

Dear Mr. Merkel and Mr. Gorley,

**Re: Written submission for old-growth Strategic Review**

I write this letter as someone who spent a significant amount of his childhood exploring old-growth forests. I write this letter as someone who now lives in Vancouver but frequently returns to these forests to renew visceral feelings of wisdom, life, and home. And I write this letter as an environmental lawyer who is intimately aware of the historic and current inadequacies of BC's efforts to protect old-growth forests.

Despite what politicians may say, one fact has endured through successive governments: old-growth timber value has been prioritized over all else.

Unfortunately, the "all else" that has been sacrificed in the name of short-term returns includes species, Indigenous rights, vital freshwater systems, and sustainable rural economies.

The results have been dire: destroyed ecosystems, endangered and extinct species, massive carbon outputs, and devastated communities.

A renewed old-growth management strategy is more urgent than ever – the remaining ancient ecosystems host innumerable flora and fauna in a time when the world is facing a biodiversity crisis; they store and sequester enormous amounts of carbon in a time when the world is facing a climate emergency.

My hope is that you recognize and capture this reality in your resulting report, and use it as a clarion call for the government to overhaul its old-growth management regime. As it currently stands, there is far too much discretion, substantial transparency and participatory deficits, and an undeniable misalignment of values.

You have been provided a unique and timely opportunity. This province, for the health of future generations and non-human species, needs to find a path to a more just, equitable, and sustainable management of old-growth forests. I hope you take this opportunity to be the first step in that direction.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kegan Pepper-Smith', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Kegan Pepper-Smith, BA, JD