



Report to Council From the Office of Mayor Rob Vagramov

Date: March 12, 2021
Subject: Old Growth Logging

Purpose

To advocate for the protection of the remaining old growth forests in British Columbia.

Recommendation

WHEREAS ancient high productivity (big tree) old growth ecosystems are one of the most valuable tourism, First Nations culture, wild salmon enhancing, biodiversity banking, and climate resiliency assets;

AND WHEREAS only a miniscule fraction of the planet's original, high productive, ancient forests remain in BC, the vast majority of which is slated to be eliminated through logging; including the headwaters of Fairy Creek, the last unprotected intact old-growth watershed on southern Vancouver Island;

BE IT RESOLVED THAT the City of Port Moody formally oppose the logging of at-risk old-growth forests as recommended in the report dated March 12, 2021 from Mayor Rob Vagramov regarding Old Growth Logging;

AND THAT the City of Port Moody call on the Government of British Columbia to immediately and permanently protect the Fairy Creek watershed from further logging;

AND THAT the City of Port Moody call on the Government of British Columbia to immediately defer logging in all at-risk old-growth forests, including all remaining high-productivity old-growth forests, as identified by the independent Old Growth Strategic Review Panel, until all 14 of the panel's recommendations have been implemented;

AND THAT the City of Port Moody call on the Government of British Columbia to allocate funding to support the economic transition of affected communities away from unsustainable old growth logging, in the full spirit of indigenous reconciliation where applicable, for the development of long-term sustainable local economies and Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas where applicable;

AND THAT the following resolution be sent to the Lower Mainland Local Government Association and the Union of BC Municipalities with this report, dated March 12, 2021 from the Office of Mayor Rob Vagramov regarding Old Growth Logging:

WHEREAS ancient high productivity (big tree) old growth ecosystems are one of the most valuable tourism, First Nations culture, wild salmon enhancing, biodiversity banking, and climate resiliency assets;

AND WHEREAS only a miniscule fraction of the planet's original, high productive, ancient forests remain in BC, the vast majority of which is slated to be eliminated through logging; including the headwaters of Fairy Creek, the last unprotected intact old-growth watershed on southern Vancouver Island;

BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Government of British Columbia immediately defer logging in all at-risk old-growth forests, as identified by the independent Old Growth Strategic Review panel until all 14 of the panel's recommendations have been implemented, and support the transition of affected local communities toward more sustainable jobs.

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the Government of British Columbia allocate funding to support the economic transition of affected communities away from unsustainable old growth logging, in the full spirit of indigenous reconciliation where applicable, for the development of long-term sustainable local economies and Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas where applicable.

Background

Ever since humanity's divergence from our primate ancestors, we have generally (with the exception of some localized cultures, or indigenous peoples) upheld and very successfully implemented a *scorched earth policy* of sorts, by efficiently and systematically converting all manner of living beings – wild beasts, exotic flora, forests, and other – into useable resources for the further expansion of the Human Footprint.

Over the course of our humble takeover of the planet, this process has eliminated vast reserves of wildlife, wildlife habitat, and flora, during our relatively brief expansion from the prehistoric age, to the present day, accelerating with every advancement in technology – from the stick, to the gun, to the chainsaw, to the factory.

When considering the forested groundcover on planet Earth, it is estimated that less than 30%¹ of it has been spared from human interference. Much of this miniscule share is right here in British

¹ https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/sites/4/2020/02/SPM_Updated-Jan20.pdf

Columbia, and of *that*, only a few groves and parks are offered the permanent protections they deserve, as an unbelievably scarce resource possessing ineffable value.

The few forest watersheds that remain untouched show us what the rest of our Province looked like pre-harvesting: vast expanses of dense forests, trunks wider than many cars, trees older than millennia. One can understand the mindset of the settlers who first logged Port Moody: “This continent is infinite, and another plentiful continent surely exists *somewhere*.” The Space Race of the 1950s and 60s, however, showed us the physical limitations of the planet we inhabit, a self-contained *pale blue dot*, with no similar oasis nearby. Unlike those first settlers, we have no excuses at our disposal when it comes to protecting rare spots of original surface.



Discussion

Government Says, Government Should Do

In September 2020, the BC government released the much-anticipated report (**Attachment 2**) of the Old Growth Strategic Review, conducted by an independent two-person panel comprised of Garry Merkel (professional forester, natural resource expert, member of the Tahltan Nation) and Al Gorley (professional forester, 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, 9,000 emails and 18,500 completed surveys. 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 panel called for a “*paradigm shift,*” recognizing that old forests have intrinsic value for all living things, and should be managed as such, rather than simply for timber supply to support ephemeral consumer goods.

Since its release, many were hopeful that the government would spare no time in implementing the recommendations, and thus, protecting some of the most incredible natural spaces left on the face of the Earth. Statements made by Premier John Horgan during the previous provincial election bolstered this sentiment. The *Prince George Citizen* captured the Premier's campaign sentiments in an October 15 2020 article:

"We're committed to implementing the report in its totality," said Horgan when asked about it during a campaign stop.²

Since winning the election, Premier Horgan further backed this up with his mandate letter to the current Minister of Forests, 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, 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 card (**Attachment 1**) 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. This indicates a clear disconnect in terms of expectations set and met, between the provincial government and environmentalist/concerned First Nations.

In a February 22 2021 meeting with Minister Conroy, the Minister stated that the government remains committed to implementing the recommendations, but noted that the implementation of the recommendations as they were presented in the independent panel's report is *"probably going to take at least a decade."* Many are concerned that we risk losing significant, if not all of, the kind of at-risk, high-productivity old growth forests that the independent panel recommended protecting in the first place.

March 11th, 2020 marked the six-month deadline for the provincial government to begin implementing the recommendations of the independent panel's report. Recommendation #6 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."*

This report does not question the Government's resolve in relation to protecting old growth assets, which has been confirmed to the public time and time again. This report also does not directly advocate for an acceleration of the Minister's implementation timeline of over 10 years (although that would be nice). Instead, one of the resolutions recommended here seeks to simply halt all logging of all at-risk old growth forest assets *until* the independent panel's recommendations are implemented in their entirety. This would provide a level of temporary protection until the government can enact the "paradigm shift" that was promised during the election, and alleviate

² <https://www.princegeorgecitizen.com/news/local-news/horgan-commits-to-paradigm-shift-in-old-growth-forest-management-1.24220819>

some of the pressure from the provincial government in ensuring the panel's recommendations can be implemented properly.

First Nations / Reconciliation

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 forests on their 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 Recommendations. 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 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.”

Jobs, Jobs, Jobs

Usually, proponents of unsustainable resource extraction point to a jobs sector that would be deeply affected by any proposed regulations, or at least a negative impact to the bigger economic picture. In the case of Old Growth logging, however, the economic picture is quite simple: the trees are worth more alive.

Currently, about 54,000 hectares of old-growth forests – an area about 5x the size of Vancouver – are being logged every year in BC³. At current logging rates, and especially with our notorious “clear-cut” approach to harvesting, BC will eventually run out of old growth forests. This means that jobs tied directly to the rude logging of these incredible giants will also 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 you can only clear-cut original forests once – from there on out, they are no longer original, and do not possess many of the qualities that are worth preserving, from complex mycelial networks that allow countless trees to work as one, to unparalleled tree size, to unimaginable (or, as presented in the independent panel’s report, understandable) biodiversity, and of course, carbon capture abilities.

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:

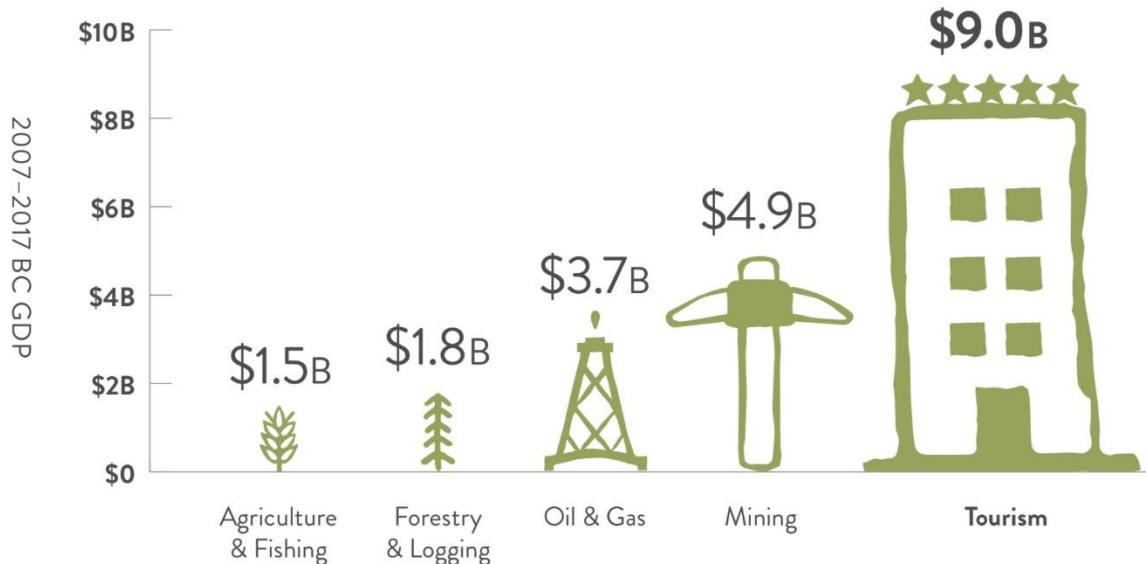
It was determined that the value of the 60 hectares of timber was worth about \$3,600,000. Since the regeneration cycle meant the area could be cut only once every 60 years, the yearly economic value of the timber was \$60,000. The economic value to the kayaking company, however, was \$416,000 per year, 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.

This one simple analysis uncovers the true value of these incredible old growth 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 [in 2017]*”.⁴

³ <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/british-columbia/article-while-government-consults-and-consults-some-more-logging-in-bcs/>

⁴ <https://www.destinationbc.ca/content/uploads/2019/07/2017-Value-of-Tourism.pdf>

GDP BY PRIMARY RESOURCE INDUSTRY



The BC Chamber of Commerce carried the following resolution in 2016, renewing it in 2019:

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 tried and tested across North America's west coast – just imagine requesting to purchase California's Redwoods (some confirmed to be over 1,500-2,000 years old) to convert them to "*amazing shingles that might even last 30 years*" – the very proposition would be laughable in a jurisdiction that was once as comparatively abundant in old growth assets as BC is today.

In many developing countries, impoverished locals commit environmental atrocities on a regular basis simply to put food on their tables. From hunting rhinos for their horns, to finning sharks, to illegally obtaining and refining crude oil (leading to perpetual spills in delicate ecosystems), these actions are pursued solely out of desperation – there simply isn't another accessible job at their disposal, and many of their traditional ways of life have been permanently disrupted by the global economy. Many international NGOs have acknowledged this reality, and have begun pouring

money into conservation and eco-tourism initiatives, leading to poachers becoming conservationists or tour guides, as an example.

One of the recommendations of this report calls on Provincial funding and support for BC communities and First Nations that currently rely on unsustainable old growth logging. Folks in the environmental movement are not out to destroy the livelihood of local residents. A supported transition to more sustainable sources of income, in the spirit of indigenous reconciliation where applicable, would not only protect the ecosystems in question, but would also lead to sustainable and resilient economies that can stand the test of time.

Climate Crisis

The October 2018, International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) 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 climate.

Aside from the intrinsic value of the magnificence of some of the largest organisms on the planet existing in one of the most intricate webs of ecological relationships on par with the rain forests of the amazon, these ancient ecosystems have an 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. These forests act as the planet's carbon bank, accumulating carbon in soil, trees, and organic matter over millennia. Research has increasingly shown that old trees store more carbon than young trees in proportion to their size. A single valley-bottom old growth tree can absorb far more carbon in a year than even an acre of seedlings. Almost 70% of the carbon stored in a tree is accumulated in the second half of its life.

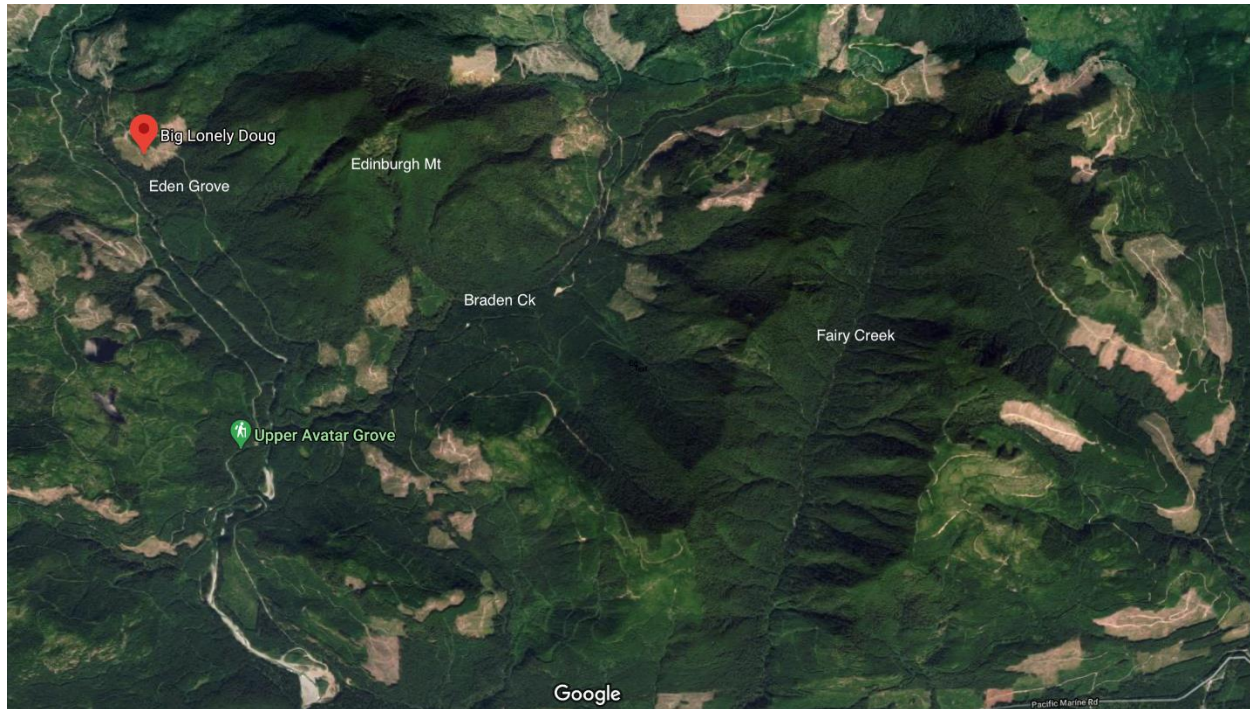
Logging primary, mature and old forests and converting them to secondary, managed forests can reduce total carbon storage by 40-50% or more, even when off-site storage of carbon in wood products in buildings is factored in. In a climate crisis it does not make sense to cut down carbon-storing older trees 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 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 forest 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 fires.

When taking into account that old growth forest products are often shipped across the world, to be used in often-replaceable products such as roofing shingles, exterior cladding, paper, pulp, and pellets, the senselessness of old-growth ecosystem harvesting cannot be understated.

Have We Not Learned?

One of the current battles for Old Growth protection is currently taking place at 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. Note the dark green colouration, no missing patches, a rare sight to behold on satellite imagery of BC:



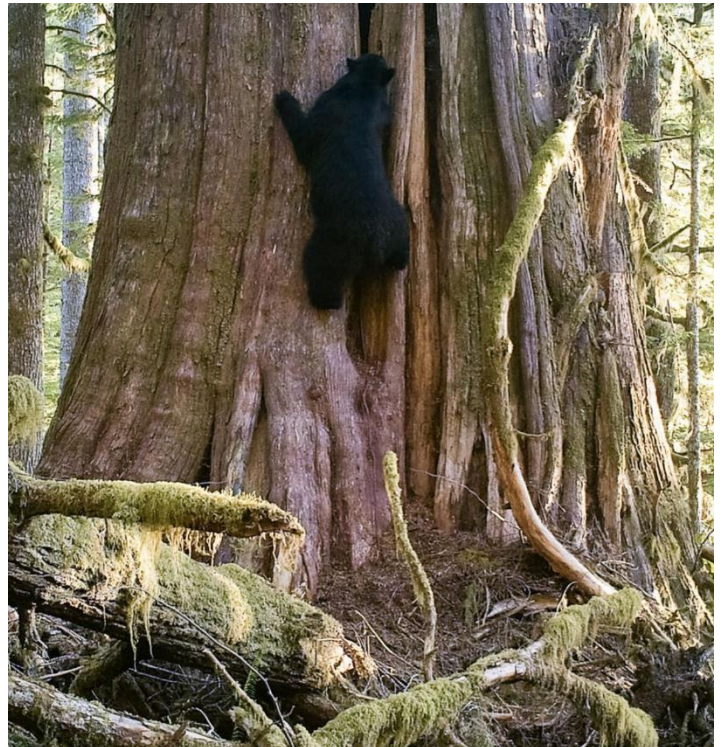
For context, one creek away stands the aptly-named “Avatar Grove” (who were you rooting for during that film?), a grove that was protected relatively recently. Further up stands *Big Lonely Doug*, pictured below, which is Canada’s second-largest Douglas-fir tree and is known as one of the most famous trees in Canada. Doug is estimated to be between 750 and 1200 years old⁵, and is the last remaining member of his grove, which was logged in 2014. It is estimated that 99% of the original, old-growth Douglas firs in British Columbia have been mercilessly cut down.

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

⁵ <https://www.atlasobscura.com/places/big-lonely-doug>



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 Doug's neighbourhood used to look like:



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

Fairy Creek, Eden Grove, and 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.

Reasonable Request

The fundamental request of this report to the Provincial government is simple – to immediately protect high productivity old growth forests, which represent only 1% of the forests of British Columbia⁶. It is my conclusion that logging *only* 99% of our forests should be enough.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

Council Strategic Plan Objectives

- Inspire environmental actions and advocacy

Attachment(s)

1. Article from Ancient Forest Alliance – B.C. is Flunking on Old-Growth Forests
2. A New Future for Old Forests
3. Minister of Forests, Lands, Natural Resources Operations and Rural Development Mandate Letter

⁶ <https://www.ancientforestalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/bcs-old-growth-forest-report-web.pdf>