

Old Growth Strategic Review

Old growth forests are forests that have either never been disturbed by human intervention, or forests that have been subjected to logging at least once, estimated to be at least 100 to 200 years old, and as a result exhibit unique ecological features.

These forests if not protected from the threats of industrialized logging, resource extraction, and excessive human activity are lost, and will never grow back to be of their former magnificence. A system that has evolved to be especially resilient to insects and disease - gone, along with hundreds of dependant plants and animals species. The caribou plight being one excellent example of that co-dependency.

Humans need to see these old growth systems kept intact as they provide such essential life sustaining services as water filtration, flood water storage, carbon sequestration, climate regulation and the production of oxygen. Their value in terms of environmental services in many cases, far exceeds the economic benefits received from logging.

Old growth forests are a non-renewable resource needing to be protected at all costs. Government must care enough to make immediate legislated changes to regulations, as current management practices are not seeing to the adequate protection of this very valuable public asset. At present B.C.'s forestry management regime "puts the whole ecological system at risk" by giving priority to timber supply above other values.

BC Timber Sales, (BCTS) created in 2003 by former BC Liberal government manages 20 % of the province's annual cut making it the biggest tenure holder in BC. Two recent investigations showed BCTS to not be in compliance with rules designed to ensure sufficient old-growth forest was retained to avoid loss of biodiversity. Recommendations for correction have so far not been implemented from what we understand. Government does not intend to charge BCTS with non-compliance, so no future investigations by the Compliance and Enforcement Branch are intended. This agency, closely allied with MFLNRO law enforcement services, working out of the same offices and sharing the same deputy minister does not appear to be in the in the best interests of proper forest stewardship and by so doing, are not looking after the best interests of the general public.

The B.C. Forest Practices Board investigates public complaints and audits foresters across the province. Since 2013, about 22% of its investigations have included concerns surrounding harvesting watersheds. According to a 2019 FPB report, "there is no legal requirement for licensees to consider downstream private property or road infrastructure. Protection of watersheds should be at the very forefront!!!!

In our own St. Mary Valley in the East Kootenays, the sidewalls of the valley have been decimated by clear cutting. Truckload after truckload leaving the valley the last few months from the Matthew/Mark watersheds and further up by private land logging interests. Some logs exiting from the private land logging are at least 2 ft. in diameter indicating it would be approx 60 to 100 years old depending on the tree type. How much old growth is being lost associated with respect to these logging areas, and what will be the long term ramifications for the St. Mary river, tributaries, and dependant species?

In the past 25 years, the BC coast has lost half its mills. Across the province the forest industry loses 6 jobs per day, amounting to 22,400 jobs in the last decade. Mechanized progress enables a single worker to fall many acres of trees/day, another worker to haul trees to a pickup site, a couple of truckers and the job is done. Poof - an entire forest gone!! A huge human footprint that utilizes little in the way of human employment, and more to come, as machinery becomes increasingly more autonomous. The industry, as it

stands now, is unsustainable at the present rate of deforestation, and in dire need of reform and revitalization in favor of ecosystems and communities

Clear cutting is the status quo and taking place on an enormous scale around the province. Protecting intact forests helps to stabilize the climate which in turn helps sustain intact forests. Both are only possible if we give up clear cutting, particularly of old-growth forests, in favour of smarter forms of forestry that don't wreck intact forests and their benefits.

A reform movement has to start with a Royal Commission accompanied by public hearings emphasizing citizen and social driven regulatory controls on the logging behavior of BC Timber Sales and MFLNRO.

The BC government needs to ban logging and industrial activity with regard to any remaining ancient forests of BC, implementing a moratorium on old growth while immediate legislation is being developed to protect it.

Environmental Impact Assessments that the public has a chance to participate in must definitely be part of the process, along with strict compliance and enforcement regulations, and adequate government oversight to administer.

Log exports to off-shore mills must be halted in order to protect wood supply for BC lumber mills. Second-growth forests should be the sole supplier of the province's lumber mills and should be logged at a slower, more sustainable rate than they are now.

Private land logging on a large scale must be subject to strict rules and regulations in line with those on Crown land including requirements for sustainable harvest, the protection of old growth,, protection of wildlife habitat, water protection, protection of viewscapes, and community input. The present system that regulates and monitors private logging in B.C. doesn't hold companies and landowners to a high enough standard.

Government capacity for monitoring, research and restoration is needed. The B.C. government must support communities and companies that want to improve forest management and value-added wood products, creating more jobs and less damage per cubic metre of wood.

Immediate dismantling of a tenure system that continues to allow corporations to log uncontrollably for profit, on land that rightfully belongs to the public of BC.

More public notice and community input on a local level with what is happening in local forests.

Changes must be made to the Forest and Range Practice Act to reflect the true value of old growth forest ecosystem services

Thousands of citizens are begging for changes before it is too late to instate them. It is imperative, that government takes heed, and institutes the necessary legislation to protect what is left of 'all' these old forests, thereby improving every forest in general for present and future generations.

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