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BC Panel on Old Growth Strategic Review

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Greetings Panel Members,

Having recently retired from a long career as a forest professional involved in many aspects of planning and management of old growth forests in British Columbia, I have much that I could say about the strategic direction for old growth forests in BC. However, for the sake of brevity, I will focus my comments on just two issues that I think are especially important.

Old growth cedar and cultural survival

In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada published their final report. The opening passage of that report states:

“For over a century, the central goals of Canada’s Aboriginal policy were to eliminate Aboriginal governments; ignore Aboriginal rights; terminate the Treaties; and, through a process of assimilation, cause Aboriginal peoples to cease to exist as distinct legal, social, cultural, religious, and racial entities in Canada. The establishment and operation of residential schools were a central element of this policy, which can best be described as “cultural genocide.” Physical genocide is the mass killing of the members of a targeted group, and biological genocide is the destruction of the group’s reproductive capacity. Cultural genocide is the destruction of those structures and practices that allow the group to continue as a group. States that engage in cultural genocide set out to destroy the political and social institutions of the targeted group.”

The residential school system was not the only attack on Aboriginal culture in Canada. For example, the “potlatch ban” refers to Canadian laws under which members of coastal First Nations in BC were sent to prison, as recently as in 1921, for the “offence” of practicing their culture.

More recently, one of Canada’s most renowned artists, Haida carver Robert Davidson, filed an affidavit in B.C. Supreme Court, seeking to halt logging of old growth cedar trees near the village of Old Masset in Haida Gwaii. The stand in question had been the source of a tree that Davidson used in 1969 to carve the first totem pole raised in Haida Gwaii in over a century. The raising of that pole was a major step in the revitalization of Haida culture, following a long period in which it was suppressed as part of Canada’s campaign of cultural genocide.

Access to an ongoing supply of very large, old western redcedar trees is essential to the cultural survival of coastal First Nations. And yet, the supply of such trees is being rapidly depleted. The assumption of timber supply in BC is that management based on liquidation of old growth is sustainable because second growth timber can take the place of old growth. That may be true for products such as siding, fencing, or decking, but it is not true with respect to First Nations cultural needs. Poles and canoes, in particular, require very large old trees with clear, straight trunks. Such trees require centuries to grow and will not be replaced within the time frame of managed forest rotations.

“I’m very concerned that there seems to be no thought about the future,” Davidson was quoted in the Haida Gwaii Observer, Oct. 9, 2019. “If we don’t have the material, we can’t carry on with our culture.”

It is important to remember that coastal First Nations traditionally engaged in trade based on cedar products, such as canoes. It follows that First Nations have strong aboriginal rights to harvest cedar trees for economic benefits as well as the ceremonial aspects of their culture.

Recommendations:

- Declare a moratorium on logging of coastal old-growth western redcedar.
- Remove stands that contain large old cedar trees from the regular operating areas of coastal tenures and from the Timber Harvesting Land Base used in AAC determinations.
- Develop forest management strategies to ensure a long-term ongoing supply of cedar needed for First Nations cultural purposes.
- Transfer harvesting rights for most coastal cedar-leading stands to First Nations.

Coastal old growth forests and climate change

BC Coastal old growth forests constitute a large reservoir of stored carbon. Harvesting old growth forests releases large quantities of carbon into the atmosphere in the form of CO₂, the leading cause of global climate change. The world is currently on a path towards a level of climate change that threatens to cause a collapse of human civilization. If the trend continues for just a few more years, our children's and grandchildren's generations will be condemned to a nightmare future. Their chances for a peaceful and prosperous life will be destroyed, and their chances for any life at all will be severely threatened.

I understand that your terms of reference call for you to seek a "balance" and to "examine old growth management from a variety of perspectives including employment, economic, social, cultural, environmental and climate change values." The word "balance" implies not merely that all perspectives are considered, but more critically, that they are given prominence and priority according to their weight. Logging old growth forests provides economic benefits to some members of society, but climate change poses a threat to many millions, perhaps billions, of human lives. To speak of a "tradeoff" between one person's job and another person's life is simply ethically wrong. We must phase out logging of coastal old growth as rapidly and completely as possible.

Of course, there must be a transition strategy for forest sector workers. With increased investment in silviculture and value-added processing, BC can have a forest sector that provides good jobs in forest-dependent communities.

Recommendations:

- Phase out logging of coastal old-growth as rapidly and completely as possible.
- Develop and fund a transition strategy for affected workers and communities.
- Revitalize the forest sector with greater investment in silviculture and value-added processing.
- Make protection and enhancement of forest carbon reservoirs and sinks a "value" under the Forest and Range Practice Act that must be addressed in all aspects of forest management.

Thank you for considering my thoughts on old growth forests in BC.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dany Hopwood". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.