

2021 City of Nanaimo Resolution

Resolution Title: Call for Immediate Protection of all at-risk Old-growth Forests in BC

Submitted by: Ben Geselbracht

WHEREAS ancient high productivity (big tree) old growth ecosystems are globally one of the most valuable climate mitigation and resiliency assets in terms of carbon storage, sequestration, protection against wildfire, storage of water and bank of biodiversity;

AND WHEREAS, of the miniscule amount (2.7%) of the original high productivity (big tree) old-growth forests that are left (less than 1% of BC's total current forested area), 75% are still slated to be eliminated through logging; BE IT RESOLVED

THAT the City of Nanaimo call on the provincial government to immediately defer logging in all high productivity, rare, oldest, and most intact old-growth forests as recommended by the Old-Growth Strategic Review, until all 14 of the panel's recommendations have been implemented; including deferrals in such at-risk old-growth forests as, the head waters of Fairy Creek, the Upper Walbran Valley, Nahmint Valley, Eden Grove, Edinburgh Mountain, Upper Tsitika Valley, East Creek, Klaskish Valley, Nimpkish Lake and the Inland Old-Growth Temperate Rainforest.

AND THAT the City of Nanaimo formally oppose the logging of at-risk old-growth forests;

AND THAT the City of Nanaimo call on the Government of British Columbia to allocate funding to enact deferrals in an economically just manner, in the full spirit of reconciliation and to support the economic transition of affected First Nations and non-First Nation communities from unsustainable old-growth logging for the development of long-term sustainable local economies.

AND THAT the following resolution be sent to the Union of BC Municipalities and as a late submission to AVICC

Immediate Protection for all at-risk Old-growth Forests in BC

WHEREAS ancient high productivity (big tree) old growth ecosystems are globally one of the most valuable climate mitigation and resiliency assets in terms of carbon storage, sequestration, protection against wildfire, storage of water and bank of biodiversity;

AND WHEREAS, of the minuscule amount (2.7%) of the original high productivity (big tree) old-growth forests that are left (less than 1% of BC's total current forested area), 75% are still slated to be eliminated through logging; BE IT RESOLVED

THAT the UBCM and AVICC call on the provincial government to immediately defer logging in all high productivity, rare, oldest, and most intact old-growth forests as recommended by the Old-Growth Strategic Review, until all 14 of the panel's recommendations have been implemented; including deferrals in such at-risk old-growth forests as the head waters of Fairy Creek, the Upper Walbran Valley, Nahmint Valley, Eden Grove, Edinburgh Mountain, Upper Tsitika Valley, East Creek, Klaskish Valley, Nimpkish Lake and the Inland Old-Growth Temperate Rainforest.

AND THAT the UBCM and AVICC call on the Government of British Columbia to allocate funding to enact deferrals in an economically just manner, in the full spirit of reconciliation and to support the economic transition of affected First Nations and non-First Nation communities from unsustainable old-growth logging for the development of long-term sustainable local economies.

BRIEFING NOTE:

Resolution on the Call for Immediate Protection of all at-risk Old-growth Forests in BC

Background

As the earth's population nears 8 billion people, consumption of the planets' resources are exceeding the limits of its capacity to sustain the conditions necessary to support human settlement¹. Of the 9 planetary boundaries, researchers report that four of these have been crossed: extinction rate, nitrogen and phosphorus loading, deforestation and atmospheric carbon dioxide. Of these four boundaries, three are inextricably linked to the health of forest ecosystems exemplified in primary old growth forests.

On Vancouver Island and in B.C, our communities thrive and depend on the health of our forests, for lively hoods, recreation, water supply and spiritual well-being. When considering the forested groundcover on planet Earth, it is estimated that less than 30% of it has been spared from human interference². Much of this miniscule share is found in our Old-growth forests here in British Columbia, and of that, only a small proportion is granted the protection that such a precious global resource deserves. It is our collective responsibility to use whatever tools at our disposal to do what we can to protect the health of our primary forests, and by extension our planet, and prioritize action to support a more sustainable future.

Climate Change and BC Forest Practices

The International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) October 2018 special report provided a grave global warning of the need for massive emissions reduction within the next 11 years to avoid irreversible catastrophic changes to climate³. In response, many local governments have declared a climate emergency and, along with the provincial and federal government, have mobilized enormous amounts of resources to reduce emissions and adapt to a changing climate through a wide range of programs and initiatives.

Despite the increased efforts to address emissions within urban areas, these actions may be inconsequential if the emissions from BC forest land management practices are not properly addressed. According to BC government data, British Columbia's forests are now releasing more carbon dioxide per year than *all* other provincial sectors combined – and depending on the year, by more than double⁴. Forest emissions are largely ignored because they are not counted as part of B.C's official emissions in provincial greenhouse gas inventories⁵.

B.C.'s forests transitioned from a sink of carbon to a source in the early 2000's through a process of unsustainable logging and forest management practices that continues today. These practices

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/environment/integration/research/newsalert/pdf/four_out_of_nine_planetary_boundaries_exceeded_410na1_en.pdf

² https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/sites/4/2020/02/SPM_Updated-Jan20.pdf

³ https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/sites/4/2020/02/SPM_Updated-Jan20.pdf

⁴ <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/climate-change/data/provincial-inventory>

⁵ <https://sierraclub.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/Pojar-7mythsfinal-2019.pdf>

have had a cumulative effect of weakening the ability of BC's forests to store and sequester carbon, regenerate, store water, withstand forest fire and insect infestations. This degradation with the continued pressure of over-harvesting has created a self-reinforcing feedback loop of worsening conditions.

In 1990, BC forests sequestered 89 Million tons of CO₂, which after the carbon released by forests fires is factored in, still made all other economic activity in the province almost carbon neutral. Since 1990 the ability of BC forests to absorb carbon progressively diminished to only 7 million tons of CO₂ sequestered in 2018⁶. Forest emissions are unfortunately no longer published publicly by the BC government, however, since no real large changes to forest practices has occurred since 2018, the net carbon sequestration of BC's forest is most likely at zero when CO₂ from fires is not factored in.

In terms of forest fires, since 1990 as the carbon sequestration capacity of BC's forest's diminished, the average size and severity of forest fires increased releasing increasingly large amounts of CO₂ into the atmosphere. 2017 and 2018 were particularly bad wildfire years back to back, burning more than 1.2 million hectares of the province, eight times more than the ten-year average. From these two fires, 163 and 199 million tons of CO₂ were released into the atmosphere respectively compared to the 60 million tons released from all other emission sources in BC. This is not even counting the emissions released from the practice of slash pile burning which releases a similar quantity of carbon annually as all industrial processes and product use.

Climate Resiliency and Old-growth Forest

The urgency of the climate crisis requires that actions are prioritized that have immediate benefits. Stopping forestry practices that have been leading to the alarming trend of increasing forest emissions must be a priority. The continued clear cutting of high productivity old-growth is one particular forestry practice that has severe negative impacts on BC's ability to lower emissions and adapt to changing climatic conditions. Still to date about 55,000 hectares of old-growth forests – an area the size of about 5 cities of Vancouver are being logged every year in BC⁷. This is devastating, not only from the perspective of the elimination of some of the most complex webs of ecological relationships housing some of the largest most magnificent organisms in the planet, but also from the loss of the capacity of these ancient ecosystems incredible capacity to store and sequester carbon.

High productivity old-growth forests can store over 1,000 tonnes of carbon per hectare, one of the highest rates on earth. They are like a carbon bank, accumulating carbon in soil, trees, and organic matter over millennia⁸. Research increasingly shows that old trees store more carbon than young trees and in proportion to their size so that a single valley bottom old growth tree can absorb far more carbon in a year than an acre of seedlings. Almost 70 per cent of the carbon stored in a tree is accumulated in the second half of its life. Logging primary, mature and old

⁶ <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/climate-change/data/provincial-inventory>

⁷ <https://veridianecological.files.wordpress.com/2020/05/bcs-old-growth-forest-report-web.pdf>

⁸ <https://sierraclub.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/Pojar-7mythsfinal-2019.pdf>

forests and converting them to secondary, managed forests can reduce total carbon storage by 40-50% or more, even when off-site storage of carbon in wood products in buildings is factored in⁹.

Although forests can eventually regenerate, standing old-growth is even more precious in the current context of a climate crisis as their stored carbon has much greater time value now and in the crucial next three decades than the anticipated, post-logging carbon storage recouped over the ensuing seven or more decades of replanted forests. In a climate crisis it does not make sense to cut down carbon-storing older trees when there are large expenditures of resources to reduce carbon emissions and invent carbon-capture technology.

In addition to carbon storage and sequestration, the unique conditions and processes within ancient old-growth ecosystems are vital to BC's forest cover's ability to adapt to a changing climate. Old growth forests are critical to the conservation of biodiversity akin to banks of genetic material for future use and adaptation to changing climatic conditions. In addition, these forests are very resistant to fire and have an incredible ability to intercept and store water, which are critical attributes necessary to withstand the self-reinforcing cycle of increasing temperature, drying landscapes, and large forest fires¹⁰. When taking into account that old-growth forest products are often shipped across the world, to be used in products such as roofing shingles, exterior cladding, paper and pulp and pellets, the senselessness of the elimination of the ecosystem services these incredibly valuable natural assets provide can not be ignored.

BC Government Commitments and Old-growth Protection

Sept, 11 2020, the BC government released the much anticipated report of the Old Growth Strategic Review¹¹ conducted by an independent two person panel comprised of Garry Merkel (professional forester, natural resource expert and member of the Tahltan Nation) and Al Gorley (professional forester and former chair of the Forest Practices Board). The Old-growth strategic review had one of the highest ever Engage BC responses with 200 meetings in 45 communities, 300 written submissions, 400 published articles and papers, 9000 emails and 18,500 completed surveys¹². The Review concluded that "BC's overall system of forest management has not supported the effective implementation or achievement of the stated and legislated public objectives for old growth forests." The authors, Gorley and Merkel, called for a "paradigm shift," saying old forests have intrinsic value for all living things and should be managed for ecosystem health, not for timber supply.

Since the reports release, many were hopeful that the BC government would spare no time in implementing the recommendations, and thus, protecting some of the most incredible natural spaces on the face of the earth. Statements made by Premier John Horgan during the previous

⁹ <https://sierraclub.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/Pojar-7mythsfinal-2019.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://engage.gov.bc.ca/app/uploads/sites/563/2020/09/STRATEGIC-REVIEW-20200430.pdf>

¹¹ <https://engage.gov.bc.ca/app/uploads/sites/563/2020/09/STRATEGIC-REVIEW-20200430.pdf>

¹² <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2020FLNR0058-001711>

Provincial election bolstered this sentiment. The Prince George Citizen captured the Premier's campaign sentiments in an October 15 2020 article¹³:

"We're committed to implementing the report in its totality," said Horgan when asked about it during a campaign stop.

Since winning the election, Premier Horgan further backed this up with his mandate letter to the current Minister of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development, Katrine Conroy. In it, he includes a mandate to *"implement the recommendations of the Old Growth Strategic Review in collaboration with Indigenous leaders, labour, industry, and environmental groups to protect more old-growth stands"*, and further comments about indigenous reconciliation and the importance of addressing climate change through forestry policy are scattered throughout the document.

Since that time, however, a coalition of environmental organizations including the Wilderness Committee, Sierra Club BC, and Ancient Forest Alliance reviewed the government's actions, and issued a scathing report card¹⁴ outlining that many commitments remain un-actioned. The report card gives the current government one D grade, followed by several "F"s in relation to its commitments to old growth protection.

March 11th, 2020 marked the six month deadline for the provincial government to begin implementing the recommendations of the report. For immediate action was recommendation #6 which recommended that, "Until a new strategy is implemented, defer development in old forests where ecosystems are very high and near term risk of irreversible biodiversity loss."¹⁵

Of the most high and near term risk of irreversible biodiversity loss are the high productivity – valley bottom old growth that contains the largest and most majestic trees. These forests represent 0.7% of the total forest cover in BC. (57 Million Hectares). These high-productivity ecosystems have the greatest values for carbon storage, sequestration and biodiversity. 97.3% of the original high productivity valley bottom old-growth forests have been eliminated in BC, with only 0.7% permanently protected and sadly, the remaining 2% (representing 415,000 hectares) slated to be logged.

To date only 3,800 hectares of the remaining 415, 000 hectares of unprotected high productivity old-growth has been deferred from logging by the BC government (1 hectare = 1.4 Soccer fields). The numbers released September 20th, by the BC government of the 352,739 hectares of old forests that would be deferred from harvesting in response to the Old-growth Strategic Review recommendations is misleading in terms of the protection afforded to the most at risk and endangered Old-growth forests in BC. The numbers announced by the BC government contains some forest lands that are already under protection, some 2nd growth forest and a large portion of less endangered small tree old-growth forest found in less productive environments

¹³ <https://www.princegeorgecitizen.com/news/local-news/horgan-commits-to-paradigm-shift-in-old-growth-forest-management-1.24220819>

¹⁴ <https://www.ancientforestalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/bcs-old-growth-forest-report-web.pdf>

¹⁵ <https://engage.gov.bc.ca/app/uploads/sites/563/2020/09/STRATEGIC-REVIEW-20200430.pdf>

like higher elevations and the outer coast¹⁶. This reflects the flaws in BC's accounting system for old-growth which lacks critical distinctions in forest productivity and ecosystem types¹⁷.

High productivity-old growth forests are the vision of what the general public understand to be old growth and provide the unique habitats, structures, and spiritual values associated with large trees. The lack of distinction in government reporting provides opportunity to protect the less economically valuable sites with small trees instead of the more at risk big tree ecosystems. This results in flawed policies with loopholes in forest reserve selection and misleading figures of the actual protection afforded to BC's endangered forests.

For example, on Vancouver Island, the official BC Government reporting on old-growth forests states that there are over 840,00 hectares considered old-growth on the island with over half (520,000 hectares) of these forests protected and never to be logged. If only the big-tree old-growth that the majority of the public understands as old-growth were counted, an independent research group using government data found that only 31,000 hectares remain on Vancouver Island¹⁸. This represents 9% of the original 360,000 hectares that existed. Of this remaining 9% or 31,000 hectares, only 9,400 hectares are protected, leaving 21,600 hectares (60 Soccer fields) or 70% of the minuscule fraction of the last high productivity forests to be logged. This is alarming as harvest rates of old-growth forest on Vancouver Island are around 10,000 hectares a year. Currently threatened by imminent clear cutting includes the head waters of Fairy Creek, the last unprotected intact old-growth watershed in southern Vancouver Island.

Current Conflict

One of the current battles for Old-Growth protection is currently taking place in Southern Vancouver Island which includes the Fairy Creek watershed in Pacheedaht First Nation territory near Port Renfrew. Fairy Creek is known locally as the last remaining unprotected, intact watershed on southern Vancouver Island. It is home to giant red cedars, douglas fir and hemlock and 1500 year old plus high elevation yellow cedars.

One creek away stands *Big Lonely Doug*, pictured below, which is Canada's second-largest Douglas-fir tree and is known as one of the most famous trees in Canada. Lonely Doug is estimated to be between 750 and 1200 years old¹⁹, and is the last remaining member of his grove, which was logged in 2014. It is estimated that 99% of the old-growth Douglas firs in British Columbia have been cut down²⁰.

If the image below is *after* logging, one need not use imagination to conceptualize what existed there *before*.

¹⁶ <https://www.ancientforestalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/bcs-old-growth-forest-report-web.pdf>

¹⁷ <https://veridianecological.files.wordpress.com/2020/05/bcs-old-growth-forest-report-web.pdf>

¹⁸ <https://veridianecological.files.wordpress.com/2020/05/bcs-old-growth-forest-report-web.pdf>

¹⁹ <https://www.atlasobscura.com/places/big-lonely-doug>

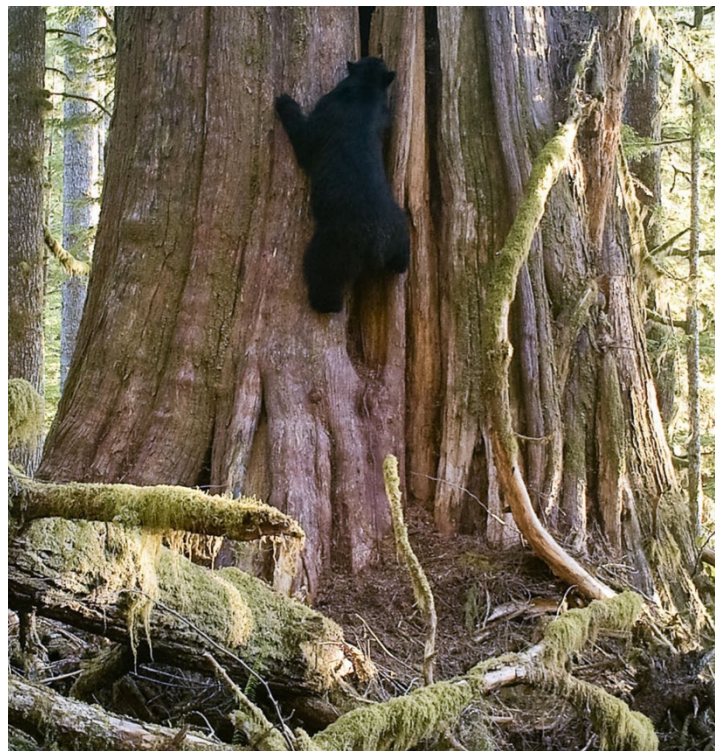
²⁰ <https://veridianecological.files.wordpress.com/2020/05/bcs-old-growth-forest-report-web.pdf>



Only a few hundred meters away is Eden Grove, another section of forest slated for annihilation. Its contents are nothing short of breathtaking, offering a glimpse into what Lonely Doug's neighbourhood used to look like:



Recently, logging interest in the area has rung the alarm bells loudly in local communities, and indeed, across the province. In response, local environmentalists, First Nation members, and others concerned about the impending doom of



Fairy Creek, Eden Grove, and other surrounding high-value ecosystems have blockaded forest service roads leading to the magnificent and irreplaceable old growth Forests that are slated for destruction. These groups are joined by Bill Jones, elder from Pacheedaht First Nation, who has been calling on Premier John Horgan to protect the forests of his lands, and other forests like it. An injunction has been applied for to clear the way for logging, and hearings are set for the end of March.

Those who have followed the history of similar conflicts over unsustainable old growth logging are sure to draw parallels between this localized situation, and one that sparked the single largest act of civil disobedience in Canadian History - the *War of the Woods*, over Clayoquot Sound on Vancouver Island. Following a similar injunction granted in the 1990s, thousands flocked to protect the rainforests of Vancouver Island near Tofino. Hundreds of arrests took place before much of the area was finally protected, and in 2000, it was added to the UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve, rightfully acknowledging the area for its global environmental value.

The recommendations of this report specific to Fairy Creek seek to prevent such a large-scale conflict from taking place again, by urging the provincial government to immediately protect these last remaining lands from human interference.

Jobs and Economic Transitions

Currently, about 54,000 hectares of old-growth forests – an area about 5x the size of Vancouver – are being logged every year in BC.²¹ At current logging rates, BC will eventually run out of High productivity old growth forests. On Vancouver Island, there is roughly 31,000 hectares of High productivity old-growth and harvest rates for this forest type can be up to 10,000 hectares per year²². This means that jobs tied directly to these incredible giants will very soon come to an end, if no protective measures are taken now. In short, any jobs tied to old growth logging are fundamentally doomed simply due to the fact that there is a quickly dwindling finite supply.

Old growth trees, on the other hand, possess a significantly longer economic viability profile, simply by their tourism allure alone in many cases. In their 2016 submission to the BC Chamber of Commerce, the Port Renfrew Chamber noted one anecdote from a 2012 financial analysis done by a kayaking company in the Discovery Islands:

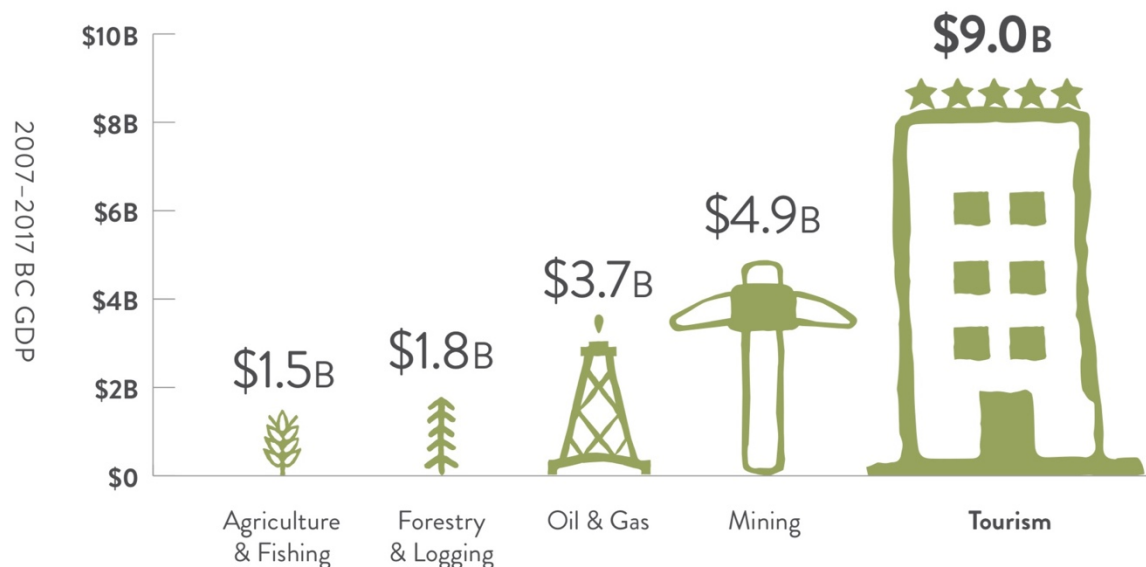
It was determined that the value of the 60 hectares of timber was worth about \$3,600,000. Since the regeneration cycle meant the area could be cut only once every 60 years, the yearly economic value of the timber was \$60,000. The economic value to the kayaking company, however, was \$416,000 per year, or \$24,960,000 for the same 60-year period. In stark contrast to the approximately 300 person-days employment from logging the 60 hectares just once, the kayaking company provided 20,160 person-days of employment during the 60-year cycle. And this simple economic analysis didn't include the employment and earnings for the 40 other ecotourism businesses using the same area.

²¹ <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/british-columbia/article-while-government-consults-and-consults-some-more-logging-in-bcs/>

²² <https://veridianecological.files.wordpress.com/2020/05/bcs-old-growth-forest-report-web.pdf>

This one simple analysis uncovers the true value of these incredible trees, not as pathetic roof shingles to be shipped to Florida, nor (even more disrespectfully) as fuel pellets for generating electricity in Europe. According to the Government of British Columbia, “*tourism contributed more to GDP than any other primary resource industry*”²³.

GDP BY PRIMARY RESOURCE INDUSTRY



The BC Chamber of Commerce carried the following resolution in 2016, and renewed it again in 2019²⁴:

THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS that the Provincial Government:

1. Support the increased protection of old-growth forests in areas of the province where they have or can likely have a greater net economic value for communities if they are left standing for the next generation and beyond.
2. Protect endangered old-growth forests by enacting new regulations such as an Old-Growth Management Area, Wildlife Habitat Area, or Land Use Order, with the intent to eventually legislate permanent protection for areas through provincial park or conservancies.

The economic case for keeping these trees standing is clear, and the effects of encouraging tourism instead have already been tested across North America’s west coast – just imagine requesting to purchase California’s Redwoods and converting them to pellets or shingles – the very thought would be laughable in a jurisdiction that was once as comparatively abundant in old growth assets as BC is today.

²³ https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/tourism-and-immigration/tourism-industry-resources/statistics-figures/2018_value_of_tourism_final_feb2020.pdf

²⁴ <https://bcchamber.org/policy/protecting-old-growth-rainforest-to-the-economic-benefit-of-tourism-based-communities-2019/>

There are good examples of economic development around Old-Growth Conservation. Many international NGOs have acknowledged this reality, and have begun pouring money into conservation and eco-tourism initiatives. Conservation financing that allowed for the protection of the Great Bear rainforest highlights the many opportunities that are possible²⁵.

First Nations / Reconciliation

In British Columbia, virtually all old-growth forests are on the unceded territories of diverse First Nations, and successive court rulings have affirmed that all land use decisions - whether logging plans or new protected areas - must include the consent of local First Nations governments.

This report does not seek to speak for First Nations communities, only to note that to date, First Nations have yet to be paid any semblance of fair-re-compensation for the historical wealth extracted from the original forests on unceded lands.

On September 29th 2020, the The Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs passed a resolution calling on the province to implement all 14 of BC's Old Growth Strategic Review Recommendations²⁶. The Union's resolutions best summarizes what the BC Government must do to preserve the last of the high-productive ancient forest ecosystems, and make right on their public commitments to true reconciliation:

"THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED the UBCIC Chiefs-in-Assembly fully support the First Nations and allies who are protesting the negligent logging and clear-cutting practices enabled by the BC government that have undermined First Nations Title and Rights and pushed Vancouver Island's old-growth forests to the brink of collapse;

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED the UBCIC Chiefs-in-Assembly fully support the Old Growth Strategic Review Panel's report and recommendations that are vital to creating a new, sustainable old growth strategy, and call upon the provincial government to take immediate and sustained action to ensure that the report's recommendations are carried out, with First Nations included and consulted every step of the way;

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED the UBCIC Chiefs-in-Assembly call upon the BC government to provide more details on its plan to shift logging deferrals to permanent protection, and working in partnership with impacted First Nations, to engage in discussions on expanding these deferrals to include all threatened old-growth forests, including areas like the Walbran Valley, Nahmint, Fairy Creek, Tsitika Valley, Mt. Elphinstone, Argonaut Creek.

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED the UBCIC Chiefs-in-Assembly direct the UBCIC Executive and staff to work with other like-minded organizations to urge the provincial and federal governments to provide dedicated funding for First Nations Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs) and First Nations land use plans, as well as financial support for First Nations communities to manage and steward IPCAs, purchase and protect private

²⁵ <https://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/oceans/documents/conservation/advisorypanel-comiteconseil/submissions-soumises/Coast-Funds-Submission-to-MPA-Advisory-Panel-July-26-2018.pdf>

²⁶ [UBCIC Old-growth Protection Resolution: https://www.endangeredecosystemsalliance.org/news/2020/10/8/union-of-bc-indian-chiefs-ubcic-resolution-on-old-growth-forests-in-bc](https://www.endangeredecosystemsalliance.org/news/2020/10/8/union-of-bc-indian-chiefs-ubcic-resolution-on-old-growth-forests-in-bc)

lands with old-growth, and pursue conservation-based businesses and economies, including cultural and eco-tourism businesses, clean energy, and second-growth forestry;

THEREFORE BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED *the UBCIC Chiefs-in-Assembly urge the Ministry of FLNRORD to consult and engage with First Nation communities and organizations, including the First Nations Forestry Council and the First Nations Leadership Council, to develop and implement a renewed old-growth strategy that entrenches Indigenous consent into its processes; is aligned with the principles of the UN Declaration, the Old Growth Strategic Review recommendations, and the BC First Nations Forestry Strategy; is supported by strong enforcement and compliance standards; and is intended to support sustainable old-growth cultural harvesting as an important First Nations livelihood and source of culture."*

The recommendations put forward within the proposed City of Nanaimo Council resolution seek to include the intent of the above UBCIC resolution.