

Old Growth Strategic Review December 17, 2019

Old growth forest stands and ecosystems that exist uniquely in coastal British Columbia capture the imagination of Canadians across the country, with the ocean, rivers, lakes and rugged coastlines they define the majestic character of the wild west coast of BC. These old stands of giant fir, cedar and spruce are part of what draws tourists to this province from around the world. They are also intertwined in what locals, both urban and rural, consider inherent in what it is to be British Columbians.

Logging has been integrally intertwined in the history of the development of British Columbia. It was this industry and the shared forest resource that has sustained the economy of British Columbia for over one hundred and fifty years. It remains one of the most important economic drivers in the province. The forest industry continues to provide good paying stable jobs and reliable tax revenues through stumpage which allows for the provision of social services and infrastructure and a high standard of living that we all enjoy in British Columbia. The rural communities of coastal British Columbia depend on this industry in most cases for their very existence.

In coastal British Columbia there are 8.4 million hectares of forested land and 3.5 million hectares of old growth (>250 years). The timber harvesting land base (THLB) or the “working forest” on coastal BC is represented by 2.6 million hectares or 30% of the total forest available. The remaining 5.8 million ha’s or 70% of the forested land base is unavailable for harvest due to legislative restrictions or physical and economic constraints. This is not just mountain top scrub, 76% of the land base that is unavailable for harvest is within the Coastal Western Hemlock biogeoclimatic zone in the elevation band between 0-1000 m which includes some of the most productive growing sites in all of BC.

On this limited portion (30%) of the forested land base a professionally managed, internationally recognized forest industry operates utilizing a science -based approach to forest management that ensures protection for sensitive ecosystems and species while managing a sustainable forest resource that provides the jobs that support families and the communities that they live in. This limited land base is capable of sustainably producing the raw materials necessary to operate an internationally competitive lumber manufacturing industry which also provides good jobs, stable communities and significant economic revenue to the crown for investment into social programs and infrastructure.

The coastal timber harvesting land base has continued to be eroded over time. The coast has experienced a 30% decline in Allowable Annual Cut (AAC) since 1990 as a result of land use decisions and increased protection of forests within the THLB. This decline in AAC is 23% greater than the decline experienced in the interior of BC as a result of the devastating impact of the Mountain Pine Beetle epidemic widely publicized for the effects it had on the economy and communities of the interior. Although the

decline in AAC was much larger on the coast, the resulting economic and community impacts remain largely disconnected by the general public and perhaps by government to the reduced timber harvesting land base and lower harvest levels over the past 30 years.

The pattern of harvest on the coast of BC reflects a designed approach to the managed development of a sustainable resource on this part of the province over time. It also reflects the history of the people who came before us, who have lived and worked in this industry and engaged in the development of communities and raising families in this rugged place, contributing to all aspects of the development of this province. I believe that we owe it to ourselves as British Columbians to actively protect the “working forest” so that we can maintain those important parts that we want and need to preserve for future generations, while still maintaining a healthy forest industry that supports our families and our provincial economy.

If society is content to leave our future to the well funded and organized international environmental groups who are mandated to lobby and influence governments and manipulate the public into perceiving an environmental crisis in coastal forestry when none exist; then we must be prepared for the economic realities of these decisions. Restricting or prohibiting old growth harvesting from within the working forest will create an unbalanced age class profile and will contribute to a drastic further reduction in coastal harvest. The impact of eliminating old growth harvesting from coastal forests will result in a net loss of ~4500 direct jobs and 10,000 jobs in total. I am a working, tax paying member of the forest industry and I do not agree with changes that could result in this kind of economic impact to my family, my community and the province of BC.

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