

GOVERNMENT TALK-AND-LOG IS DRIVING BRITISH COLUMBIA INTO IRREPARABLE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

Climate change is causing more frequent and worse extreme weather in BC and across the world. This global warming is mostly caused by the burning of fossil fuels — oil, gas and coal — which spews carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, where it traps heat on our planet.

However, trees absorb carbon dioxide from the air and store it in their wood and soil, and the older the tree, the more carbon they capture and store. According to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, every year since 2000, forests have removed an estimated average of 2 billion tons of carbon dioxide from the air. Thus our forests are key allies in slowing down climate change. Clearcutting not only sets their carbon absorption back to zero, but also releases much of the carbon they have stored back into the atmosphere, contributing to climate change.

Right: Can you see the person in this photograph? These are cedar trees in BC's Inland Temperate Rainforest. They are likely 500 years or older, and their size indicates whopping carbon storage. They are growing in Lake Creek in the proposed Selkirk Mountain Caribou Park Proposal, but the proposal area is being logged not far away.

Courtesy Gary Diers



Courtesy Gary Diers

The Incomappleux Valley in the Selkirk Mountain Park Proposal. A 4-meter diameter tree like this would be about 1,800 years old. About two-thirds of the valley has been clearcut.

A Deadly Combination of Extreme Weather and Deregulated Logging

Around this time last year, 595 British Columbians had died as the result of a "heat dome". Around the same time, 1,610 fires burned 8,682 square kilometres of BC, including the towns of Lytton and Monte Lake. Approximately 32,000 people had to be evacuated.

Within a couple of months torrential rain fell on southwestern BC, flooding a vast area of farmland, killing thousands of farm animals and carrying away houses. The rains brought landslides that damaged or destroyed 200 highway sites and killed seven people in BC.

Railways, hydro lines, pipelines, dikes, and bridges were damaged, resulting in billions of dollars in economic losses. Highway and rail connection between Vancouver and the B.C. interior was severed, isolating Canada's biggest port for more than a week, and interrupting supply chains across Canada. (Globe & Mail, Feb. 19, 2022)

Excessive logging worsens the effects of severe weather. For instance, scientific studies have now shown that trees release moisture that cools the air around them, and that deforestation of temperate forests has led to more intense heat waves. Statistics have shown that clearcuts intensify fires and cause them to spread more rapidly.

Meanwhile BC's approval of logging on steep slopes, with the only professional oversight provided by the corporations that stand to profit,

sets the stage for landslides that can then be triggered by heavy rain worsened by climate change. Hydrology experts have verified that the slide that killed seven people in 2021 was "predictable and avoidable", having started on a poorly built logging road that was then unmonitored.

"But What about the Economy?"

Yes, let's talk about the economy. In February this year, the Globe & Mail (Justine Hunter, Feb 19, 2022) calculated that the currently countable cost of recovering from BC's 2021 floods is nearing \$9 billion dollars, while another source projects \$13 billion. These costs will come from the taxpayers at local, provincial and national levels, not the corporations that profit from logging our forests. Other costs in Canadian trade while ports and highways were blocked were not part of the analysis.

Meanwhile a study published in *The Lancet* medical journal (Prof. Guo, M., July 2021, Monash Univ.) estimated there have been five million deaths per year worldwide from abnormal hot and cold temperatures between 2000 and 2019. Scientists advise that there will be many more deaths as climate change intensifies.

Is the destruction of the conditions for life on the planet just a reasonable cost of doing business? Are we comfortable with shrugging off these deaths and leaving them to future generations while the causes continue unabated?

Promises to Reform Forest Practices Are Meaningless Without a Substantial Reduction of the Amount of Logging

This year the government has acknowledged that years of forest mismanagement contributed to the 2021 landslides; it is apparently planning a review of existing logging roads. Talk of improving logging standards is important, but unless they aim for dramatically less logging, with a substantial reduction of the Allowable Annual Cut, changes will not save species or help to mitigate climate change. The high rate of logging would continue to drive roads onto steep, unstable slopes and cut down the trees needed to hold the soil on those slopes. It would continue to fragment and destroy wildlife habitat, and it would also be greatly reducing our forests' carbon capture and storage capacity.

Despite promises of old-growth logging deferrals, few have materialized, nor has much permanent protection. Some deferrals are close to expiration or have already expired. Why does it matter how long it takes for promises to materialize?— because while we are waiting, the forest needing protection is oftentimes being logged.

Forcing forest policies on people that threaten the health and safety of present and future generations pushes them into resistance through logging and pipeline blockades. Our government has turned a willfully blind eye to the excesses of militarized police forces on peaceful protesters. In past years on the coast police action brought helicopters, snipers, assault weapons, arrests of journalists, and excessive force to arrest peaceful protesters.

Recently in the interior of BC, at Argenta on Kootenay Lake, police have set up "exclusion zones" where witnesses cannot observe police behaviour. They have arrested citizens who were not blocking the road, and destroyed the belongings of protesters on public land. All of these protests were efforts to protect very important intact forest and mature or very old forest.

Wiping Out Wildlife for Forest Profits

The BC government's unwillingness to protect loggable forest blocks the protection of old-growth dependent wildlife. For instance, several groups of citizens have submitted legal petitions under the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA), asking the federal government to order BC to protect habitat for the Southern Group of Mountain Caribou that inhabit the Inland Temperate Rainforest. Our federal government refused to write an order.

According to the federal Environment Minister, the government would rather resolve the issue by talking



When, in 2018, Environment and Climate Change Canada determined that the Southern Group of Mountain Caribou were under imminent threat to their recovery, Canada and BC whipped up a snowstorm of reports, meetings and consultations which, over 4 years, have not produced one iota of viable caribou habitat protection in the Interior Wetbelt.

to the province and First Nations. BC has been thumbing its nose at the federal government for nearly four years. For some time it swore that new "herd plans" were just around the corner for the Southern Group; but the plans never materialized and the government no longer mentions them after stringing environmentalists along for several years. Their recovery programs are primarily killing wolves and penning pregnant caribou. This appears to be a course of deliberate extinction.

As Mountain Caribou herds dwindle and disappear, protection of their habitat is still urgently necessary because it is rare Inland Temperate Rainforest with over 180 known species at risk listed by BC's Conservation Data Centre, and amongst the highest carbon storage of any forests in Canada.

What Forests to Protect?

Protection of BC's wettest and oldest forests, with big trees and high biodiversity, should be a priority on the coast and in BC's globally rare Inland Temperate Rainforest. Overall our Inland Temperate Rainforests have had far less protection (about 17%) than the Coastal Temperate Rainforest (about 37%).

The province has taken some encouraging steps such as creating an old-growth panel and promising logging deferrals that might ultimately result in protection. However, the Valhalla Wilderness Society is deeply concerned that efforts to protect old-growth are mostly focused on the age of the forest, while paying little heed to protection of their ecosystems. Small tracts of old-growth forest are important, but the surrounding clearcuts can expose them to drying air and sunlight, which can eliminate species that are dependent upon moist, cool interior forest conditions, or upon seclusion from human disturbance.

So there is also a critical need to protect our few remaining large, intact areas. Protecting small areas with even very old trees, and logging the rest, would just create more 'islands of extinction'. At one time our government had the understanding and the will to protect large, intact areas. These areas would include the younger and mature forest that connects old-growth stands into wilderness areas large enough for the survival of grizzly bears, mountain caribou, and hundreds of other species.

The Valhalla Wilderness Society has submitted to government three carefully considered, intact forest areas designed as park proposals for Inland Temperate Rainforest. Please consider supporting them for deferrals and new protection. They are:

Selkirk Mtn. Caribou Park Proposal
Quesnel Lake Wilderness Proposal
Rainbow-Jordan Wilderness Proposal

You can see them on our website at www.vws.org and sign our petition at:

<https://www.change.org/.../save-bc-s-ancient-temperate>

There are also other Inland Temperate Rainforest stands needing protection. It is urgent that you consider supporting them, as time is running out.

Please Write the BC Government today!

Hon. John Horgan, Premier
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Hon. Katrine Conroy, Min. of Forests
FLNR.Minister@gov.bc.ca

Hon. Josie Osborne, Min. of Land,
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Hon. Murray Rankin, Min. of Indigenous
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Submitted by Valhalla Wilderness Society

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