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January 31, 2020

RE: Old Growth Strategic Review

The North Columbia Environmental Society (NCES) wishes to advocate for the enhanced protection of old growth forests in our area. Old growth forests in the North Columbia region are vitally important to the health of ecosystems, to the natural and cultural history of the region, for the well being of the human population, and the economic sustainability of vital industries.

Our old growth forests are an important and unique ecosystem not found anywhere else in the world. Developing over the course of 10 000 years, the forests of the interior rainforest hold vast amounts of biodiversity and are rich in natural history. In a recent preliminary study of a newly discovered, undisturbed tract of inland rainforest, over 360 individual species were identified in the area. More than 20 of these species have been identified as “rare” species and are not often found in the abundance that they are in the Rainbow-Frisbee valley.¹

Millions of dollars have been spent in the North Columbia region on mountain caribou recovery efforts, including maternal penning and predator control. But if there is not enough suitable old growth forest left in the area to support a healthy, self-sustaining mountain caribou population, then what is the point of all these efforts to increase their numbers?

In addition to the importance for local flora and fauna, these pristine stands of old growth act as a sanctuary for the mental and physical well being of our area’s residents. It is widely accepted that spending time outdoors is beneficial for mental health and we are fortunate to have access to established forests that have nurtured unique ecosystems for thousands of years. Many people consider these last remaining stands of pristine old growth to be their temple, it is time we start to protect these areas with intention, the same as how we protect our man-made heritage sites.

The old growth forest around the North Columbia is a very popular destination for year round recreation. Since 2015 tourism has overcome logging as one of the largest employment sectors². People from all over the world come to our area to hike, ski, bike, and paddle through the stunning natural corridors that the old growth creates. As outdoor tourism continues to grow and more residents become dependent on this sector, the high value areas should be protected

1

<https://www.bcclocalnews.com/news/youre-sitting-on-a-jewel-revelstoke-wilderness-society-proposes-new-park/>

2

<https://www.britishcolumbia.ca/invest/communities/british-columbia/thompson-okanagan/columbia-shu-swap/revelstoke/>



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and left to our community to manage. With a changing economy comes a changing attitude towards traditional forest practices. The government needs to recognize that as fewer residents

rely on the extraction of timber, more effort must be made to protect the spaces that draw so many visitors to our area. The NCES will continue to advocate for low impact recreational usage so that these sacred areas can be used to educate while simultaneously supporting the growing tourism industry.

Right now there are multinational corporations whose interests lie not in the responsible management of the forests but in satisfying their shareholders with continued profits. This ethos has created a supply crisis and forces large areas to be cut long before the timber is mature and valuable. The strategy of cutting for a select few merchantable logs leads to huge amounts of waste, as can be seen by the massive piles that are burnt each fall. It is reasonable to believe that a more progressive cutting strategy where areas are allowed to mature to extract more value with less waste is mutually beneficial to the community and the logging companies. Similarly, ensuring more value is added to the timber being cut through local manufacturing and labor would ensure more jobs and wages stay within the community per harvested log. If we allow the "business as usual" case to continue, our forests will be empty, the mills will pack up and leave and the community members who lose their jobs will suffer the most.

With the Revelstoke Community Forest Corporation (RCFC) there is an opportunity to create a working coalition between the forestry industry and local conservationists. Having an established forestry corporation that employs community members and fundamentally acts in the best interests of the region will allow us to develop new and innovative logging strategies without outside pressure. Allowing RCFC to manage more of our region's old growth would be a progressive strategy to encourage long term sustainability for the industry in town.

The public in our region unequivocally supports the responsible management and protection of old growth forests. It is common to hear negative sentiments about the forestry sector because of the clear cutting of ancient forests. It is important to create a better relationship between citizens of the North Columbia region and local industry and government to maintain public support as traditional employment changes. To develop a relationship of trust the government must be earnest in its commitment to old growth protection; historically this has not been the case. For example, in 2007 the government chose to protect 10 000Ha of land for Caribou protection, 2600Ha was counted from a previous land use plan leaving 7400Ha to be protected. Then, in 2011, a biodiversity amendment from the Revelstoke Higher Level Land Use Plan was invoked allowing timber licensees to be compensated for any reduction to their timber supply. The licensees were given 7042Ha of land in compensation, leaving 300Ha of new land protected.

The government's evident bias in favor of industry is apparent even on the official Old Growth Strategic Review background page³. There are three separate pages that address the economic importance of logging to the economy while merely two paragraphs on the ecological

³ <https://engage.gov.bc.ca/oldgrowth/background/>



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importance of old growth forests. If we do not have fair and balanced policy makers, then there is no hope that business as usual will ever change. Without a real effort by our government, the

public and conservationists are struggling to believe that their efforts will ever show tangible results.

As we progress through the 21st century it is evident that the global climate is changing rapidly and in ways that we don't fully understand. Old growth forests have been proven to be some of the most valuable carbon sinks that exist on the planet⁴, therefore they will become increasingly important to help reduce the concentration of greenhouse gasses in the atmosphere. The old growth is of special concern because of it's incredible ability to sequester carbon for centuries. The issue is that if these original forests are disturbed, all of the carbon in the trees and biomass is released, contributing to the concentration of carbon in the atmosphere. We are fortunate to have the opportunity to be a global leader in the protection and sustainable management of this invaluable resource.

Having ancient forests in our region poses a unique opportunity for citizens and government, how to show leadership in protecting the rich cultural history, the flourishing biodiversity, the recreational wishes of current residents, while supporting traditional and contemporary forms of economic dependence. With innovative strategies and community-based solutions we can become global leaders in the necessary preservation of an invaluable resource. Now is the time when the government of BC must show initiative.

On behalf of the NCES membership and Board of Directors,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "K. Borucz", written in a cursive style.

Kate Borucz
Executive Director

⁴ <https://www.nature.com/articles/nature07276>