



BC IS NOT IN BUSINESS WITHOUT A WORKING FOREST

TLA Perspective

The working forest land base in BC is shrinking and there is no clear indication this trend will lose momentum. The BC Government has committed to sustainably harvesting old growth and balancing provincial forest policy to ensure all stakeholder needs are met. However, with the transition to lower volume second-growth stands we need an increasing working forest land base secured in order to meet the needs of a sustainable, economically viable forest industry.

BC's unique land and climate is home to one of the richest plant and wildlife resources in North America. This includes three-quarters of all mammal species found in Canada, 488 bird species, 480 fish species, 136 mammal species, 20 amphibian species, 16 reptile species, 1,596 native vascular plants species, 35,000 insect species, and tens of thousands of other invertebrate species.

Pretty impressive, right? No one has a greater appreciation for BC's natural landscapes and complex critter interactions than those working in the forest industry, and directly generating their sustainable, multi-generational family income from the forest resources. So what happens to all this complex structure and interaction of fauna and flora when the mature

trees are removed for harvest? Is any of it saved? How big is the harvest area? How were the trees removed? Who completed the work? When? Why? What is the impact of new trees planted at the site?

Trying to assess the exact impact of human activities on our forests and the short- and long-term is very complicated and yes, it is much more difficult than rocket science. It is rare to get multiple scientists or professionals agreeing on the "correct" answer.

Complexity and uncertainty opens the door for influence from some ENGO's and interest groups pushing self-serving conservation and preservation related agendas. When "the sky is falling" and alarm bells are ringing, this is an opportunity for incoming cash flow pulses into

their "business" from concerned citizens, celebrities, and even government funded aid and research programs.

While the BC Government and all forest professionals have the responsibility to ensure a balanced stakeholder approach to managing BC's forests, the shrinking working forest land base appears to be the result of a classic case of "the squeaky wheels getting the grease".

We don't have all the answers to predict the exact outcome of human interactions with our forests, but we do have a great deal of talented folks in academia, consulting fields, industry, and "in-the-field practitioners" all interacting to learn, improve practices, and inform forest policy makers. In fact, forestry has a longer history of practice, research, and policy than

most other industries in BC, with the first forestry class offered at UBC in 1918.

Historically, a great deal of forestry knowledge and practice in BC was transferred from European countries where there is an even greater history and knowledge of forestry practice following the 2nd world war. Many forestry professionals immigrated to BC, including the Hungarian Sopron crew whose mass immigration provided BC with a new perspective on forestry and an increased knowledge base.

With all this knowledge and experience, why does BC struggle to maintain the size of its working forest land base? Based on this declining land base trend, it would appear the government is forecasting a shrinking demand for wood products in the future. With the passing of the *Wood First Act*, and various climate change and carbon sequestration initiatives, we know the BC government is advocating for an increased utilization of wood products in construction. So timber harvesting contractors are left in this conflicting state between theoretical ideals and practical realities and see increasing pressure to reduce harvest volumes and working

forest areas in BC. The following partial list quantifies this position:

- Parks and protected areas cover 14.2 per cent of the total BC land base.
- 55 per cent of BC's 3.2 million hectares of old growth forests are already protected in parks and wilderness areas (including two-thirds of the old growth on Vancouver Island's Crown land).
- The Province has 55,000 Old Growth Management Areas covering 3.9 million hectares set aside as non-commercially harvestable units.
- In 2008 the government introduced the designation of 70 new conservancies and 11 new Class A parks, along with the expansion of 5 existing parks and 2 existing conservancies. The new conservancies and parks placed more than 1.4 million additional hectares under protected areas status.
- The utilities and pipeline sector applied for crown land tenure of nearly 15 million hectare between 2001 and 2009 and in recent years land tenure granted to this sector has increased exponentially (reliable data for recent years was inconsistent).

- In 2015, the government established 567 additional old growth management areas on the Sunshine Coast.
- In 2016, the *Great Bear Rainforest Act* protected 85 per cent of a 6.4 million hectare commercial timber harvesting area, reducing and scattering the working forest area into uneconomical fragments with costly road and access constraints.
- Recently, the "coastal Douglas-fir ecosystem" was protected in 19 parcels of land on Vancouver Island.
- Loss of the fertile valley bottom working forest land base to urban development and agriculture is increasing at an exponential rate.

In recent years the government has launched several environmental initiatives that are putting further pressure on reducing the working forest land base. Examples of these initiatives include: implementation of the *Species at Risk Act*, revision of the federal *Fisheries Act*, the Northern Goshawk Recovery Strategy recovery implementation plan, Marbled Murrelet Recovery Strategy, south island cautionary moratorium on old growth, monumental tree retention programs, legacy tree retention programs, Union of



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BC Municipalities resolution on old growth logging, and other regional initiatives aimed at reducing timber harvesting in BC.

A healthy, economically viable forest industry is essential to the long-term prosperity of our province. Discussions of the working forest concept have been in circulation since at least the 1940s and at that time resulted tree farm licences (TFLs). Government's intention of TFLs was for dedicated land to produce timber with the purpose of improving the lives of working men and women and their families. Over time, the companies assigned those TFLs have restructured, amalgamated, affiliated, and changed to the point where it seems the TFLs exist to maximize profits to company shareholders, which has lost alignment with its original intention. As licensees continue to reduce staff and contract as much of the forestry and harvesting operation as possible, the financial benefit of the forest resource shifts more towards the shareholder, and away from "working men and women." This power imbalance between tenure holder and contracted worker is a source of many conflicts in the forest industry today, and has resulted in recent efforts such as the Contractor Sustainability Review.

The federal government has committed to the United Nations Biodiversity Convention and the Canadian Biodiversity Strategy. The Auditor General's audit of BC's biodiversity found the provincial government had significant gaps in understanding of biodiversity, did not know if their actions were resulting in the conservation of biodiversity, and did not measure and report on its progress in the conservation of biodiversity.

With this in mind, we can see that a lack of information and knowledge associated with pressure from environmental interest groups can lead to a shrinking working forest land base simply due to aversion of risk in land management decision making.

If the impact of timber harvesting is unclear, there is more pressure to reduce harvesting timber. However, by assessing these information and knowledge gaps, we can address issues of concern and firm up boundaries associated with timber harvesting decisions. An example of this has recently played out with Northern Goshawk harvest restrictions on the south island. Private land forest owners have hired biologists and collected many years of habitat use and goshawk presence in second growth forests.

Until recently, the government insisted goshawks required old growth forests to survive, and therefore large areas of old growth were retained in order to "protect biodiversity and goshawk habitat." The recent studies of goshawk habitat in second growth clearly demonstrate the species' ability to adapt and thrive in second growth forests, and move around the landscape spatially as the forests are harvested and replanted. This eliminates the need for reducing the working forest land base for the survival of goshawks.

The question is, how much protected old growth is enough? If we protected all of our forests we would eliminate jobs, economic activity and tax generation. The TLA believes we have achieved a balance with sustainable working forest, conservation of ecosystems, and representative and unique flora and fauna. We must protect our working forests.▲