

Thank you for the opportunity to address the panel today about something close to my heart, the profoundly beautiful life-giving and endangered old-growth forests of this coast.

I wish to acknowledge that this meeting is taking place on the unceded territory of the Lekwungen people who sustainably stewarded these beautiful lands and waters and all the myriad life forms of this place on Earth since time immemorial. I acknowledge that the climate crisis that I would like to address today in connection to the urgency of protecting old-growth forests, in my opinion, not talked enough about in forestry circles, is a by-product of a system of resource colonialism and economic growth that in only 150 years of colonization has pushed the planet to the point of the dangerous decline of every ecosystem on Earth. So that by acknowledging the land we are on, I also acknowledge the history of resource extractive colonial violence on these lands that has led us to this moment in which the future of all children and all life is now mired in uncertainty.

My name is Bobby Arbess. I am a veteran tree hugger, self-employed landscaper, parent and member of the Friends of Carmanah-Walbran and organizer with the Forests4Climate! Coalition, representing over 50 civil society groups and youth, climate, Indigenous, faith and sustainable forestry leaders across B.C. calling for bold action to protect the last remaining carbon-rich old-growth temperate rainforests for themselves as sacred life-giving habitats and as a necessary measure to help stabilize the atmosphere and buffer the planet from the horrific spectre of runaway climate change unfolding before our eyes.

Every day we hear fresh scientific reports of catastrophic levels of disruption to the natural world that sustains us all: major glaciers melting almost overnight endangering freshwater sources for billions of people, the Arctic permafrost releasing lethal amounts of methane as they melt, oceans warming to such high degrees that they are losing oxygen, salmon populations, food for orcas, wolves, bears and the basis of coastal indigenous communities from time immemorial, collapsing; entire regions as we have experienced here in BC engulfed in smoke for months on end--from climate change.

These are the times we are in and these times call for extraordinary action to do what we can to stop the unravelling of the planet's life support systems collapsing under the weight of a global capitalist-industrial growth economy that has totally exceeded the planet's carrying capacity. We are

rapidly wearing out our welcome on this amazing planet that has graciously supported our evolution.

In 1989, I visited the fabled Carmanah valley, a place I had only seen in WC calendars and began trail-building through the giant Sitka Spruce habitat on its pristine alluvial valley bottom and in the neighbouring big cedar country of the Walbran valley, almost every weekend, and some time for longer stretches from 1989 to 1991. In the summer of 1991, with multinationals Fletcher Challenge and McMillan Bloedel poised to punch road mainlines through most of the Walbran valley in one summer, I participated in the organizing of a three-month road blockade that effectively stopped over 13 kms of logging road development. These actions helped lead to the the creation of Carmanah-Walbran Provincial Park, over 15, 000 hectares of old-growth forest paradise. Despite, the very heart of this area being left out of the park, for logging of its giant Western Red Cedars, now known as the Central Walbran, for which we are still fighting today, this was a victory for the movement to protect this amazing land-base from reckless destruction for short-term profit. Since that time, however, over the last 25 years, almost 10, 000 hectares a year, an area roughly 16 x the size of Carmanah-Walbran Provincial Park of old-growth rainforest, has been lost forever.

I say forever, because an old-growth forest is an irreplaceable and therefore non-renewable source of life (notice how I didn't say resource) that has evolved under the moist, cool conditions of the post-Pleistocene glacial period that provided the optimal conditions for thriving forest succession. In a rapidly warming world, created partly due to deforestation, those conditions are not something we can wilfully reproduce. Once these forests are gone they are gone forever. We need to come by that honestly. The biologically barren environment of an industrial tree plantation with trees spaced 10 feet apart over hundreds of thousands of hectares, all the same age, height and devoid of the structural, age, height and biological diversity of a climax successional , low-disturbance forest naturally evolving for 10, 000 years, is no substitute for the real thing. That said, I hold hope that a dramatically scaled down version of the industry can thrive in a restorative capacity tending the vast silvicultural lands to bring back the characteristics of an old-growth forest and with it improved high quality wood, the future of forestry in BC.

The tragedy of the industrial forestry model is that we have been liquidating some of the best softwood forests on earth and replacing them with something the companies that have been cutting them down want nothing

to do with. Once the 'green gold' is gone so go the companies, leaving local communities with diminishing jobs and a degraded land. The Tree Farm License system, stripped of its appurtenance clauses that once held logging companies accountable for job stability in exchange for the gargantuan privilege of timber rights over vast areas of unceded Indigenous lands, has been a nightmare to local communities and ecosystems alike.

If I were the Premier of British Columbia I would revoke those timber licenses as they have violated the very trust upon which they were first granted. I would return land to the people it was stolen from and I would work with them to create new legislation to ensure the maximum number of jobs per trees extracted from the land, rather than maximized profits for multinational logging companies who have called the shots around here for far too long. Perhaps the Panel can make such recommendations for returning wealth back to the communities, human and more-than-human from where it has been stolen by an industry bent on maximizing profit through over-cutting, mechanization and the unbridled export of raw timber.

Only then will we have our cake and eat it too. Only then can we protect all or most of the remaining old-growth forests and have no net loss, but rather more, sustainable jobs in a thriving, value-added forest economy based on diversification and investment in transitioning the smaller and smaller workforce still involved in old-growth logging into long-term sustainable careers in eco and cultural-tourism, land-based aquaculture, salmon enhancement, sustainable harvesting of non-timber forest resources such as berries, mushrooms, plant medicinals and manufacturing of quality finished wood products requiring skilled craftsmanship and pride in work. This is what is missing in BC and there is no better time than now to make that investment in a vibrant future of human-scale, sustainable economic development for local forest-dependant communities that gets them out of the rut of boom and bust economic cycles that has been the scourge of land-based communities.

The primary, old-growth and ancient temperate rainforests of the Pacific Northwest are amongst some of the most carbon-rich forests, containing the highest volumes of woody biomass of any forests in the world. Their geographic distribution is extremely restricted. There is a large volume of scientific evidence that confirms the role these forests play as a critical storehouse of carbon, sequestering vast amounts of CO₂. Many scientific reports have established evidence that protecting the last of these forests

can be one of the most important measures to tackle both the climate and biodiversity crisis we are in. Forests4Climate! have urged B.C Minister of Environment and Climate Change Strategy George Heyman to take a bold stand to protect these forests as part of the Province's climate action plans.

At the moment BC forests and forestry top every sector as the largest source of carbon emissions in the province. This is from the combined impacts of forest mismanagement including logging old-growth forests, the awful practise of slash burning the colossal amount of wood waste generated from our clearcuts, the widespread glyphosate spraying-- and BC wildfires. We need to do everything inside our control to get back to the point where the forests can fulfill their natural function as storehouses not sources of carbon.

There appears to be large disagreement and discrepancy between government/corporate and non-profit organization figures about how much old-growth forests remain on Vancouver island and the southwest mainland. Sierra Club and Ancient Forest Alliance figures seem to concur that less than 10% of the low-elevation coastal old-growth forest remains-- that 90% of the original low-elevation old-growth forest has been logged in under 150 years of settler-colonialism on this coast, an astounding disaster in my mind, and reason alone to halt all further industrial logging of this globally-significant natural ecosystem.

FLNRORD figures suggest that over half of the old-growth forests remain. Although these forests on unceded Indigenous lands are purportedly managed in the public trust, there is no publicly-available information of any scientific inventory of how much of the low-elevation old-growth forests remain and the government appears to have no clue what is left or to have any scientific basis for determining a conservation baseline required for protecting biodiversity and maintaining the ecological services these forests provide including critical carbon sequestration and storage, salmon spawning and other wildlife habitat of commercial and non-commercial species, fishwater and drinking water and clean air; as well as ethnocultural resources and cultural sites of Indigenous peoples who have stewarded these lands since time immemorial.

But one thing we know: We will run out of old-growth if we keep cutting it and once we do we will have to fallback on the silvicultural land-base for wood. If that day is inevitable and we need the carbon sequestration of the old-growth forests to help get us through the next 10-30 years in which we must neutralize our carbon footprint on this planet or put the survival of humanity at risk, why not protect these forests now? There is nothing we

can do in British Columbia that will more effectively contribute natural solutions to the climate crisis and to act on the rare opportunity to be wise carbon stewards than to safeguard the globally significant critical carbon sink that is embodied in these old-growth forests. The accelerating severity of the climate crisis now considered the greatest existential threat facing humanity and the web of life on this planet adds an unprecedented moral urgency to the protection of the last old-growth forests. In no small way, our collective future and the welfare of our children and their children depends on it.

We must all rise to the occasion and do what we can, where we can to reverse catastrophic climate change. As panel members you can contribute enormously to tackling the climate crisis by recommending more than incremental changes and to advocate for full protection of the last old-growth forests and the banning of the antiquated practises of clearcut logging, spraying and slash burning.

As we know, these coastal and interior rainforests are not naturally subjected to the kinds of fire cycles and pest and disease outbreaks of other forests in the province. As more and more of BC's forests are consumed in climate-related wildfires it is especially critical that we protect the forests that don't typically burn and which act literally as climate guardians preventing further global warming and its associated litany of "natural" disasters.

For too long the conversation about old-growth forests has taken place strictly within an industrial paradigm that views forests predominantly as a resource to exploit. The unquestioned assumption and operating norm of the industrial forestry system that is about liquidating old-growth forests and replacing them with tree farms, has always been that what can be logged will be logged and if something is to be protected, taken out of the industrial land-base, viewed ironically, as if protecting something is a form of removal, then members of the public will have to fight for years for a park or Indigenous communities will have to engage in civil disobedience or expensive court cases to establish ICPAs or Tribal Parks on their traditional territories. Companies will need to be compensated for the loss of profits, while no compensation has ever gone to communities for lost jobs, lost salmon streams, forest soils lost to roads, erosion, landslides, loss of cultural sites etc.

It is time to begin to decolonize our view of the forests as a source of dead resources that exist for the sole purpose of economic growth and to pay forward what cannot be paid back by respect for the role these forests play

in protecting life and the sacred ecological balances of the biosphere as a whole that we need to protect today!

To this end, I urge this panel to support:

1. An immediate moratorium on the industrial logging of the last old-growth temperate rainforests of Vancouver island
2. The shutdown of the BC government's own British Columbia Timber Sales program, accounting for 20% of the Province's Annual Allowable Cut. This agency operates without oversight and in routine violation of the Province's own weak regulations around old-growth forest management.
3. Legislated protection of the 485 hectare Central Walbran valley
4. A ban on raw log exports
5. Public and private re-investment into sustainable forestry infrastructure, re-training and jobs including commercial thinning of tree plantations and re-tooling mills for the production of second and third-growth quality finished wood products; and small business development in the sustainable harvesting of non-timber products
6. Just transition into sustainable forestry and value-added wood manufacturing jobs for workers displaced by forest protection
7. Revoking large corporate tree farm licenses in favour of First Nations and local community forest tenures
8. Re-placing the gutted Forest Service and professional reliance model with Regional Forest Boards comprised of local Indigenous leaders, workers, foresters, ecologists and citizen advocates that provide oversight and implementation of strong laws to protect and restore endangered biodiversity, wildlife habitats, salmon streams and carbon capture.