

Garry Merkel PRF
Al Gorley PRF
Review Panel Old Growth Strategy
Government of British Columbia

Sent by email to address: oldgrowthbc@gov.bc.ca

Re: Old Growth Strategic Review

Dear panel members,

I am writing regarding the need for preservation of old growth forest and the need to immediately halt logging of old growth forests on unceded Indigenous lands when initiated by colonial resource policies.

I am writing from the position that colonialism in all its forms is illegal. During the last century, most colonies ceased to exist as colonial occupiers transferred sovereignty back to the rightful owners. Noticeable exceptions are a number of countries including Canada, where it was suggested that the colony was no longer a colony, because the colonial society was no longer under the rule of the British Government. Sovereignty was never transferred back to the rightful owners of the land; the Indigenous Nations. Clearly Indigenous lands continue to be occupied by colonizers.

Since Canada is a colonial society that has pushed Indigenous Peoples to 0.2 % of their former territories, any Canadian law to be colonial law, cannot be considered the rule of law as it suggested it should be for Indigenous peoples. Indigenous Nations have their own laws.

Directly out of this position, I consider the taking of any resources from Indigenous unceded territories without the consent of Indigenous peoples to be illegal and to be considered theft.

The nature of consent should be taken into consideration, although is that truly something a colonial entity can have an opinion on? Of course, it can't, yet it does.

Consent given to resource projects by an elected Band Council using the power imposed by the Indian Act – with its colonial racist nature and purpose of divide and conquer, is clearly different than circumstance where elected Band Councils made/make decisions about resource management after properly informing and consulting with Hereditary Chiefs and band membership in a form that is appropriate to the Nation in question.

I fully aware of the poor living conditions many Indigenous peoples find themselves in as result of lack of proper housing, proper education, proper economic prospects and a continued degradation of the natural environment that many Indigenous peoples have relied and continue to rely on, to be a direct outcome of colonial policies that have been designed to do exactly that.

I am fully aware of the pressure from two sides brought onto Indian Act elected Band Councils to sign onto resource projects on the Nation's territory, even though such decisions often fall within the realm of Hereditary Chiefs, as the authority of Indian Act elected band chiefs is limited to the reserves. The pressures being: -the Canadian Federal Government who provide the funding for the band council system on one side and on the other, the band membership fed up with poor living conditions and limited life outlook.

Directly following out of this, instead of pushing Indigenous elected band councils and band membership into the arms of resource companies, and so forced to accept colonial resource policies, which the Canadian Federal Government and Canadian Provincial Governments want to see fulfilled, Canada and its provinces must immediately start compensating Indigenous Peoples for resources taken without their consent, allowing for Indigenous Peoples to rebuild their communities, establish much needed services and start building their future Nation by Nation.

Conclusion: Immediate compensation to Indigenous Nations is priority number one in terms of reconciliation.

With the context laid out and the main priority set, what do we do with an 'old growth strategic review' initiated by a colonial entity, the BC Government? Is this not simply further imposition and interference by a colonial entity in the lives of Indigenous peoples?

Of course, such a review can be used as a justification to perpetuate a not so strategic and the all to blunt liquidation of old growth forest on unceded Indigenous lands.

However such a review can also be another voice urging for that acknowledges current and past wrongs to Indigenous Peoples and right-out theft of resources from Indigenous Nations, and provides a schedule for compensation to Indigenous Nations of old growth resources stolen and non-timber values destroyed, and recommends for that compensation schedule to be implemented immediately. Any talk of waiting and complexity and the need for transition is colonial speak to buy more time to continue resource theft and will result in only more suffering for Indigenous peoples.

Old growth logging, whether clearcutting or selective logging, must come to an immediate halt, for the sole reason that: What is taken what is not yours is theft. Continuing the taking when talking about reconciliation is all the more shameful. And stalling or slowing of this process is again a colonial power buying more time to continue resource theft and resulting in more suffering for Indigenous peoples.

Conclusion: From the point of view of reconciliation, Old growth logging in all its forms initiated by colonial policies must stop immediately.

Secondary to Indigenous Rights and Title, there is the reasoning why old growth forest should be left standing and not be cut down.

On a global level, we see a dramatic decline of life and an increase in species becoming critically endangered and going extinct, all due to natural habitat fragmented, polluted, and/or destroyed.

I can go into detail how important old growth forest and its complex soil ecosystems are for the natural health of the species that depend on these forest, that old growth forests are effective water regulators, that these forest in an ever widening circle of scientists are being recognized to play a crucially important role in capturing of CO2 from the atmosphere. consider that knowledge to be present in both of you.

As we know, old growth forests are not simply stands of timber. They are complex ecosystems that harbour a wide variety of connections and interdependency between a wide variety of species. Once logged will take many years to re-establish if at all.

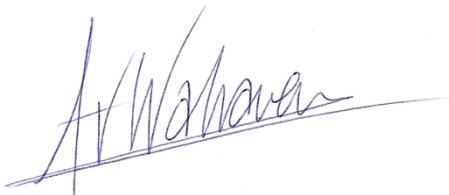
Colonial resource policies in Canada and BC have led to a rapid decline in the amount of old growth forests in the area currently named British Columbia.

For that matter all remaining old growth forest should be left standing.

Conclusion: Old growth forest are vitally important to help keep global heating below 2 degrees Celsius as they effective fixers of CO2, they harbour crucially important to the survival of many species, and therefore logging of old growth forest must stop immediately.

End of submission

Sincerely,



Anton van Walraven

Nexwlelexwem / Bowen Island, January 31, 2020

This submission will be CCed, but not limited to: Union of BC Indian Chiefs, Premier of BC, Minister of Environment, Minister of Forests, Lands & Natural Resource Operations