



SIERRA  
CLUB BC

# SIERRA REPORT SPRING 2021

## INTACT FORESTS, SAFE COMMUNITIES

Have you felt the impacts of global warming yet? As climate change increases, we are witnessing profound changes in our communities. Wildfires, droughts, floods, and sea level rise are no longer abstract concepts or dire warnings from scientists, they are impacts being felt personally if not by you, then by your friends and neighbors.

The B.C. government recently released their “Strategic Climate Risk Assessment” which lists many of the harmful impacts communities will be faced with if global temperatures continue to rise. In response, Sierra Club BC (SCBC) commissioned its own independent report that details a glaring omission in the province’s assessment: how intact forests reduce risks for communities and how clearcutting exacerbates these dangers.

Written by Dr. Peter Wood, the “Intact Forests, Safe Communities” report found that industrial logging has a significant impact on the severity and frequency of climate risks for communities in B.C. This makes it even more important for the provincial government to follow

through with its election promise to implement all 14 recommendations from its Old Growth Strategic Review panel.

We’re grateful that this message resonated strongly across the province with over 100 mainstream media outlets covering the issue. CBC, CTV, Global, and even the Weather Network aired videos, while newspapers and magazines published the powerful infographics that illustrate how intact forests help protect communities from climate impacts.

We invite you to read SCBC’s report online and learn more about the importance of protecting and restoring intact forests before the climate crisis worsens at [sierraclub.bc.ca/report](https://sierraclub.bc.ca/report). We also hope to continue to have your support in holding the B.C. government accountable.



Photo by Louis Bockner/Sierra Club BC. Report mockup by freepik.

# HUMANS HAVE COEXISTED WITH WILDFIRES FOR MILLENNIA

## But now climate change and industrial logging are making fires dangerous

*By Robin Strong and Aurora Tejeida*

Standing in the open field that only three and a half years ago was populated by Douglas fir, Bert William reminisces about the forest that once stood there and the devastating fire that consumed it.

William is the Senior Archaeological Advisor for the Bonaparte Indian Band and has always lived in the rugged country within Secwepemc territory. His band had cleared the stumps and debris shortly after the Elephant Hill fire had devastated this forest in the valley bottom of the Loon Lake watershed, so that all that remained was an open field and the unnatural emptiness that came with it.

"The fire went across, up the gully, up the valley to the [Ashcroft Indian Band] reserve. It burned down six houses on the reserve," says William, remembering that the fire seemed to have a mind of its own as it destroyed a house here and there and seemingly "jumped" over others.

The Elephant Hill fire broke out near Ashcroft on July 6, 2017 and was the largest in B.C. during the record-breaking wildfire season that year. It burned nearly 1,920 square kilometres of land, ravaging the Ashcroft, Boston Flats, Loon Lake and Green Lake areas of the B.C. Interior. Approximately three-quarters of the Bonaparte Indian Band territory was impacted by the fire, with a burn area 75 kilometres wide in places.

That day, William had driven into town with his mother when he noticed the smoke on the hills around noontime. "Within a minute, the whole fire was just creeping up the mountain. Then, all of a sudden, it just takes right off. By the time we got down to Bonaparte, it had just come over the hill. That whole country was on fire. You could see flames at the top of the hill, way up in the air," recalls William.



*Photo of the fire near Bert William's home (Photo by Bert William).*

## A REFUGE IN THE FACE OF CLIMATE CHANGE

B.C. has seen some of its worst fire seasons in recent years, and the severity and frequency of these fires are likely to increase in a warming climate. But there are concrete steps we can take to mitigate this climate risk. Unfortunately, we are logging our biggest ally – intact forested landscapes.

The dry forests of the interior evolved in tandem with Indigenous peoples and wildfire. The forested landscape prior to colonial forestry practices was made up of old-growth forests interspersed with young forests, grasslands, shrub fields, wetlands, and forest openings. This mosaic of ecosystems was created and maintained through the influences of wildfire and Indigenous cultural burning.

But this landscape has changed dramatically with decades of unsustainable clearcut logging.

*The Elephant Hill wildfire started on July 6, 2017, about 2.5 kilometres southwest of Ashcroft (Photo by the BC Wildfire Service).*





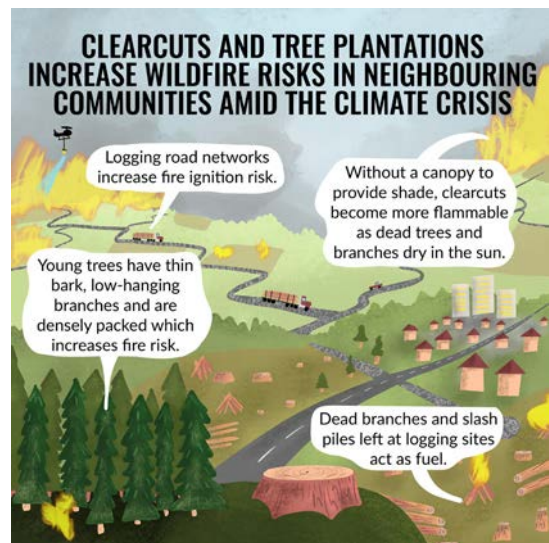
Old forests act like giant sponges – absorbing and retaining water, sheltering snow from melting, then slowly releasing the water over a long period of time – so what is left of these intact forests helps regulate the size and intensity of wildfires, making their protection and restoration one of the most effective ways to mitigate risks for wildlife and humans alike.

In addition to the displacement of many community members, the Elephant Hill fire and the fight to control it caused enormous economic, property and cultural losses. Over 200 archaeological sites were impacted according to William, something he says could have been mitigated had local communities been allowed to be more involved in the efforts to fight the fire.

The practice of replacing intact forests with younger forests is a significant driver of wildfire severity. “Logging practices, like taking out all those [old-growth] trees, planting all those pine trees. You go up to Scotty Creek and all those plantations burned too. Those trees were this tall,” William explains, motioning about hip-height. “The fire just ripped right through that. A carpet of fire.”

In B.C.’s interior, intact forests don’t just moderate the extreme weather events brought on by climate change, they also retain a natural pattern of wildfire. A pattern with which people have coexisted for millennia and can continue to coexist with if the B.C. government commits to protecting intact forests and better-managing forests degraded by logging to restore their resiliency.

*Infographics showing how intact old-growth helps us coexist with fire. Illustration by Mya Van Woudenberg/Sierra Club BC. Below photo by Jens Wieting.*





# B.C. GOVERNMENT PUSHES AHEAD ON SITE C

Last February, despite the mounting cost overruns and growing evidence of geotechnical instability, the BC NDP once again passed up its chance to stop Site C. Sierra Club BC has long opposed its construction due to the environmental dangers it poses, as well as the devastating impacts on the Aboriginal and Treaty rights of the Treaty 8 First Nations. To aid awareness with the hopes of action, SCBC created a 60 second short that was viewed 87,000 times online and facilitated a flood of thousands of emails to the key cabinet ministers.

Although much damage has already been done, this government still had an opportunity to halt the project and protect the land, water and hundreds of culturally significant sites and hunting and fishing grounds in the Peace River Valley. It is unacceptable that British

Columbians will pay \$16 billion to subsidize the cost of electricity for oil and gas corporations like LNG Canada whose operations will make our provincial climate targets impossible to meet. We will continue to support Treaty 8 Nations that oppose this project.

*Photo of Site C by BC Hydro.*



## GOING OUTSIDE AND ONLINE LEARNING

SCBC continues to encourage learners of all ages to safely go into the world just outside their front door and develop a deeper relationship with our plant and animal relatives in nature. During the 2020-2021 school year, SCBC's Education team created new curricula and tools for safe online access, and resumed local outdoor classrooms. These new curricula were intentionally developed to recognize our joint interconnectedness to all beings.

While getting outside is always our top priority, during the past year, many Education resources have moved online to create safe ways to meet the needs of teachers, parents and caregivers. These resources cover far ranging topics such as: B.C. Interior Ecology, Boreal Forest Ecology,

Climate Change, Temperate Rainforest Ecology, Water, and Wild Products and Sustainable Harvesting. There are numerous activities that appeal to different learning styles and encourage kids of all ages to find environmental knowledge. If you need inspiration for kids in your life, or if you just want to be a kid again, please visit [sierraclub.bc.ca/education](https://sierraclub.bc.ca/education) to explore the free activities available to learners of all ages.





# LET YOUTH LEAD THE WAY!

Did you know that pre-teens and teenagers have the most influence on adults in their lives on issues such as climate action? SCBC's updated Climate and Place program has begun for learners in grades 6 to 8 across B.C. The revamped program looks to help young people feel empowered to take action on climate change. Each workshop is aligned with the B.C. Curriculum and was designed to inspire locally-based action and stewardship. Lessons are rooted in environmental and social justice, with a focus on Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples. There are five areas of learnings including: climate science, ecology and ecosystems, youth activism as a part of climate justice, self-expression through art in the climate crisis, and food systems and sovereignty.



# LEARN TO DRAW LOCAL ANIMALS WITH JULIUS!

What do the Southern Mountain Caribou, Spotted Owl, Vancouver Island Marmot, Bocaccio Rockfish, and the Orca have in common? They all live in B.C. and you can learn how to draw them with SCBC and superstar scientific illustrator Dr. Julius Csotonyi! The recordings of these lessons are available for free on our website at [sierraclub.bc.ca/draw](https://sierraclub.bc.ca/draw) and our YouTube channel, or we can

email a package of them as a gift to someone when you make a donation in their honour to Sierra Club BC.

We invite you to join us for our next art session on May 11 at 1 p.m. where we'll be drawing Pacific lamprey! Register at [sierraclub.bc.ca/lamprey](https://sierraclub.bc.ca/lamprey).



Art by (L-R): Julius Csotonyi, Tessa and Cynthia Nugent.  
Photos by Mya Van Woudenberg/Sierra Club BC.

# 6 MONTHS LATER, FAILING GRADES FOR PROTECTING OLD-GROWTH

March 11, marked exactly six months since the B.C. government released its independent Old Growth Strategic Review report. Shortly after, Premier Horgan promised to implement the report's 14 recommendations "in totality," including recommendation six — an immediate deferral of logging in the most at-risk old-growth forests. That six month deadline has now passed, however, almost all at-risk forest remains open to logging, funding and milestone dates remain uncertain.

SCBC partnered with Ancient Forest Alliance and the Wilderness Committee to issue a report card assessing the government's progress.

On the heels of the media storm created by our Climate Risk Assessment report, the report card generated more media coverage, building additional public pressure. We will continue to keep this pressure up until solutions are in place, because, as Sierra Club BC's Jens Wieting told Global News, "this is not good enough for our children, who will ask us, 'what have you done when there was only three per cent of old-growth with huge trees left standing?'"

## BC Government Old-growth Report Card

Date: March 11, 2021  
Premier: John Horgan

SUBJECT	PROGRESS	GRADE
IMMEDIATE ACTION FOR AT-RISK FOREST DEFERRALS WITHIN 6 MONTHS	■■■■■	<b>D</b>
THREE YEAR WORKPLAN WITH MILESTONE DATES	■■■■■	<b>F</b>
FUNDING FOR IMPLEMENTATION, FIRST NATION AND FORESTRY TRANSITION	■■■■■	<b>F</b>
CHANGE COURSE AND PRIORITIZE ECOSYSTEM INTEGRITY AND BIODIVERSITY	■■■■■	<b>F</b>
TRANSPARENCY AND COMMUNICATION	■■■■■	<b>F</b>

John Horgan needs to try harder

# FINDING THE MOTHER TREE

Trees talk to each other; they share, nurturing each other, and we have a lot we can learn from them. World-renowned TED Speaker and Professor at UBC's Department of Forest and Conservation Sciences, Suzanne Simard studies the surprising and delicate complexity in nature. Her main focus is on the below-ground fungal networks that connect trees and facilitate underground inter-tree communication and interaction. Her team's analysis revealed that the fungi networks move water, carbon and nutrients such as nitrogen between and among trees as well as across species. The research has demonstrated that these complex, symbiotic networks in our forests — at the hub of which stand what she calls the "mother trees" — mimic our own neural and social networks.

This groundbreaking work on symbiotic plant communication has far-reaching implications and we invite you to join this exciting discussion with Prof. Simard. Happening on May 19 at 7 p.m., she will be joining us to dive into her new book "Finding the Mother Tree." We'll be emailing out invitations for this webinar soon, but if you're interested please reach out to Elisabeth Noble at [gifts@sierraclub.bc.ca](mailto:gifts@sierraclub.bc.ca) or call 250-882-3682 for more details.



# LEAVE YOUR LEGACY TODAY

If you've ever dreamed of winning the lottery and being able to give a massive sum of money to charity, you might be surprised to learn that a gift in your will can come close to accomplishing that dream. Even leaving a small percentage of your estate to Sierra Club BC can lower the tax burden while helping protect B.C.'s special places. In the last five years, our team has grown because of the generosity of people who included us as part of their legacy planning.

If you'd like to discuss your vision for the future, please call our Manger of Donor Engagement Elisabeth Noble at 250-882-3682.



# A GOOD WAR – MOBILIZING CANADA FOR THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY

Canadian author Seth Klein's new book, *A Good War*, explores the way that Canada quickly – and radically – retooled its economy for the Second World War. Just as we have seen governments respond to the COVID-19 pandemic with speed and efficiency previously unimaginable, so too can we respond to the climate emergency. Join us at 11 a.m. on Earth Day (Thursday, April 22) for a conversation with Seth Klein and Sierra Club BC's Climate Justice Campaigner Anjali Appadurai as they discuss the obstacles to meaningful climate action and what you and I can do to overcome them. Join online at [sierraclub.bc.ca/earthday](https://sierraclub.bc.ca/earthday).



## FAREWELL, CAITLYN VERNON

Caitlyn Vernon has stepped down as Campaigns Director to take an exciting new position in public service. We are so grateful for Caitlyn's incredible dedication to Sierra Club BC. During her 13 years with SCBC, she helped usher in and lead a diverse, brilliant, and talented staff and board. Despite the pandemic, we have a solid base of support, a clear strategic plan, and the capacity to execute. We are so happy for Caitlyn to have found an excellent new role that she will excel in. We will miss her very much!

Caitlyn shared a poem she wrote in 2009 with our staff and top supporters at her good-bye celebration and we invite you to read it online at [sierraclub.bc.ca/poem](https://sierraclub.bc.ca/poem).



# YOUR DONATIONS AT WORK

In the last 12 months, you have helped:

- Create a **new Youth Employment program** for BC Parks
- Secure new **Federal Funds** for Climate Action
- Reach over **5,000 students** through online and outdoor workshops
- Launch a summer **youth writing program**
- Over **2,000 people** attend free learn to draw B.C. wildlife lessons
- Host over a dozen **Pro-D workshops** for teachers
- Coordinate the **national Just Recovery** (Green New Deal for Canada) coalition
- Partner with RAVEN to **oppose public investment in fossil fuel pipelines**
- Facilitate **inter-faith dialogues** on climate change and forest protection
- A **coalition of 70,000** Greater Victoria Acting Together members oppose old-growth logging
- Get **public commitment** from the B.C. government to implement all 14 old-growth recommendations
- Publish "**Intact Forests, Safe Communities**" report
- Garner over **200 mainstream media stories** that mention our work
- Send over **10,000 emails** to the B.C. government demanding climate action
- Create videos about environmental issues that have been viewed over **100,000 times**



*Photos by Mya Van Woudenberg/  
Sierra Club BC, Adam Reid and Louis  
Bockner/Sierra Club BC.*

## THANK YOU!

WE'D LIKE TO ACKNOWLEDGE  
AND APPRECIATE ALL THE  
HANDS AND MINDS WHO  
HELPED BREATHE LIFE INTO  
THIS WORK.



301-2994 Douglas St, Victoria BC, V8T 4N4  
Lək'wəḡən Peoples Territory  
P: (250) 386-5255  
Support our work at [sierraclub.bc.ca/give](https://sierraclub.bc.ca/give)  
Follow us at [@sierraclubbc](https://twitter.com/sierraclubbc)



**Go paperless!** If you only want to receive digital communications, email [social@sierraclub.bc.ca](mailto:social@sierraclub.bc.ca) to let us know and we'll add you to our email list!

*Printed on FSC-certified  
post-consumer recycled paper*