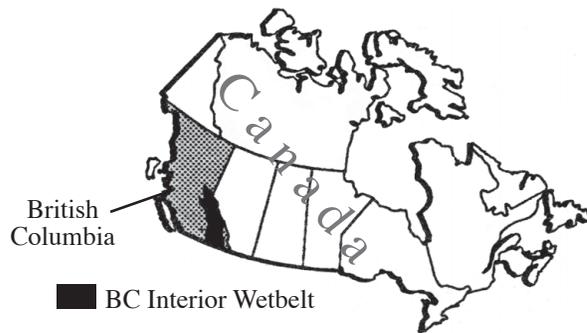


# Logging Is Destroying Precious Biological Legacies of Canada's Rare INLAND RAINFOREST



Craig Pettitt

True rainforest in the temperate latitudes is rare. Most of occurs in coastal areas at eight locations around the world. In North America, it occurs in a narrow strip on the Pacific Coast, from Alaska to the midcoast of California.

But there is only one place in the world where temperate rainforest occurs inland. That is in the Columbia and Rocky Mountains of southeastern BC, 500-600 kilometres from the coast. This area is known as BC's "Interior Wetbelt."

Forests at the lower elevations of the Interior Wetbelt are dominated by Western Redcedar and Western Hemlock. This zone is called the Interior Cedar-Hemlock (ICH) biogeoclimatic zone.

The high biomass of these forests is produced by rain coming inland from the coast. ICH forest is rich in biodiversity. It is home to endangered mountain caribou, grizzly and black bears, wolves, wolverines, cougars, and salmon.

These cedar-hemlock forests vary in their climate and moisture. The moist ICH forests may have hundreds of years between forest fires. These areas produce giant old-growth cedar and hemlock trees. After 40 years of clearcut logging, these are becoming rare.

Only the wettest ICH forests are true rainforest. This occurs between 51° and 54° latitude — mostly in the northern half of the Interior Wetbelt. These forests have been developing uninterrupted since the last Ice Age. They are called "antique forests."

In one area, the Incomappleux River Valley, attempts to count tree rings suggest that the larger trees, which are 3-4 metres in diametrees, may be up to 1,800 years old.

Inland Rainforest contains many species of lichens, mushrooms and plants previously known only in Coastal Rainforest.

However, the climate includes a wider range of temperatures than on the coast, with cold winters and heavy snows. Thus the Inland Rainforest contains a unique biological legacy that is found nowhere else on Earth. It brings together coastal, southern interior and boreal species of plants.

The inland antique rainforests have provided a stable environment for thousands of years in which rare and fragile species could survive and spread. This has allowed the development of intricate interconnections between all parts of the ecosystem. Scientists are finding many rare, endangered and old-growth dependent species in these forests.

## Clearcut logging is stripping the 14.3-million hectare Interior Wetbelt of a whole constellation of biodiversity associated with low-elevation, old-growth cedar-hemlock forest.

The Valhalla Wilderness Society commissioned Applied Cnservation GIS to do computerized mapping of the forest, clearcuts, roads and wildlife habitat of the entire 14.3 million hectare BC portion of the Interior Wetbelt. The project area is called the Inland Rainforest Region.

- Over 2 million hectares of forestland have been logged since 1960.
- Logging has been concentrated at the low- and mid-elevations.
- Only 3.2% of the total forest in the Inland Rainforest region is intact, old-growth low-elevation forest.
- Only 7.5% of the Inland Rainforest Region has been protected in parks. Many of them are small parks or high elevation parks that contain little forest. Clearcut logging and roads are surrounding these parks, destroying critical wildlife habitat and isolating populations so that they can no longer diversify their gene pools.
- A new study by the Craighead Environmental Research Institute in Montana says that 55% of the area should be fully protected to maintain species such as grizzly bears, wolves, other large predators, and mountain caribou.



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The Interior Cedar-Hemlock forests contain some of the best black bear and grizzly bear habitat in BC. Every autumn they feed on spawning salmon. In the southern half of the region, there are landlocked salmon called Kokanee. In the northern half, in the Cariboo Mountains and Robson Valley, salmon from the ocean reach the Interior.

**East Asia has 4,500-7,350 snow leopards. Africa has 2,700 black rhinoceros. China has 1,600 giant pandas. Canada has only 1,670 mountain caribou. They are unique in all the world, and they are totally dependent upon old-growth forest. But old-growth caribou habitat is still being logged.**



## **No place to run, no place to hide**

**Uncontrolled chainsaws, snowmobiles and helicopters are driving this unique type of caribou to extinction. It is found nowhere else on Earth but in the Inland Rainforest Region.**

- The woodland caribou is listed as threatened (blue-listed) in Canada. The mountain caribou is an ecotype of the woodland caribou. It is even closer to extinction.
- A small remnant herd of mountain caribou ranges into the northwestern United States; otherwise, they are found only in the Inland Rainforest Region of British Columbia.
- Mountain caribou have evolved especially for life in BC's rugged mountains. They migrate up and down the mountains rather than latitudinally. They eat tree lichens rather than ground lichens.
- They depend upon old-growth forest for food and shelter from heavy snows during early winter when the snow is soft and will not support their weight.
- Trees 100 years old and over grow large quantities of tree lichens (genus *Bryoria* and *Alectoria*) that are the key winter food supply for mountain caribou.
- Their numbers have declined from an estimated pre-colonial population of 5,000 to 6,000 caribou to an estimated 1,670 caribou in 2004, including a 27% decline just since 1996.
- Of the 13 remaining sub-populations, most continue to shrink, none are expanding, 6 of the 13 have fewer than 50 animals, and one appears to now be extirpated.
- Their old-growth forest habitat has been heavily logged and fragmented. Despite the grave status, measures for protection of mountain caribou habitat remain limited and inadequate.
- 7.5% of the Inland Rainforest Region is in protected areas, but most of these are too small to help. The area needs new and expanded parks with low- and mid-elevation forest.
- Recovery programs under Canada's new *Species At Risk Act* have so far resulted in no new parks to protect the caribou. The northern part of the Inland Rainforest Region has received some old-growth management areas for the caribou, and more are under consideration. But none of these new and proposed areas are securely protected. And they exclude low-elevation forest so the logging companies can log the large trees. Caribou need low-elevation forests in early winter and late spring.
- Snowmobiles and helicopters used for winter recreation drive caribou away from their preferred habitat during winter when their survival hangs by a thread. These machines are believed to be a significant factor in the decline of the mountain caribou. The northern Recovery Group has taken only small steps to control recreation, the southern Group has so far taken none.
- Land and Water BC (LWBC), a privatized Crown corporation, is handing out permits for new tenures for snowcat, helicopter, and other motorized recreation businesses. LWBC is operating in total disregard of the needs of the mountain caribou.

### **Please help stop the destruction of old-growth Inland Temperate Rainforest**

Decades ago, Third World nations had no real controls on the slaughter of wildlife. Our developed nations, including Canada, said Third World societies could earn their income in more environmentally friendly ways. They imposed import bans on endangered species and items from their slaughter.

In BC, we kill blue-listed species such as grizzly bears directly, by hunting them. But we also kill endangered species indirectly through the butchery of forests. In the process we annihilate old-growth ecosystems that contribute immeasurably to the health

of the planet. And we rob the world of the opportunity to experience the cathedral-like ancient temperate forests.

For many years scientists and environmental groups have worked to save some of the species richness of the tropical rainforests before it is too late. Now, a similar international effort needs to be made to increase protection of Canada's only Inland Rainforest.

If you hope someday to experience a primeval, wilderness rainforest where bears, wolves and caribou

roam, you must write the Canadian and provincial BC governments immediately to stop the destruction of a rare heritage.

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