to completion;
  - monitoring, evaluating and reporting on progress;
  - issuing regular reports to the public; and
  - recommending adjustments to the commitments in this plan that may be needed as relationships with First Nations deepen and evolve.
- In 2025, transfer these responsibilities to a long-term co-governance model with First Nations; and
  - Upon approval of this plan, ensure that the Mandate Letters and Service Plan commitments for ministries will establish clear ownership of the various projects required to fully implement this plan.

## Continuous Implementation

The Province has been working since 2020 to implement the 14 recommendations of the *A New Future for Old Forests*, with a projected timeframe below for putting the new systems into practice.

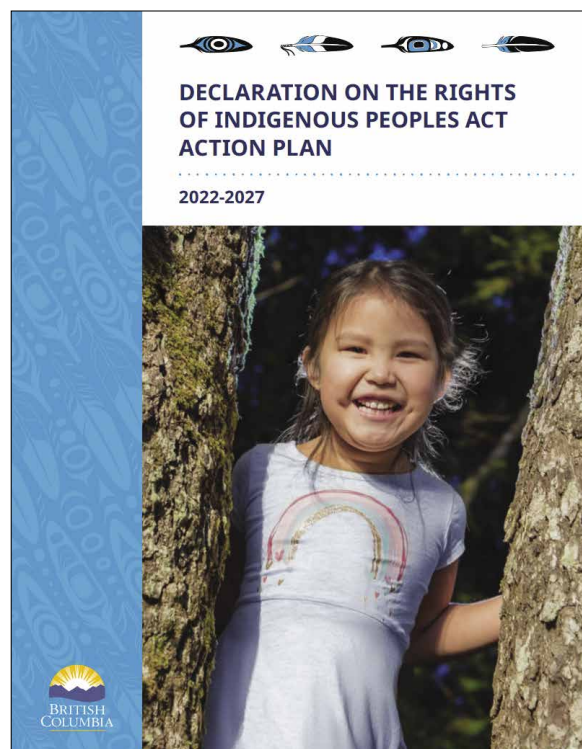


Progress under this plan will be jointly reviewed with First Nations and reported publicly on an annual basis until the implementation of this work is within the “Long-Term Delivery” phase, anticipated to be underway within two to four years.



## The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Action Plan

During the engagement with First Nations throughout 2023, many Nations urged the Province to wherever possible build on work already underway. Many actions throughout this plan are closely tied to commitments already underway within the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Action Plan*. These actions will be included in the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Action Plan* reporting process, in addition to the oversight and reporting processes associated with this plan.



## Expert advice for further action

Many of the commitments in this plan depend on the guidance and advice of technical experts in ecology and other related fields. To provide this steady source of expertise, an expert advisory group will be formed in 2024 to help interpret and guide the implementation of biodiversity-related recommendations into policy and practices on the ground.

The group will consist of representatives from the Province, First Nations and external experts.

Progress on establishing the group will be reported through this plan's accountability structure until a longer-term way to report on the group's work is created.



# Appendix: Progress at a glance by recommendation of *A New Future for Old Forests*

This appendix sets out the actions that the Province is taking to respond to the recommendations contained in *A New Future for Old Forests*. There may be some instances where additional detail is included below that is not found in the main body of the plan.



Photo credit: Alec Pytlowany, Province of British Columbia Flickr, Cranberry Marsh, near Valemount B.C.

## Recommendation 1

**Engage the full involvement of Indigenous leaders and organizations to review (*A New Future for Old Forests*) and any subsequent policy or strategy development and implementation.**

### PROGRESS TO DATE

- Explored opportunities for co-development with First Nations through the development of this Action Plan.
- Amended the *Forest and Range Practices Act* to enable joint- and consent-based decision-making agreements for Forest Landscape Planning tables.
- Initiated 13 new Forest Landscape Planning tables.
- Expanded Modernized Land Use Planning.
- Partnered with First Nations to co-develop a Guardians and Stewardship Training Initiative and continued to support existing Guardians and other field-based First Nations monitoring programs.
- Continued to invest in the many Nation-B.C. partnerships that have been established across the province for close to a decade, and tried out new concepts and models of inclusive governance leading towards co-management.
- Supported and encouraged First Nations participation in co-developing forest policies through the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Action Plan* and ministry-specific mandates.

### WHAT'S TO COME

- Expand working with First Nations through Collaborative Indigenous Stewardship Forums where supported by First Nations.

- Accelerate the expansion of Forest Landscape Planning and Modernized Land Use Planning in British Columbia where it is supported by First Nations.
- Ongoing oversight and reporting on progress under this action plan with First Nations. For anticipated timeframes on these actions, see Oversight and Reporting on page 22.

## Recommendation 2

**Declare conservation of ecosystem health and biodiversity of B.C.'s forests as an overarching priority and enact legislation that legally establishes this priority for all sectors.**

### PROGRESS TO DATE

- Developed a draft Biodiversity and Ecosystem Health Framework and engaged with First Nations, sector participants, and the public.
- Amended the *Forest Act* to ensure that statutory decision makers have discretion over issuing permits for roads and cut blocks.
- Amended the *Wildfire Act* to enable prescribed and cultural use of fire for the purpose of creating more resilient ecosystems that include old forest elements.
- Amended the *Forest and Range Practices Act* to enable joint and consent-based decision-making agreements for Forest Landscape Planning tables.
- Amended the regulations under the *Forest and Range Practices Act* to legally protect rare habitats called "ecological communities."
- Amended Forest Range and Practices Act regulations to repeal prioritization of timber supply over all other forest objectives.

- Secured additional sources of funding for old-forest conservation through the Conservation Financing Mechanism and the Old Growth Nature Fund (Canada) which supports shared goals of the Tripartite Framework Agreement on Nature Conservation.

## WHAT'S TO COME

- Finalize a framework on biodiversity and ecosystem health and associated workplan to implement the framework. (2025)
- Explore and further refine legislation and related policies to facilitate better biodiversity management through forestry, beginning with reviewing the Old Growth Management Area policy. (Begin in 2024)
- Expand the use of cultural and prescribed fire in partnership with First Nations. Progress is reported annually under Performance Measure 2.1 of the Ministry of Forests Service Plan and will be reviewed by 2027 under the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Action Plan*.
- Adopt principles of landscape fire management and develop a toolkit from them for planning throughout B.C. to ensure that management actions are based in the new reality of wildfire and help restore ecosystem-appropriate fire.
- Produce a work plan to address the current and future ecological risks of resource roads across their lifecycles. (By early 2025)

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## Recommendation 3

**Adopt a three-zone forest management framework to guide forest planning and decision-making.**

### PROGRESS TO DATE

- Initiated 13 new Forest Landscape Planning tables.
- Expanded Modernized Land Use Planning.

### WHAT'S TO COME

- As part of delivering Recommendation #2, collaborate with First Nations and the forest sector through Forest Landscape Planning, Modernized Land Use Planning and other related planning processes to test regional strategies for managing ecosystem health and biodiversity through a three-zone approach and to inform provincial guidance. (Begin this work immediately)

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## Recommendation 4

**Adopt a more inclusive and stable governance model that gives local communities and stakeholders a greater role in forest management decisions that affect them.**

### PROGRESS TO DATE

- Initiated 13 new Forest Landscape Planning tables.
- Expanded Modernized Land Use Planning.
- Continued to invest in the many First Nation-B.C. partnerships have been established across the province for close to a decade, and tested out new concepts and models of inclusive governance leading towards co-management.

- Doubled the share of forest revenues flowing to First Nations as work continues to co-develop a new fiscal framework.
- Secured additional sources of funding for old-forest conservation through the Conservation Financing Mechanism and the Tripartite Framework Agreement on Nature Conservation.
- Amended the *Forest and Range Practices Act* to enable joint and consent-based decision-making agreements for Forest Landscape Planning tables.

## WHAT'S TO COME

- Expand working together with First Nations through Collaborative Indigenous Stewardship Forums where it is supported by First Nations.
- Accelerate the expansion of Forest Landscape Planning and Modernized Land Use Planning in British Columbia where it is supported by First Nations.
- Continue to co-develop with Indigenous Peoples a new distinctions-based fiscal relationship and framework that supports the operation of Indigenous governments.

## Recommendation 5

**Provide the public with timely and objective information about forest conditions and trends.**

### PROGRESS TO DATE

- Established the Future Forest Ecosystem Centre as a climate-data hub for land managers, policymakers and the public.

- Amended the *Forest and Range Practice Act* regulations to require Forest Operations Maps, and launched a new online platform for the public to view the location of planned logging activity.
- Invested in the collection of LiDAR province wide.

### WHAT'S TO COME

- Align the websites of key ministries to provide a stable source of information on forest conditions and trends. (By end of 2024)
- Improve the accuracy and frequency of public reporting on the location of forest harvesting activity across the province – report updated harvest mapping on DataBC quarterly. (By end of 2024)
- Enhance the provincial forest inventory mapping to reflect ecosystem integrity and seral stage attributes.

## Recommendation 6

**Until a new strategy is implemented, defer development in old forests where ecosystems are at very high and near-term risk of irreversible biodiversity loss.**

### PROGRESS TO DATE

- Increased the area of old forest that is deferred from development to over 2.4 million hectares in collaboration with First Nations and industry.

### WHAT'S TO COME

- Use regionally-led planning processes to identify long-term management solutions for temporarily deferred old forest in collaboration with First Nations, local communities and affected parties.

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## Recommendation 7

**Bring management of old forests into compliance with existing provincial targets and guidelines for maintaining biological diversity.**

### PROGRESS TO DATE

- Increased the Provincial Operational Priority for compliance and enforcement activities relating to old growth.

### WHAT'S TO COME

- Review Provincial compliance and enforcement Operational Priority ranking for old growth-related operations. (By summer 2024)
- Run a targeted compliance project to ensure priority old-growth areas are in compliance with legal orders and to report on systemic challenges. (Initiate in 2024, run through to 2029)

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## Recommendation 8

**Establish and fund a more robust monitoring and evaluation system for updating management of old forests.**

### PROGRESS TO DATE

- Continued to invest in the many Nation-B.C. partnerships have been established across the province for close to a decade and tested out new concepts and models of inclusive governance leading towards co-management.

- Initiated design for a public-facing reporting system on old forests that includes a variety of Provincial government reports including the Forest and Range Evaluation Program (FREP) and Cumulative Effects.

### WHAT'S TO COME

- Establish monitoring and reporting system based on the implementation of other actions under recommendations #5, #9, #10 and #11. This will be the responsibility of the oversight and accountability structure to establish – see Oversight and Reporting on page 22.

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## Recommendation 9

**Establish a standardized system and guidance that integrates Provincial goals and priorities to local objectives and targets.**

and

## Recommendation 10

**Update the targets for retention and management of old and ancient forests.**

### PROGRESS TO DATE

- Commissioned a third-party to provide early considerations regarding the implementation of these two recommendations jointly.

### WHAT'S TO COME

- Finalize and launch a framework for biodiversity and ecosystem health and an associated implementation plan. (2025)

- Form an advisory group of experts to help interpret and guide the implementation of biodiversity-related recommendations into policy and practices on the ground. (By end of 2024)
- Explore and further refine legislation and related policies to facilitate better biodiversity management through forestry beginning with reviewing the Old Growth Management Area policy. (Begin in 2024)

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## Recommendation 11

**Improve the mapping and classification of old forests to recognize multiple values.**

### PROGRESS TO DATE

- Invested in the collection of LiDAR province wide.
- Updated the BC Data Catalogue in October 2023 with the most recent consolidated information on the harvested area of B.C. based upon satellite imagery and reports from permit holders.

### WHAT'S TO COME

- Enhance the Provincial forest inventory mapping to better support managing ecosystem health and biodiversity, especially for old forests.
- Use enhanced forest inventories immediately as they become available in the timber supply review process.
- Develop a provincial seral stage classification to support ecosystem health planning processes.
- Move from annual to quarterly harvest reporting in the BC Data Catalogue.

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## Recommendation 12

**Create a silviculture innovation program aimed at developing harvesting alternatives to clearcutting that maintain old forest values.**

### PROGRESS TO DATE

- Created the Silviculture Innovation Program.
- Amended *Forest Range and Practices Act* regulations to repeal prioritization of timber supply over all other forest objectives.

### WHAT'S TO COME

- Review and make recommendations to better manage ecosystem health and biodiversity through B.C.'s current silviculture framework.
- Update silvicultural guidance and extension material. (By end of 2024)

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## Recommendation 13

**Once developed, implement new policies and strategies for the management of old forests through mandatory Provincial and local transition plans that define, schedule and monitor the process.**

### PROGRESS TO DATE

- Created the Forestry Worker Support and Community Resiliency Council to advise the Province.

## WHAT'S TO COME

- Engage the broader forest-based industry, communities, First Nations, local government and others to develop a roadmap to the future forest-based economy and a strategy to achieve that vision.
- Provide transition planning and implementation assistance to workers, employers or communities, and support access to available information, funding and services.

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## Recommendation 14

**Support forest sector workers and communities as they adapt to changes resulting from a new forest stewardship system.**

### PROGRESS TO DATE

- Created the Forestry Worker Support and Community Resiliency Council to advise the Province.
- Established the BC Manufacturing Jobs Fund to help manufacturing companies modernize, innovate and grow.
- Established the Bridging to Retirement program to support full-time forestry workers' transition to retirement and protect the jobs of junior workers.
- Created a BC Timber Sales Value-added Manufacturing Program, dedicating a portion of timber supply to value-added manufacturers.
- Launched value-added accelerator tables in partnership with the First Nations Forestry Council, the Council of Forest Industries and the BC Value-Added Wood Coalition.

- Launched the Indigenous Accelerator Program to increase First Nations participation in the forest sector.
- Doubled the Rural Economic Diversification and Infrastructure Program to support economic diversification and double funding for FY2022/23.
- Implemented the Forest Worker Transition Support program providing specialized skills training for impacted workers, employers and communities.
- Revised log and lumber export policies to increase the amount of fibre staying in B.C. to support the value-added wood manufacturing sector.

### WHAT'S TO COME

- Establish a cross-sector group dedicated to identifying the right conditions to diversify and grow the forest bio-economy. (By fall 2024)
- Create an open source of information to support the development of community economic visions and transition toward them.

A NEW FUTURE FOR OLD FORESTS

# From review to action

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