

# Old Growth Strategic Review

Please accept the following comments and concerns as a written submission pertaining to the Old Growth Strategic Review Process.

I am a Registered Professional Forester with over 25 years of Coastal Forestry experience. I currently reside and work on Central Vancouver Island, but I have travelled throughout much of the province. There is no doubt that B.C.'s forests are as diverse as the values that they provide and as diverse as the opinions on how they should be managed. I strongly believe that B.C. forests are being well managed for all values, including Old Growth. This is not to say that good forest management comes without conflict or 100% consensus on all management decisions.

There are many Forest Policies and Practices in British Columbia that directly or indirectly impact old growth harvesting. They have evolved over many decades and have led to the development of the sound forest management practices of today. These practices have been developed and refined over the years with the direct input from the public, professionals such as Foresters, Engineers, Biologists, Archaeologists, Hydrologists and Geoscientists to name a few, First Nations, environmental non-government organizations, local government and other stakeholder groups. An important review process impacting old growth harvesting is the Timber Supply Review (TSR) or Timber Supply Analysis (TSA) for Tree Farm Licenses. Both these processes involve public and First Nation review and are subject to the final determination of the Chief Forester in setting annual cut levels (AAC) for the Crown managed forests. These are not light decisions as they have a direct impact on the social and economic well-being of the province. Although these determinations are required every 10 years it was noted that much of the coastal region was reviewed between 2016 to 2018 and in the past 15 years the AAC on the coast has already been decreased by 25%. My main point of discussion here is that I feel there is an unwarranted sense of urgency whether by government or social media to create new policies or enact new legislation to protect old growth when in fact this process has been going on for decades. Public interest and values have and will continue to change over time and the forest policies and practices will evolve as well. A good example of this is the recent policy adopted by government and several forest companies on the coast to preserve unique or iconic large old growth trees commonly referred to as the "Big Tree" policy or Standard. Forest companies and government do respond to public interest.

Old growth protection is well reflected in policy decisions on the coast. Since 1991 protection of forests on the coast has more than tripled. 8.4 million hectares (56%) of the coast is forested and 3.5 million hectares (42%) is defined as old growth (>250 years). 1.5 million ha (55%) of the old growth on the coast is protected in parks or other reserves and will never be harvested. These statistics may vary depending on the sources, but it points to the fact that coastal old

growth is far from being in jeopardy. Less than 0.5% of the coast regions crown forest is harvested each year and only half of that is old growth.

One of my greatest concerns today is the power of social media and its recent use to effectively sway public opinion based on manipulated data, fear tactics and emotional imagery. According to the Oxford Internet Institute, “organized social media manipulation has more than doubled since 2017 with 70 countries using computational propaganda to manipulate public opinion. Facebook remains the platform for social media manipulation with evidence of formally organized campaigns taking place in 56 countries”. Forest Professionals and policy makers rely on public opinion to guide and shape new policies and practices and as I mentioned before current social media is creating what I believe a false sense of urgency with statements like “It's time to act now on the Old Growth crisis” and pushing for the support for an immediate moratorium on old growth harvesting. The science of social media manipulation is not new but the relatively new platforms such as Facebook make it much more powerful in reaching the common public. The main point of this comment is to convey my concern that the subject of old growth can be quite emotional for many people and this, combined with recent social media campaigns that are promoting old growth preservation will undoubtedly have an impact on the responses given in the Old Growth Strategic Review Questionnaire. I also feel that the public has not been provided important facts about old growth in B.C. or the full implication of the effect old growth preservation will have on the economy.

The forest sector has long been an important economic driver of the B.C. economy, both in the form of stumpage revenue but probably more importantly in the tax revenue generated from the direct and indirect jobs and business related to the industry. It is estimated that over 21,000 jobs on the coast have been linked to the forest industry and that the coastal forest sector contributes \$2.1 billion in GDP. A moratorium on old growth harvesting on the coast would effectively cut the coastal industry in half resulting in the loss of over 4500 direct jobs and nearly 10,000 total jobs. Many of our rural communities are highly dependent on the forest industry and reductions like this would be devastating. As a taxpayer and supporter of a young family this is not acceptable.

According to the Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development Digital Road Atlas, there are over 660,000 km of unpaved resource roads in B.C. On the coast this massive infrastructure was primarily developed for the harvesting of old growth timber and is currently maintained by forest companies and government as a necessity for timber harvesting. These public resource roads provide access to a plethora of non-forestry related recreational and commercial activities. Without the harvesting of old growth, the funding and need to maintain road access on many thousands of kilometers will cease and unless government feels the need to use taxpayer's money to maintain these roads, many areas will become inaccessible to the public. British Columbians are very proud of the “Back Country”

access that has been afforded to them over the years, but it is unlikely they are fully aware of the relationship that is specific to old growth harvesting.

I fully support a protected, well managed working forest on the coast of B.C. with old growth as part of the harvesting profile. I believe that the forest professionals of B.C. are managing the forests using sound, well developed forest practices based on the best available information. Social media has become a strong tool for educating but also manipulating public opinion. It is important for Forestry advocates and policy makers to ensure that the public has well supported facts to be able to make informed decisions. Reductions to old growth harvest levels will significantly impact the economy and have devastating impacts to the small rural coastal communities and as a taxpayer and forest worker this is not acceptable to me.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Clark'.

Tony Clark, RPF