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B.C. Climate Preparedness and Adaptation Strategy

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Preparing for and taking steps towards adapting to a changing climate and climate impacts is paramount and we applaud the province for taking steps into this direction. Climate change will affect all parts of our lives and all parts of our economy. Sierra Club BC welcomes the opportunity to provide input.

Our submission will focus on forest conservation and forest management, a crucial issue for the province considering the large amount of provincial forest cover and the role of forests in both climate mitigation and adaptation.

The role of BC's forests illustrates why mitigation (emission reductions) and adaptation cannot be separated. Protecting forests and phasing out destructive forestry practices is equally important both to protect communities from climate change impacts like droughts and flooding, and to reduce carbon dioxide emissions from forests and forestry, which are not counted in official emission tallies yet are now much greater than all official provincial emissions combined.

In a report released at the end of 2019 called Clearcut Carbon¹, Sierra Club BC highlighted the importance of reforming BC forestry for both climate mitigation and adaptation. We recommend the province reviews our report in the context of its climate preparedness and adaptation strategy. The recommendations that follow and the rationale why they should be implemented as part of B.C.'s climate preparedness and adaptation strategy are based on this report.

Forests also illustrate the limits to adaptation. Like many other ecosystems, forests have tipping points beyond which they cannot adapt; degrees of planetary warming beyond which adaptation efforts will be overwhelmed by the changes in natural systems. Thus as the province develops a climate preparedness and adaptation strategy, it is paramount to also develop targets and climate action plans consistent with science. In short, adaptation strategies will fail unless the province does its part to contribute to emissions reductions that slow down climate change to a level that allows the possibility of adaptation.

¹ <https://sierraclub.bc.ca/clearcutcarbon/>

Resilient forests for safe, resilient communities

To prepare and adapt our province in the face of climate change requires increased forest conservation and reformed forest management policies. Destructive forestry practices that put communities at risk of increased climate impacts like drought and flooding, and that cause significant carbon emissions, need to be phased out. Forest management for community and ecological resiliency also requires protecting and restoring resilient forests as a defense from worsening climate impacts. Safeguarding intact landscapes will also help enable a diverse economy and high quality of life in B.C.

Forests are the last line of defence for many communities amid worsening climate impacts like droughts and floods. As the climate shifts into uncharted territory, only intact forests can buffer the impacts—not clearcuts and young tree plantations. Intact forests are also essential for clean air and water, species habitat and long term forestry jobs. Carbon-rich old-growth forests remain the most resilient. Forest management decision makers must recognize that protecting and restoring resilient forests will both slow climate change and help defend the safety of communities.

In some forest landscapes, cautious intervention like thinning to build resiliency and controlled burns will be necessary. Clearcutting forests on short cycles is not a climate solution in any forest type in B.C., as this forest management practice releases carbon emissions. Our urgent task is to store carbon, not release it, and natural intact forests do this best.

The IPCC concluded that, without unprecedented action, the world will heat by about 1.5 degrees Celsius by 2040. Global heating of just one degree is already causing longer and more extreme flooding and droughts.

These trends will only stop once the world economy has completely decarbonized. However, impacts to B.C. communities can be significantly slowed by protecting intact natural forests, particularly large landscapes, to moderate local climates.

As our climate is changing rapidly, B.C.'s forestry policies and practices must reflect the changing forest ecosystems we live and work in. Safeguarding our natural life support systems and the ability of forests to store and capture carbon will require leadership, funding and innovation.

Forest management must be guided by the overarching goal of restoring ecologically intact, resilient forests that can protect communities from devastating climate impacts and capture carbon.

Both the urgency to protect communities and the need to massively reduce carbon emissions in the next decade² requires that we prioritize actions that have immediate benefits. While tree planting initiatives have potential long-term benefits for communities and the climate, these benefits will not be significantly realized for decades. In contrast, protecting old-growth forests and ending slash burning has immediate benefits for communities and the climate.

It is not too late to save and restore some of the remaining relatively intact forest landscapes in the province, their cultural values, and their benefits for clean water, pure air and a stable climate. But the decision to transition to truly sustainable forest management cannot wait. Creating more jobs with less damage per cubic metre of wood and truly climate-friendly wood products deserves full provincial support.

In the midst of a climate crisis, we can no longer afford to clearcut forests for timber. The good news is that a reimagined forestry model is a core component in a low carbon economy, if we act quickly to slow climate change with the help of our best ally: forests.

² International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) special report released in October 2018:

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/oct/08/global-warming-must-not-exceed-15c-warns-landmark-un-report>

Recommendations for forest stewardship to support healthy communities and a stable climate:

1. Overhaul B.C.'s legislation and regulations governing forestry and make them consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).
2. Partner with the federal government³ to support First Nations who are seeking new Indigenous protected area designations for their territories, many of which include carbon-rich old-growth forests such as those found in Clayoquot Sound.⁴ The federal government has reserved \$1.3 billion to support these conservation aspirations and deliver on international conservation commitments that neither Canada nor B.C. has met thus far.⁵ B.C. is considered the ecologically richest part of Canada and therefore has a disproportionately large responsibility to contribute to Canada's target of conserving 17% of its land base. The Province should commit to matching contributions that are, at minimum, proportional to its geographic area (close to 10% of Canada's geographic area).
3. Amend the Forest and Range Practices Act (FRPA) to reflect a paradigm shift from a timber-based approach to an ecosystem-based approach, to better protect communities from climate impacts, restore the ability of forests to store and capture carbon and give more species and ecosystems a chance to adapt to the changing climate by increasing protection.⁶ Prioritize amendments that will result in immediate community benefits and carbon emissions reductions such as minimum protection for old-growth ecosystems, an end to slash burning and an end to the spraying of deciduous stands with glyphosate.
4. Provide additional transition assistance to forestry dependent communities and workers affected by climate change impacts and mill closures to support their efforts to restore ecologically intact forest landscapes, safeguard future forestry opportunities and create a diverse economy. Support community well-being and a diverse economy—including long-term forestry jobs—by shifting subsidies away from the fossil fuel industry and towards supporting ecosystem-based management and conservation finance solutions.
5. Implement all recommendations related to forestry laws from the Professional Reliance Review Report, strengthening regulation and reversing the trend of outsourcing oversight to corporations.⁷
6. Apply a "climate impact test" for existing logging plans to address the imminent danger of climate impacts worsened through destructive logging. Where needed, adjust or cancel logging plans to address these risks.
7. Restore and expand government capacity for forest stewardship, monitoring and enforcement at the provincial, regional and local level. Increased oversight is urgently needed, since destructive logging practices will cause greater harm in landscapes hit by increasingly extreme weather events worsened by climate change.
8. Restore and expand government capacity to update ecosystem mapping, update inventories and undertake research, especially related to climate adaptation and climate change impacts such as fire and insects.
9. Adjust the provincial Annual Allowable Cut to a realistic, sustainable level that takes into account past overharvesting and climate impacts, the need for increased conservation and risks from worsening climate impacts.

³ In the case of the Great Bear Rainforest Agreements, provincial and federal governments contributed \$30 million each to conservation financing mechanisms, matching private donors to a total of \$120 million made available for funding First Nations' economic opportunities and management of protected areas <https://coastfunds.ca/>

⁴ <https://thenarwhal.ca/biodiversity-crisis-feds-announce-175-million-new-conservation-projects/>

⁵ <https://thenarwhal.ca/canada-commits-historic-1-3-billion-create-new-protected-areas/>

⁶ <https://sierraclub.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/FRPA-Joint-ENG0-Submission.pdf>

⁷ https://engage.gov.bc.ca/app/uploads/sites/272/2018/06/Professional_Reliance_Review_Final_Report.pdf

10. Develop a detailed provincial report on forest carbon emissions to inform governments and decision makers at all levels. Develop forest climate action plans with timelines for keeping more carbon stored in forests through old-growth protection, ending slash burning and spraying, and reducing clearcuts in size and number (eventually phasing them out).
11. Amend regulation and create incentives to support improved forest management and value-added businesses that create a higher number of jobs per cubic metre and reduce damage and wood waste. Phase out raw log exports.
12. Increase funding for modernized regional land use plans with science-based conservation targets for all types of old-growth using the Ecosystem-Based Management model applied in the Great Bear Rainforest,⁸ combined with support for First Nations' governance, land use planning and a rapid transition to improved management of second-growth forests and a diverse economy.

⁸ The 2017 NDP platform stated, "In partnership with First Nations and communities, we will modernize land-use planning to effectively and sustainably manage BC's ecosystems, rivers, lakes, watersheds, forests and old growth, while accounting for cumulative effects. We will take an evidence-based scientific approach and use the ecosystem-based management of the Great Bear Rainforest as a model." <https://action.bcndp.ca/page/-/bcndp/docs/BC-NDP-Platform-2017.pdf>