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Backgrounder: B.C. Green Party Strategy to Build Resilience in our Natural Resource Sectors

The B.C. Green Party believes that government should be responsible for managing the province's resources for the benefit of both present and future generations of British Columbians.

We recognise that economic opportunities are essential for people, and our sustainable economy proposals are designed to seize the opportunities our natural resources afford us through innovation, efficiency, value-added and intrinsic benefits by promoting their stewardship and sustainable use.

A sustainable economy must also be a resilient economy. We need an economy that identifies the challenges we face, and develops strategies to mitigate risk. Our climate is changing, and while it is important to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions, we also need to acknowledge the reality that we have already committed ourselves to rising global temperatures and extreme weather events for years to come; and that without proper preparation, the economic and social consequences are potentially catastrophic.

The challenge moving forward is that the past is no longer a good predictor of the future. Professional associations are grappling with the task of how to factor climate risk management into their planning and design, and professional codes of practice. Many areas of government still lag in their recognition of the need to adapt their operating practices to a changing climate.

Our plan to build resilience has 2 themes:

- Resilient Management of our Natural Assets is a proactive approach that sustainably manages our natural resources in a changing climate so that so that our resource dependent sectors may thrive;
- Economic resilience will support business enterprises in BC to better manage the changing climate risks they face, (e.g. flooding, shorter winter seasons, variable precipitation, infrastructure failure).



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Resilient Management of our Natural Assets

Natural Resources are an integral component of the livelihoods of British Columbians and community economies, and will be for years to come. However, while the biophysical impacts of climate change on ecosystems, forests, agriculture, fisheries and water are quite well understood, there has been limited integration of these risks into planning.

Natural influences are not the only forces affecting our natural assets. The B.C. Liberals' economic strategy that emphasizes short term corporate profits is damaging ecosystems and threatening the long-term sustainability of our forests, our water and our agricultural land.

If we are to sustain our natural assets and build resilience, we need a fundamentally different approach that is inclusive, all encompassing, prudent and manages risks to our asset base before determining short-term bottom line targets.

Communities must be protected from bearing the costs of negative environmental impacts and be assured that they are benefitting from the exploitation of nearby resources.

The B.C. government must collaborate with First Nations in the sustainable management of our natural resources.

1. A B.C. Green government will make the resilience of our natural asset base a priority. We will work with industrial sectors that will be impacted by climate change to develop integrated climate risk management and resilience plans to preserve long term economic and environmental sustainability, and promote best practices.

- Sectors affected by climate change include forestry, mining, tourism, aquaculture, fisheries, agriculture, and energy. The plans will not only be internal to the industry, but will consider competing interests of the different industries.



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2. A B.C. Green government will implement new guidelines for the use of qualified professionals that eliminate the potential for conflict of interest, and work with professional bodies to ensure that codes of conduct for their members are fully enforced.

3. A B. C. Green government will re-establish the integrity of the Environmental Assessment process and establish clear criteria for decisions that fully factor in sustainability and cumulative impacts.

4. A B.C. Green government will establish a natural resource sector-wide compliance and enforcement unit that will be responsible for the continuum of compliance and enforcement activities from inspections to prosecutions. An additional \$20 million will be allocated to enhance monitoring, compliance and enforcement.

5. A Green government will establish a Natural Resource Commissioner who will lead a Natural Resources Board (NRB) that is responsible for establishing sustainable harvest and extraction levels and reporting on the state of BC's environment and natural assets. The NRB will conduct cumulative impact assessments, and oversee the professional reliance model.

- We will ensure that the Natural Resources Board is independent of government. Examples of functions that might be carried out by this board could be the establishment of the annual allowable cut.

6. A Green government will rebuild the scientific and technical capability of the BC Public Service.



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7. A B.C. Green government will reform the governance of the oil and gas sector to remove conflicting interests within the Oil and Gas Commission.

Results

- Secure communities from bearing the costs of negative environmental impacts and ensure that they are benefitting from the exploitation of nearby resources.
- Better sustain our natural assets through long-term planning and integrating the risks of climate change into natural resource planning.
- Increase the integrity of environmental assessment, through increasing the capacity of the civil service, creating a natural resources board, reforming the oil and gas commission, and moving away from the professional reliance model.
- Avoid conflicts of interest in the management of our natural resources, through ensuring that decision-makers operate independently of government and industry.

Background

- The B.C. Liberals' economic strategy that emphasizes short term corporate profits is threatening the long-term sustainability of our forests, our water and our agricultural land.
- Mechanisms do exist to fully protect our environment, however the B.C. Liberal government has chosen to tie the hands of the Environmental Assessment Office, and has starved conservation officers and other inspectors of desperately needed resources.
- Reliance on professional consultants, paid by project proponents, has further undermined the integrity of environmental assessment.
- The BC Oil and Gas Commission (BCOGC) is both the champion of the oil and gas industry, and the regulator charged with ensuring compliance with environmental legislation. In the current "get to yes" climate, the emphasis is on promoting oil and gas extraction rather than ensuring environmental compliance.

We have already talked about our plans to enhance resilience in our agricultural sector. We are now going to outline how we will address resilience in two of our most important resources: our forests and our water.

Resilient Forests

The B.C. Green Party's objective is to optimize the value of B.C.'s forests, by recognising multiple values including carbon sequestration, recreation, soil and water quality, wildlife,



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biodiversity, Indigenous interests and community health; as well as maximising the economic contribution of forest fibre, especially for communities and First Nations. We need to use evidence based approaches to ensure sustainability and resilience of B.C.'s forests and rangelands.

The B.C. Liberals have largely abdicated responsibility for monitoring, research, oversight, protection, compliance and enforcement to the large forest corporations that control the largest percentage of the annual cut. Forestry experts, environmental organizations, First Nations groups and rural communities are now documenting increasing environmental degradation. B.C. is now facing a softwood lumber trade dispute alongside a historic shortage of timber supply and resulting employment loss and instability.

A B.C. Green government will ensure resilient forests and sustainable forestry, maximizing the value from our forests and ensuring their sustainable long term management. We will protect old growth forests from further logging, curb the export of raw logs, and implement legislation to sustainably manage our forests and rangelands. We will promote value added enterprises in the forest industry, and maintain and expand markets for B.C. forest products. Through all of our policies, we will ensure that forestry is supporting First Nations and rural communities.

8. A B.C. Green government will enact a modern, evidence based, multi-objective *B.C. Forest and Range Ecology Act*.

- The legislation will implement global best practices in forestry, and be focused on restoring wildlife habitat, improving forest productivity, reforestation, and addressing priority forest health issues.
 - Among other objectives, it will address First Nations rights, resilience planning, and cumulative effects.
 - The legislation will also balance stakeholder interests in the management of rangelands.

9. A B.C. Green Government will develop a B.C. Old-Growth Forest Inventory that will determine reserves and protect B.C.'s old-growth forests.

- We will improve the sustainable logging of second-growth forests, which now constitute the majority of forest lands in southern BC.
- We will utilize new technologies and the latest science, and apply the precautionary principle to timber supply reviews to direct sustainable resource management.



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- We will develop a comprehensive and updated forest inventory that accommodates changing climate and migration of forest ecosystems, incorporates cumulative effects, and develops future-oriented management strategies to improve productivity.

10. A B.C. Green government will place further restrictions on the export of raw logs, while recognizing that raw log exports are a symptom of a struggling value added forest industry and not the cause. Innovative encouragement and enhancement of value added enterprises and wood processing will be implemented to increase demand in BC for currently exported logs.

11. A B.C. Green government will, effective October 1, 2017, remove the PST from purchases of machinery and equipment for modernization, upgrading and new investment in sawmills and other value added wood processing.



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12. A B.C. Green government will establish a Forest Opportunities Panel mandated to identify opportunities for promoting innovation, value added production, independent regional operations and indigenous enterprises.

13. A B.C. Green government will invest in a more extensive forest research network to encourage innovation regarding non-traditional uses of wood and the use of wood fibre to develop new grades of material for a wide range of products; and to promote advanced wood technologies and building systems.

14. A B.C. Green government will institute policies to ensure that forest waste is used productively.

15. A B.C. Green government will promote B.C. forest products in international markets and support the identification of new markets. We will work co-operatively with the federal government and industry to secure fair, stable and beneficial trade agreements.

16. A B.C. Green Government will review and modernize forest tenures with a view to promoting innovation, value added, independent regional operations and indigenous enterprises.



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17. A B.C. Green Government will engage in meaningful consultation and engagement that respects indigenous resource rights and title; will collaborate with First Nations to build economic, environmental and social opportunities and commercial partnerships in the forest sector; and will support more community forests.

18. A B.C. Green Government will support small, rural resource- dependent communities, by building skills and capacity for a future forest industry and promoting investment in economic diversification in rural communities.

Results

- A healthy and resilient forest ecosystem
- A diverse and innovative forest industry that maximizes the value of our forests and increases the economic benefits to the people of BC
- Flourishing First Nations and rural communities

Background

- Over 140 rural communities in BC depend on the forest sector. In 2015, the forest sector employed directly 65,500 people. Forestry generated \$8.8 billion in GDP and provided \$1.7 billion in tax revenue for the province.
- Over the past twenty years there has been a spike in harvesting to maximise the return on pine beetle-infected timber. The Annual Allowable Cut is now falling and this poses a significant threat to economic stability in many communities. In the Prince George Forest District (the largest such administrative unit in B.C.), the provincial government estimates that today's logging rates may have to decline by more than half in just four years.¹
- Over the same period, over 100 saw mills have closed and over 40,000 direct jobs have been lost, while raw log exports have risen.
- Since 2001, inadequate funding for the Ministry in charge of forestry has seriously weakened the Ministry's abilities to plan, regulate, monitor and protect the BC forests and its industry.
- The Liberal government policy of shifting forest tenures to 5 large corporations has effectively formed a powerful oligopoly that controls most of the timber supply in BC.

¹ <http://vancouversun.com/opinion/opinion-vital-information-missing-for-sound-forest-management>



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- As clear-cut logging practice is most profitable, it has been the preferred practice among large tenures holders. Under the watch of a weakened Ministry, effective replanting and ecological restoration of affected forests are not done and the health and productivity of BC forests are being jeopardized.
- Compared to secondary manufacturing, expanding raw log export requires very little capital investment; therefore, it is much more profitable to the timber oligopoly to export raw logs. Without investment in maintenance and upgrade, many BC mills have been closed while raw log exports have grown substantially in recent years. Local economies are suffering due to significant job loss.
- The 2002 *Forest and Range Practices Act* (FRPA) was part of the deregulation and outcome-based regime introduced by the BC Liberals. Under the *Act*, BC's forests have been managed with a timber centric focus, while tenures have become concentrated in the hands of five large corporations.
- According to a 2014 report by the Forest Practices Board (FPB) "...the context within which FRPA exists has changed, with many other resource industries and activities using the same landbase. Government needs to re-invigorate land-use planning and establish consistent environmental protection legislation that applies to all users of the land. This will be essential if public confidence is to be maintained and BC is to keep its reputation for high environmental standards."²
- Rangelands have been largely ignored, with the same Forest Practices Board report rating planning and compliance and enforcement as poor on rangeland.

Water

Water is fundamental to so many aspects of our lives: to agriculture, energy production, transportation, freshwater fisheries, recreation and industrial processes, not to mention drinking and personal use. In most communities in B.C., we are accustomed to there being plentiful water for all our needs. But a growing population, climate change, and industrial use are changing the balance. According to POLIS, B.C. is entering an era of water insecurity.³

Protecting water quality and quantity requires good data to be able to determine the quality of the water and how much is available, and to identify where there are problems. It also requires ensuring that all water users, and all activities occurring in close proximity to water sources, are

² <https://www.bcfpb.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/SR46-A-Decade-in-Review.pdf>

³ <http://poliswaterproject.org/sites/default/files/POLIS-Top5-final-web-v2.pdf>



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following the requirements to keep the water clean, and there must be strict compliance monitoring and enforcement when regulations are contravened.

The B.C. Green Party will focus on developing resilient water systems and ensuring a sustainable water supply. Resilient water management is essential to the future health and well-being of British Columbians.

19. A B.C. Green government will work with professional associations and local governments to ensure that the design of stormwater, wastewater and drinking water infrastructure fully accounts for the risks of a changing climate.

20. A B.C. Green government will review the water allocation and licensing provisions of the *Water Sustainability Act* to ensure that they fully protect B.C.'s water quality and quantity, so that it is sustainable for future generations.

21. A B.C. Green government will initiate a comprehensive, province wide water and watershed planning process, in collaboration with local governments, First Nations, and other government agencies, stewardship organizations, water use sectors and community stakeholders.

- The plans will address water supply and demand, protecting drinking water quality, integration of land use planning and water and watershed planning, and conflicting water use demands.

22. A B.C. Green government will enhance data gathering and analysis of water quantity and quality to enable science based decision-making.

Results

- Resilient water systems that are capable of withstanding extreme events
 - Includes infrastructure that channels our stormwater, wastewater and drinking water



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- Protection of the quality and quantity of our water to ensure that it is sustainable for future generations
- Improved data to enable science based decision-making
- Comprehensive watershed planning across BC in partnership with First Nations, local organizations, local governments and stakeholders

Background

- In B.C., the forecast impacts of climate change on water supply range across the province.
- Some parts of the province may be subject to extreme rainfall events, while the Southern Interior of B.C. is at high risk of experiencing extended periods of drought. Each end of the spectrum presents challenges for water infrastructure and quality.
- Heavy rainfall events can increase water turbidity and contamination, whereas drought can lead to lower water levels with less dilution, and salination of groundwater in coastal regions.
- The purpose of the 2016 *Water Sustainability Act* (WSA), is “to ensure a sustainable supply of fresh, clean water that meets the needs of B.C. residents today and in the future”. It is “the principal law for managing the diversion and use of water resources. The WSA provides important new tools and updates B.C.’s strategy for protecting, managing and using water efficiently throughout the province”⁴
- The government is in the process of creating the regulations that will implement the Act. However, although most agree that the WSA is an improvement on the old *Water Act*, there are some significant gaps, and the effectiveness of the legislation will be determined by the strength of the accompanying regulations.

⁴ <http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/air-land-water/water/laws-rules/water-sustainability-act>