

Old Growth Strategic Review January 10, 2020

The forests of British Columbia are what makes this part of Canada unique. One only needs to travel a relatively short distance to experience their diversity in species and structure. These same forests have provided successive generations of residents an opportunity to make a living, even a rewarding career for many. From these forests come the means for providing many of the services which all residents enjoy and expect, including clean drinking water, health care, emergency services and schools to name a few.

Old growth forests mean different things to different people. To some, they offer an escape from the day to day hustle of life nowadays. To others, they are a work site and a way to earn a living. Old growth forests have been and continue to be very important to the Indigenous communities in the Province. What contributes to a forest being called old growth can vary and is informed by both personal beliefs and experiences as well as science-based facts.

There has been some form of sustainable forest management of these forests for a very long time, whether it was burning grasslands to control the spread of trees or present Land Use Plans covering tens or hundreds of thousands of hectares.

Sustainable forest management in British Columbia provides well paying jobs which support families and communities. In many cases, rural areas around British Columbia, particularly on the Coast, depend almost solely on the forest industry for their existence and have done so for generations.

The Coastal Region of British Columbia is about 15 million hectares in size. About 8.4 million hectares is covered in forests. Roughly 3.5 million hectares is considered old growth (i.e. greater than 250 years old). Harvesting takes place on about 2.6 million hectares (30%) of the total forest area; the working forest or Timber Harvesting Land Base (THLB). Less than 0.5% of these forests located on Crown land are harvested each year. The remaining 5.6 million hectares will never be harvested due to various physical and legal constraints and protections, including Provincial Parks and reserves. Over the last 30 years, the Allowable Annual Cut (AAC) for the Coastal Region has declined by 30% due to land use decisions affecting the THLB.

Across the Coastal Region, a dedicated and diverse group of natural resource professionals employed by the forest industry, government and Indigenous groups manage the land base, including the working forest. A science-based approach to sustainable forest management is utilized. A very robust and effective reforestation program has been a hallmark of the Coast for many decades. Indeed, many of the first plantations are now being harvested as second growth.

The current campaigns to end old growth harvesting that are underway in British Columbia point out that a sustainable forest industry can be based on just harvesting second growth forests. Restricting harvesting to just second growth will quickly result in a significant age class

imbalance that will in turn reduce the AAC rapidly. Serious economic and social impacts will quickly follow, and these will be acutely felt in the rural communities as well as across the Province. I believe that continued management and harvesting of old growth within the THLB is critical for a healthy forest industry and to the social and economic well being for the residents of the Coastal Region and the Province as a whole. Continued management must be based on the best science including cumulative effects and climate change.

I am a second-generation forest professional, proud to be working in the Coastal Forest Industry. I reside in Port McNeill, on Northern Vancouver Island.

Sincerely,
Jonathan Flintoft, RPF #3349

