

CONVENIENT CRISIS

Using wildfires as an excuse to log BC's last old-growth forest

Most of BC's forestland is a sea of clearcuts. Some types of BC's forests have less than 10% of their old-growth left. For many decades the logging industry, Ministry of Forests, and BC politicians have told the public falsely that the rate of logging was "sustainable" over the long term. Proof was shown repeatedly that this was false, but the government and industry denied it and sought to maximize quick profits. Well before the US imposed high tariffs on Canadian wood, corporations that had made huge profits from BC wood were moving operations to the U.S. Much of the forest left in B.C. is more expensive to log, due to being too far from mills, poor quality, or on steep terrain. The US tariffs reduced the profitability of the industry even more. But it's the increase of forest fires due to climate change that has provided the "emergency" that some in the forest industry are now using as a lever to get into protected areas. This is being advocated as "thinning", otherwise known as "selective logging" or "active management". This pretends that the logging industry can "thin" protected areas without carving them up with roads, doing permanent ecological damage, and taking the big trees.



At risk: High biodiversity old-growth in Valhalla Wilderness Society's Selkirk park proposal.

Politicians create a grave threat to human life when they favour corporate profits at the expense of making climate change worse. Extreme weather events worsened by climate change have already killed hundreds of people in BC. Wildfires have destroyed many houses and even whole towns. Yet governments are ignoring the science about forests, fires and climate change.

Scientists urge increased forest protection is necessary to mitigate climate change

A letter from 200 climate and forest scientists to the US government, 13 May 2020 stated:

"The growing consensus of scientific findings is that, to effectively mitigate the worst impacts of climate change, we must not only move beyond fossil fuel consumption but must also substantially increase protection of our native forests in order to absorb more CO₂ from the atmosphere and store more, not less, carbon in our forests."

And in 2022 ninety scientists sent a letter to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau stating:

"We are deeply concerned by the evidence of continued deforestation and degradation of primary forests globally and in Canada because of the resulting impact on greenhouse gas emissions and the biodiversity crisis ... Canada's primary boreal and temperate forests have a vital role to play as natural climate solutions, and it is important that their protection is central to Canada's climate and biodiversity policies."

In general, old primary forests (forests that have never been logged) store the highest amounts of carbon. BC's old-growth Coastal and Inland Temperate Rainforests are among the highest carbon stores in the world. They are also relatively resistant to wildfire. Moist old-growth forests in BC have canopies that shade and cool the forest floor and hold in moisture, while the trees block

wind. Studies have shown that logging, or even thinning these moist forests, can increase their fire risk by exposing them to higher temperatures and desiccating wind.

Logging is destroying potential climate refuges

Scientists at the University of Alberta have worked to identify BC old-growth forest that could potentially provide refuge to species vulnerable to climate change. The study was funded by the Canadian Forest Service and the BC Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship.

The report states that: "Old growth forests are recognized as areas of buffered microclimates with resistance to natural disturbance." (Pochailo, N, et al, *Ecosphere*, Jan. 2025). They assessed the probability of forests acting as refuges into the 2050s. The idea is to prioritize these areas for protection.

They designated 63% of BC's current old growth as potential climate refugia. At present 17% of BC's old-growth is in fully protected areas, but that includes only 11.5% of the projected refugia. Of the unprotected refugia, almost half are susceptible to development. The authors state:

"At just over 17% protected, BC's old growth generally fails to reach Canada's area protection target of 30% by 2030 (Government of Canada, 2021), which has been proposed to apply equally to all ecosystems."

Disappearing promises of forestry reform

BC also promised to protect 30% of the province by 2030, but has made no progress since creating three protected areas in 2023-24.

In 2020 BC's "Old Growth Strategic Review Panel" recommended that BC pass legislation declaring ecosystem health and biodiversity as the top priority of forest management. It also recommended temporary logging deferrals on old-growth at high risk of biodiversity loss. BC set up the Old-growth Technical Advisory Panel (TAP) to identify areas for

Last year, BC's Minister of Forests, Hon. Ravi Parmar claimed that parks and old-growth management areas are going to burn down unless their forest is "selectively thinned". He said it's impossible to put a line around an area and protect it, and he argued: "We did not take the important steps to protect our ancient forests to see them burn down." The BC government has since assured the public there will be no logging in BC parks, but Parmar's statements are a threat to protected old-growth outside of parks. This ignores some very important things:

1. Forests are one of the planet's very few means of removing carbon from the air at a scale that's meaningful to reduce climate change.

2. Logging forests has been a major contributor to climate change by releasing the carbon store in them back into the atmosphere.

3. Clearcuts and tree plantations are known to intensify and accelerate the spread of wildfires. Logging, even selective logging can increase wildfire risk in some kinds of forest, especially moist forests, by creating hot, dry conditions on logging slash.

deferrals. It recommended deferrals for 2.6 million hectares of at risk, big-treed old-growth, pending decisions on which should be protected. The government loudly approved the deferrals, but four years later, 55,000 hectares of the recommended deferrals have been logged and only 136,000 hectares have been protected.

A 2025 report entitled "Closer to the Brink" by two members of the TAP Panel, Dave Daust and ecologist Dr. Karen Price, states that "Logging was four times more likely inside at-risk old growth forests that were recommended for deferral than in other old growth," indicating that recommended deferrals have been targeted for logging.

BC promptly released draft legislation making biodiversity and ecosystem health the top priority, but quietly dropped it.

Why is BC trying to log its depleted forest faster?

In 2025 the Premier of BC ordered a large increase in the Allowable Annual Cut (AAC), as well as doubling of the speed at which logging permits are signed. Minister Parmar was ordered to find the wood, apparently regardless of the impact on biodiversity. In a cynical twist, instead of moving towards protecting 30% of BC, the government's Ministry of Forests advocated selective logging of the protected areas we already have.

An aroused citizenry is increasingly aware of the political double-talk we have outlined in this and other publications. While mouthing platitudes about climate change concern and environmental protection, the same old profit-first aims in both industry and government are bent on a rapacious exhaustion of the forest and mass destruction of species at risk, while also furthering the climate change danger to the electorate. Extreme weather caused by climate change has been costing the government and citizens billions and billions of dollars. Who profits from denying or dismissing climate change while cutting our last remaining old-growth?

B.C. PROVINCIAL PARKS

A treasured public legacy built by generations of British Columbians

The BC government has recently clarified that commercial thinning of forest is not occurring in parks, and is against the BC Park Act. That's good, at least for now. But:

When one considers that the only accessible forest in BC that is fully, permanently protected is in BC Parks, Ecological Reserves, and Conservancies, — and only by means of the BC Park Act — it becomes incredibly important for government to obey and protect the Park Act, itself.

The BC Park Act is one of the strongest park acts in North America. It was drafted many decades ago by BC Parks officials, after they studied how other park designations, such as Canada's National Park Act, had notoriously failed their goal of protecting parks "unimpaired for future generations". The Park Act is also the only instrument in BC that can fully protect forest because it is a law that persists through changes of government, and it is not under the control of the Ministry of Forests.

Concerns about the BC Park Act

One concern for the BC Park Act today is that changing BC laws through negotiations with First Nations is on the agenda of the BC government. Valhalla Wilderness Society (VWS) has always asserted staunch support for co-management of BC parks and conservancies between BC Parks and First Nations. And First Nations have been very instrumental in the protection of quite a few BC parks and conservancies.

However, most recently VWS is concerned about political forces vying for management control of BC's parks. This contention has nothing to do with conservation. In today's political climate, any change to the BC Park Act is likely to diminish if not outright gut its protective clauses.

The establishment of BC parks was generated



Goat Range Provincial Park

by British Columbians' collective desire to protect an adequate amount of land in its natural condition for the health of ecosystems and future generations. Parks were meant to embrace all people, and as such they require a government or co-management arrangement that represents the broad public interest. Anything else is sadly misaligned with the spirit in which BC Parks were created.

Unfortunately, BC's existing Old-growth Management Areas are under the control of the Ministry of Forests, and they are under severe threat. British Columbia's parks are far too few in number and too far apart to adequately protect biodiversity, yet they are a great legacy that outshines most other park systems on this continent. We see no reason why this legacy should stop growing, and think it is shameful if any BC government would turn its back on creating them.

The BC-wide Broken Promises Protest

In November 2025 these protests denounced the betrayal of BC's promises of forestry reform. They drew 1,300 people in 12 locations around BC.

The degree of support for BC parks may be judged by the poster for the protests: Minister Parmar's photograph was featured on a WANTED poster "for allowing increased logging in deferred areas and threatening logging provincial parks."

Yes, there IS a crisis in BC today:

A crisis in which monetary interests in industry and government are using climate change fires and US tariffs to justify racing to gain profits from major industrial expansion, regardless of the damage to the environment, the health of people, the lost species and the bleak future of worsening climate change. Please write letters of protest today to:

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Please consider supporting the following points:

- ◆ Addressing climate change and the biodiversity crisis requires immediate protection for old-growth and primary forest.
- ◆ BC must keep its promise to protect 30% of the province by 2030. Protection should mean full protection under the BC Park Act.
- ◆ Priority should be given to at-risk old-growth and ancient forest with high biodiversity.
- ◆ Maintain strict enforcement and preservation of the BC Park Act.