

Jen Pukonen

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Written Submission Old Growth Strategic Review

To: Garry Merkel and Al Gorley, Old Growth Strategic Review Panel

First of all, thank you for providing BC residents with an opportunity to express our thoughts and views about old growth forest management in BC. Given the increased understanding of the critical role of intact forest ecosystems to our climate and global health, this process seems timely.

As you know, old growth forests are an invaluable part of BC's natural heritage. But, as more research reveals the value of intact forest ecosystems in addressing climate change, BC's old growth forests are increasingly valued globally as well.

It is widely recognized that forests play a significant role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, mitigating the rate and impacts of climate change as well as in regulating water cycles and maintaining biodiversity. However, new studies continue to demonstrate that not all forests are equally effective at doing this. A study released in 2019 reports that not only are intact forests especially effective at storing carbon but that the gradual loss of these intact forests has a much greater climate impact than previously accounted for. Forest conservation initiatives must reflect this knowledge. Future climate and biodiversity policies should prioritize the protection of intact and old growth forests.

When we consider the increasing social and environmental costs of climate change (due to wildfires, flooding etc.) protecting old growth forests is a powerful and cost-effective example of a natural climate solution. When nature is doing something vital to our health and that of our planet we must protect it.

BC's old growth forests are non-renewable. Once disturbed, formerly intact forests become increasingly susceptible to natural pressures such as disease, fires, and erosion and they become less resilient to human-made climate change.

Given our understanding of their irreplaceable value (for both humans and wildlife) and our lack of understanding regarding the great uncertainties of rates and magnitudes of climate change, forest responses to climatic change and in turn the associated socioeconomic repercussions it is time to update our forest management policies to reflect our current

challenges. Protecting old growth forests both reduces risks and increases resilience to climate change.

First Nations across BC have depended on and cared for these old growth forests since time immemorial. Their laws and values enabled flourishing healthy societies who were able to meet their needs without compromising the needs of those to come. We have much to learn from them.

An updated management approach should include:

- Working together with First Nations to protect and manage old-growth forests in a way that upholds Indigenous rights and honours First Nations' relationships to the land.
- An immediate halt on logging in BC's most intact and endangered old growth forests.
- A legislated traditional knowledge and science-based plan for the protection of our remaining old growth forests (An Old Growth Forest Protection Act).
- Incentives and regulations to develop a sustainable, exclusively second-growth forest industry.
- Support and funding for First Nations' conservation financing solutions, economic diversification and Indigenous Protected Areas.
- Creation of a provincial lands acquisition fund to purchase and protect old-growth forests on private lands.
- Supporting efforts to restore and increase productivity of degraded systems.

By transitioning to logging the second-growth forests that now cover most of BC's productive forest lands and increasing the number of jobs within the province to manufacture the wood into value-added products, BC will be able to sustain and even enhance forestry employment levels while protecting its remaining endangered old-growth forests.

Numerous studies have shown that old-growth forests have greater economic value when left standing compared to their timber value when factoring in their cultural value, critical habitat, carbon offset potential, tourism, recreation, and many other values.

This can and has been done elsewhere. In 2001, New Zealand developed legislation to protect their remaining old growth forests on public lands and additional restrictions for logging native forests on private lands.

That was from my head... the following is from my heart.

I recognize that asking you to recommend protecting the remaining old growth forest in BC is not an easy thing for you to do. I realize that the forestry industry will be faced with many challenges, but I also feel that there are now viable alternatives and solutions. And, I honestly feel that the challenges we will face if we don't make significant changes to our current approach, by protecting old growth forest and restoring damaged ecosystems, will be much more severe than if we don't protect it (simply look at the wildfires in Australia).

I took the time to write this letter because I genuinely feel that protecting intact old growth forest ecosystems is one of the most important things we can do to ensure the health of our planet for generations to come. I have two young daughters and I want to be able to look them in the eyes and know that I did the best I could.

Please consider the health and well-being of future generations when you make these decisions.

Jen Pukonen

I live in Tla-o-qui-aht Traditional Territory in Tofino, BC.

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