

Garry Merkel and Al Gorley,

I am employed by Western Forest Products (WFP) in Powell River, BC as a field planner. I feel obliged to write to you because the outcome of this decision will not only directly affect me but will affect all people living in British Columbia.

The old growth debate at its core is about protecting the environment, reducing and limiting our global contribution to climate change and creating a sustainable industry for generations to come. Environmentalist groups at the most basic level say that forestry negatively disturbs the environment and contributes to climate change; this couldn't be further from the truth. Forestry is one of the few industries that is renewable, reduces carbon emissions, and is a sustainable green resource, like wind, solar, or geothermal heat. People don't bat an eye at the removal of forested lands for agriculture, industrial and residential developments, but if a forestry company wants to harvest trees, and then reforest that area with three trees for every one logged, they are met with protests. Farms, golf courses, and vineyards take up thousands of hectares of deforested land and are highly water dependent but are met with the justification that they are required to grow the economy. If the main issue is protecting the environment and fighting climate change then why are these environmentalist groups not focusing their resources on industries that are major contributors to the climate crisis.

Timber is part of a global market, if the BC government regulates the forest industry into inoperability, other countries that have no reforestation or environmental protection laws will fill that void in the market. Canada and BC need to set a global example by sustainably harvesting our second and old growth forests and continuing to set the standard of forest stewardship. With the looming global climate crisis this is the time to be creating more with wood products not less. Green building projects constructed from sustainable harvested timber, not steel and concrete. Sequestering and storing carbon in harvested wood products. Harvesting ageing forests that are releasing carbon as they decay and replacing them with replanted young forests that uptake large amounts of carbon from the atmosphere.

The Canadian and BC economy relies on the forest industry, it's naive to think that tourism or small-scale manufacturing operations are going to replace a 13-billion-dollar industry. Forestry in BC contributes \$1.4 billion in federal taxes, \$2.6 billion in provincial taxes, and \$198 million in municipal taxes annually. Forestry generates jobs and economic activity in every corner of the province, it creates remote communities that depend on it. The forest industry requires solutions for long term management, based on science and research, not opinions and political agendas.

Forest professionals like yourselves and I know that British Columbia's old growth forests are important. They are rich in biodiversity, provide crucial habitat for an assortment of species, contribute genetic variation across the landscape, protect water systems and they are a beautiful sight to behold, but they are also a source of atmospheric carbon emissions.

One of the biggest issues when dealing with old growth is there is no clear definition, and because of that the mixed messages about how much old growth forest remains on the land base, the environmental groups say 8%, the BC government says 33% is protected, which narrative am I and the public supposed to believe is correct. It's quite difficult to determine if a resource requires protecting when there is no clear data determining how much of that resource exists. Old growth is not solely about big trees, rather it is about an ecological state. This concept needs to be clearly communicated from government to the BC public.

What I would like to see come out of this strategic review is research conducted by qualified professionals into old growth that determines;

1. A commonly accepted definition of an old growth forest in BC.
2. Based on that definition how much old growth in hectares remains on the harvestable land base (not including private lands)

3. Ranking of these old growth forests based on their ecological value
4. A map that shows what is currently protected and what is available for harvest

I don't disagree that old growth forests need to be protected and preserved for us, and for generations to come. I agree that the province of BC and the forestry industry desperately needs a long-term landscape level management approach that is rooted in science and doesn't change with every four-year political cycle. These science-based management systems and policies need to address more than old growth as a separate entity, as it makes up only a part of the forest and doesn't exist in isolation. I implore you when making this decision that will affect so many families, and communities, to please stick to the science-based facts when it comes to the sustainable management strategy of old growth forests.

Sincerely,



Whitney Peters TFT#0683