

## **Protect Our Elder Trees Declaration**

We have inhabited and governed our territories, within what's now called British Columbia, since time immemorial. Our relationships with our lands and waters are both ancient and fundamental to our cultures, identities and entire ways of life.

Much of our lands are forested, and these forests are integral parts of who we are. For millennia, we have relied on these ecosystems for food and for the other medicines and resources they contain.

For the last century, the forests with the oldest trees here have been exploited by industry, their resources extracted and the systems within them altered beyond recognition, largely without adherence to our laws or involvement of our people and governments.

The vast majority of these rich, productive, original forests here have been logged.

While this has generated tangible opportunities and benefits, it has also compromised our ability to access our resources and medicines, for our people and future generations to walk in the same forests as our ancestors, as we always have. Our cultures and laws are based in forests that are thousands of years old, not less than a hundred.

We are raising our voices together to speak for the need for remaining elder trees and their forests to be protected forever.

We support and call for the implementation of the fourteen recommendations of the report from the Old-Growth Strategic Review, and again stress that the ability to fully implement this report and achieve the "paradigm shift" it calls for requires the immediate protection of Old-Growth forests.

Our people and Nations must have a greater role in all decisions about forests -- about their conservation and their use. This requires immediate, fulsome, and resourced engagement with our Nations about what we want to happen to elder trees and their forests in our territories. It also requires a halt to logging in many

areas where the majority of elder trees and their forests has been logged, because, at current rates of cutting, much of the most valuable and important elder trees will be lost in the coming months and years.

**Therefore, in upholding our ancestral laws, responsibilities, Rights and Title, we declare that:**

**All Old-Growth forests within our territories are to be protected, to provide our Nations with the opportunity to decide on their management moving forward. This means immediate action to defer logging in remaining at-risk old growth forests as defined by the old growth strategic review panel in their April 30, 2020 report. If it is deemed not possible to identify these forests immediately, then all old forest should be deferred from harvest for an interim period so that irreplaceable opportunities are not lost.**

We are adamant and resolved in this declaration, and we call on the Government of BC to respect and honour it. Our Nations and forests here have always supported one another, and we will ensure the survival of elder trees and their forests for our future generations.