

oldgrowthbc@gov.bc.ca

Dear Old Growth Panel,

Thank you for providing the opportunity for public input into future policy and direction related to forestry and protection of old growth forests in B.C. My voice is one of many that believe vehemently that the protections for these ancient forests, a treasure of world heritage, must be dramatically increased, and that a moratorium on further logging in these areas should be implemented immediately along with other wholesale changes to forest policy and practice.

Old growth forests of Canada's west coast represent the smallest fraction of North American forests that existed at the time of colonization and have been all but eliminated in the course of four generationsⁱ. When I travel and work around Vancouver Island for example, compared to the wild areas that existed even in recent years during my childhood, I find little on the landscape that has not been touched by the hand of man. Forested areas close to where most of us live and work, are a shadow of what they once were. Urban sprawl and development are expanding exponentially across the countryside. Dead and dying cedar, fir and arbutus dot the landscape, while the understory and forest floor once rich with species catalogued in the iconic text by Pojar and MacKinnonⁱⁱ, now consist only of the most common species such as Oregon grape and salal. A tree farm is not an intact ecosystem: the species assemblages and complex interactions are absent from a planted landscape that takes hundreds of years to replenish after disturbance. This subject is deeply personal to so many of us who have spent time in truly ancient forests and have found solace and spiritual enrichment in these spectacular environments. The scientific and business case for a major change in forest management in the province is equally strong and can be captured under the following rationales: climate regulation and resilience, protection of ecosystem services including hydrologic function and habitat, fiduciary obligations of the Crown and rights of First Nations, and accounting for long-term economic and other benefits other than derived from extractive harvest and clearcutting.

Climate regulation and resilience: The global climate crisis is, without exaggeration, the greatest present threat to all life on Earth. Similar, to the Amazon rainforest, coastal and Boreal forests of North America act as the lungs of the planet, maintaining regional moisture balances and sequestering carbon. The forestry sector is one of the largest single contributors to carbon budgets, in particular under clear-cut scenarios, as carbon is released from biomass and soil, and due to the decadal-scale time lag from when trees are planted and can begin sequestering carbonⁱⁱⁱ ^{iv}. Maintenance of these climate regulatory functions should be our highest priority. Beyond political rhetoric, B.C. has not invested in studying nor implementing science-based policy to protect these values of forested ecosystems, while many management options and opportunities exist^v. Retention of small forest stands in parks is insufficient, and does not allow for resilience, in the face of forest fires, or storms that could wipe out isolated, retained patches, as shown in the 2019-2020 Australian wildfires where world heritage wildlife reserves were decimated^{vi}, or in reserves such as Cathedral grove which due to lack of buffers is exceedingly vulnerable to windthrow during winter storms^{vii}. Ancient forests are critical repositories of biological diversity, from which natural restoration and evolution of species can emerge following disturbances such as forest fires and other climate impacts.

Ecosystem services: Current economic models fail to account for the economic and other benefits provided by forested ecosystems, from provision of clean water, to maintenance landscape stability, to viable fisheries and healthy streams, to biodiversity. It is anthropocentric hubris to treat these forests

solely as ours for the taking, discounting the rights of other species to exist and thrive. Forest policy should be amended to maximize beneficial services provided by these forests, and to retain/restore connectivity of wild landscapes so that other species may survive.

First Nations Rights: One of the greatest travesties in colonial B.C. history was the E&N Land Grant which effectively gave away the rights and title to much of the southeastern half on Southeast Vancouver Island, with no consultation or redress for local First Nations^{viii}. B.C. has been slow to establish treaties and few processes have been completed. While the lawyers argue and stall, the resources and values of disputed Crown lands continue to be exploited. A fair process would administer treaty obligations first, so that treaty settlement lands are intact when returned to First Nations, and the full economic benefits and options for use of the land could be afforded to these nations and communities, as is their right. The travesty of mismanagement and corruption in B.C. Timber Sales related to logging in the Nahmint Valley, one of many examples, is further evidence that even so-called special management areas are ineffective in protecting these forests from decimation in absence of third-party monitoring, compliance and enforcement.^{ix}

Diverse economic benefits: The financial benefit of clear-cut logging for B.C. communities is short-lived and minimal in comparison to the other potential land-uses. The logging industry has been most profitable for multinational corporations who have cut and run from many B.C. communities, leaving unemployment and poverty in their wake. From tourism and recreation, to salmon, and maintenance of clean water supplies, healthy forests are critical to the future and economic prosperity of this province, values that are infinitely greater in living, thriving ecosystems, in comparison to the short-term profits from offshore timber exports.

Sincerely,

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ⁱ Valiant, J. 2006. The Golden Spruce: A True Story of Myth, Madness and Greed. Vintage Books Canada.

ⁱⁱ Pojar, J. and MacKinnon, A. 2004. Plants of the Pacific Northwest Coast. Lone Pine Publishing.

ⁱⁱⁱ Wieting, J. and L'Eversee, D. December 2019. Clearcut Carbon. A Sierra Club BC report on the forests in British Columbia. Sierra Club. <https://sierraclub.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019-Clearcut-Carbon-report.pdf>. Accessed January 2020.

^{iv} Broadland, D. January 6, 2020. Defusing B.C.'s big, bad carbon bomb. Focus on Victoria. <https://www.focusonvictoria.ca/focus-magazine-jan-feb-2020/defusing-bc%E2%80%99s-big-bad-carbon-bomb-r14/> (Accessed January 2020).

^v Black, T.A., Jassal, R.S. and Fredeen, A.L. November 2008. Carbon Sequestration in British Columbia's Forests and Management Options. Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions. University of Victoria. https://pics.uvic.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/WP_Forestry_November2008.pdf. (Accessed January 2020).

^{vi} Cox, L and Evershed, N. January 16, 2020. 'It's heart-wrenching': 80% of Blue Mountains and 50% of Gondwana rainforests burnt in bushfires. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/jan/17/its-heart-wrenching-80-of-blue-mountains-and-50-of-gondwana-rainforests-burn-in-bushfires> (Accessed January 2020)

^{vii} BC Parks. November 2019. MacMillan Provincial Park. <http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/bcparks/explore/parkpgs/macmillan/> (Accessed January 2020).

^{viii} Horter, W. December 2008. Vancouver Island's Great E & N Railway Land Grab. Watershed Sentinel. <https://watershedsentinel.ca/articles/vancouver-island-land-grab/> (Accessed January 2020.)

^{ix} Lavoie, J. October 7, 2019. 'Indicative of a truly corrupt system': government investigation reveals BC Timber Sales violating old-growth logging rules. The Narwal. <https://thenarwhal.ca/indicative-of-a-truly-corrupt-system-government-investigation-reveals-bc-timber-sales-violating-old-growth-logging-rules/>