

Old Growth Strategic Review – December 18, 2019

Our coastal forest system is unique and complex. Biodiversity support plants and wildlife, but it also impacts our marine ecosystems. Coastal forests are contributing to our province's economy and values – values held not only within our province, but throughout Canada and the world.

Make no mistake – managing this complex ecosystem is no easy feat. However, in our province, we have the Association of British Columbia Forest Professionals (ABC FP) to help in our management of the forests. This group has been protecting forests and the interest of the public for over 70 years. They have risen to the challenges presented from our ever-changing management of this resource and continue to live up to a stringent Code of Ethics.

As the rights of our indigenous people in BC become further entrenched, they are in turn providing more valuable input into our planning for harvesting. The ABC FP membership have recognized the needs and cultural values of our First Nations people. As such, they are working cooperatively to ensure those values are understood and recognized when planning harvest areas.

The size of our old growth forests has decreased over the years for many reasons (development, harvesting, winds, fire, etc.) but thankfully, prior stewardship decisions have protected many areas on our coast. The current 'unprotected forest' that still exists is comprised of economically harvestable timber, or the Timber Harvesting Land Base – THLB – along with non-economical timber. Proper management of the THLB is incredibly important to rural communities in BC – so many small communities up and down our coast rely on the infrastructure that has been created through harvesting activities, as well as manufacturing, planting, silviculture. These are vital jobs that support many of our province's smallest towns, who rely on our forests for their future. AAC calculations and assumptions that are made by industry and reviewed / approved by government have never taken into consideration the curtailment of old growth harvesting – current levels of cut are designed to provide long term economic stability while providing for long term management of the resource.

Having come to Campbell River from a very small coastal community (on the Queen Charlottes / Haida Gwaii), I have seen first hand the results of overprotection of old growth– huge job loss, direct impact to communities, as well as financial decline for the many who have relied on the forest industry to earn their living and support their families. Special interest groups led the way for these protections, but they did not ever present any alternatives to offset the loss of work that resulted. Now friends who still reside there are struggling to live; and many have walked away from their lives there to start over somewhere new as a direct result of these "protections".

Please trust in the capabilities of highly trained professional Foresters shape the future of our old growth strategies– not environmentalists who only garner support through emotion, not facts and experience. Do not be fooled by the environmental groups who claim to care about the livelihoods of people like me, who are involved in this industry. I watched this backfire on my community once already. This is a sustainable resource industry that has been effectively managed without the help of environmentalists. Think of the tens of thousands of people in this province who rely on the forest industry to support their families and community infrastructure– I **am** one of those people.

Debbi Thwaites
Western Forest Products Inc.
Campbell River, British Columbia