

CONSERVATION OF OLD GROWTH

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This submission to the “Old Growth Strategic Review” is based on my views, comments and experiences over the last 45 years regarding long-term forest stewardship.

Excluding any intervention in all remaining BC old growth forests OR logging all the remaining old growth are two impractical options that will not contribute to community resiliency or the well-being of British Columbians. A responsible model is required to meet the objectives of old growth conservation in BC.

Old growth forests are recognized by forest professionals and policy decision-makers for their value to environmental, economic, social and cultural contributions to the BC forest asset. The issue of old growth conservation is not new. I recall being part of a multi-stakeholder committee organized by the Society Promoting Environmental Conservation (SPEC) in the late 1980s to bring forward a definition of old growth for use in conservation decision-making. The challenge is how do we bring this value into the mainstream of long-term forest stewardship of BC forests without accepting either of the extreme options noted above while at the same time capitalize on the old growth values in the BC forest asset.

Old growth conservation strategies and policies cannot be developed in isolation of a suitable forest regulatory and planning infrastructure framework. BC has a history of when an issue arises responding by just adding a piece on to the existing infrastructure without knowing how it fits overall. Hopefully, Government will not continue this relative to the old growth issue. Graphic courtesy of Symmetry Consulting¹.

Forest infrastructure framework

Addressing the public concern over old growth conservation provides an opportunity to not only address this issue but stimulate the filling of existing forest infrastructure gaps. **Recommendation:** This opportunity should not be missed.

Long-term forest stewardship requires officially adopting the principle of Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) to guide development of legislative and regulatory tools for decision-making regarding the management of BC forest lands and the basis for monitoring and assessment. Currently, one major shortcoming is the lack of a legally binding Provincial vision and associated goals. A Provincial vision statement has been produced by the Chief Forester (<https://tinyurl.com/r9bkn6e>) but it is not binding on policy development or operations practices. **Recommendation:** This deficiency should be removed.



¹ <http://www.symmetree.ca> Presentation to the Canadian Institute of Forestry, January 2011.

The vision for a forest is a cornerstone in developing a plan for any forest management unit (e.g., landscape, Province, etc.) The late Dr. Gordon Baskerville, Dean, Faculty of Forestry, University of New Brunswick was an eminent Canadian forest management leader who advised foresters to “decide what you want from the forest and then go to the tool box” (<https://www.bcforestconversation.com/wp-content/uploads/SFM-what-needs-to-be-done-to-demonstrate-status.pdf>). Old growth must become a component, with targets, just like wildlife habitat, visionally sensitive areas, biodiversity conservation, etc. identified in the Forest and Range Practices Act (FRPA). **Recommendation:** Binding vision statements for the Provincial forest and the local forests across BC that include old growth conservation should be developed.

Community² involvement

The 2008 *Reversing the Tide* conference in Prince George identified that best practices across North America in rural development and economic revitalization requires active involvement of communities in designing solutions to their issues. BC communities have since identified, through the 2016 UBCM³ AGM resolutions to Government, they want to have more influence in forest and land use decision-making. Consequently, they need to have a say in a vision for their local forests that is consistent with the Provincial vision. Government needs to take a leadership role in requesting a broad-based and general community agreed upon local vision for the local forest (<https://tinyurl.com/y9v3opkh>). This would then be used in guiding forest managers in developing long-term forest stewardship plans. **Recommendation:** Government to support and encourage communities to develop vision statements for their local forests.

A framework for a new governance model (<https://tinyurl.com/rjzuxnp>) is provided for consideration of local governments and First Nations who wish to take a leadership role in this regard. Some examples of communities who have taken action on increasing their influence on strategic forest management decision-making are identified in <https://www.bcforestconversation.com/community-influence/>.

Vision implementation

Achieving the local forest vision is a technical exercise conducted by forest resources professionals. It involves development of a strategic plan that demonstrates spatially, temporally and explicitly the long-term forest stewardship of a local forest, including the desired future forest condition to be achieved in the short and long-term relative to public expectations and industrial and environmental pressures related to the forest land base. It balances the management of the forest resources over the long-term. A framework concept for developing such a plan is outlined in <https://tinyurl.com/r6w7ktl>. **Recommendation:** This type of scenario building approach needs to be a requirement for all strategic forest management plans.

The developing of possible scenarios for a long-term forest stewardship is being used in the Integrated Silviculture Strategies pilot projects initiated by the Chief Forester <https://tinyurl.com/vx4x7kg>. There may need to be adjustments to the management area other than a Timber Supply Area (TSA) to accommodate the definition of the local forest as identified by the communities. It would also need to

² Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal

³ Union of BC Municipalities

include adjacent protected or conservation areas to assess old growth targets associated with the local forest.

As identified in the description of the process, several inputs are required and should be expanded to include old growth targets. Regardless of the approach to old growth conservation, definitions and targets of old growth and existing and future research into the values old growth will be required as inputs into the scenario building exercise and subsequent communications with communities. **Recommendation:** Government commit to supporting the development of the critical old growth inputs.

The expectation that when a recommended strategic plan has been prepared, it would be presented to the communities in the Region and Government for comment relative to how the plan would support the movement toward community resiliency and meet or move toward the vision and resources targets. If acceptance is not provided, revisions would be conducted by the forest manager to address broadly accepted concerns of technical significance. The strategic planning process must be transparent and progress in developing the plan communicated publicly. **Recommendation:** Government encourage local processes to review strategic plans.

Conclusions

The proposed approach and models will not meet the needs of those promoting the extreme options. However, it will achieve long-term forest stewardship leading to community resiliency, provided Government, First Nations, communities, industry and other resource management organizations participate in a constructive and positive manner. Hopefully, legislated participation will not be required.

The recommendations will:

- Recognize old growth as an important forest value and incorporate it into the mainstream of forest management.
- Capitalize on utilization of existing forest management instruments even though there may be a possibility of some modifications to meet the overall objectives.
- Fill the gaps in important missing instruments within the current forest regulatory and management infrastructure model.
- Provide an important opportunity for communities to have a say in the strategic management of their local forests.
- Provide a basis for moving into a more locally driven and collaborative governance model of local forests.
- Provide a vision for the long-term forest stewardship of local forests contributing to community resiliency.
- Provide strategic balancing of the management of forest resource values in a manner that is transparent, involves existing forest management knowledge and research.
- Provide publicly transparent guidance to forest managers and a basis for monitoring progress toward a set of resources objectives.
- Provide a replacement for the Forest Stewardship Plan with a more informative and auditable strategic level plan.