

FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL



BRITISH COLUMBIA
ASSEMBLY OF
FIRST NATIONS

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March 26, 2021

Honourable Katrine Conroy
Minister of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations
and Rural Development
Room 248 Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4
Email: FLNR.Minister@gov.bc.ca

Dear Minister Conroy,

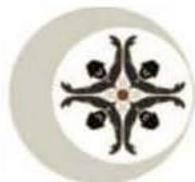
RE: The BC First Nations Forest Strategy: Advancement of First Nations Rights, Values and Principles.

We are again writing regarding the failure by the Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development (FLNRORD), to endorse and implement the BC First Nations Forest Strategy (“the Forest Strategy”). This is particularly concerning to First Nations in BC as the Province continues to propose and pass changes to forest legislation, policies and regulations that are focused on provincial objectives and do not reflect Indigenous rights, values and principles outlined in the Forest Strategy, or input the First Nations Forestry Council (the “Forestry Council”) has received from Nations through direct communications and outreach.

As you will recall, in 2018 the Province committed to developing a BC First Nations Forest Strategy in collaboration with First Nations to advance reconciliation, modernize the government-to-government relationship, and support the implementation of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UN Declaration); which requires that Indigenous peoples are involved in developing changes to forest legislation policies and regulations that affect their rights. We remind you that the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* places a positive obligation on the Government of British Columbia to ensure that all laws, policies and practices in British Columbia be brought in alignment with the UN Declaration in consultation and cooperation with Indigenous peoples.

In 2019, a draft Forest Strategy and Implementation Plan was developed collaboratively with the Province to support the implementation of the UN Declaration, informed by direct feedback received from First Nations for over a decade. The Province has yet to endorse the Forest Strategy or commit to the implementation of the Forest Strategy.

In our letters of April 3, 2020 and July 24, 2019 to then-Minister Donaldson, we outlined the need for the Province to work collaboratively with the Forestry Council on the development of a workplan and identification of actions to implement the Forest Strategy, including the need for multi-year funding for the Forestry Council. So far, this has not happened.



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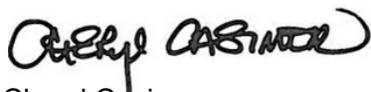
Through resolutions passed at recent meetings (February and March 2021) of the First Nations Summit, Union of BC Indian Chiefs and the BC Assembly of First Nations, First Nations leadership in BC is calling on the Province to formally endorse the Forest Strategy and commit to the development of a joint BC-First Nations Forestry Council workplan to inform and support the work under Concrete Action 4 of the Commitment Document. The Chiefs in Assembly support the role of the Forestry Council to lead key areas of work with the Province, at the direction of First Nations who are the Title and Rights holders, to advance the implementation of the Forest Strategy through ongoing communications and outreach with First Nations. This is to ensure that changes to forest policy and legislation is informed by, and developed in collaboration with, BC First Nations.

We further call upon your Ministry to work collaboratively with the Forestry Council by committing the resources required to support the implementation of the Forest Strategy, carry out its role as a technical council to support First Nations Leadership Council and First Nations leadership and communities, and continue work to engage with the Nations. This work will advance our common goals to increase the role First Nations play in governance and stewardship of forest lands and resources, and create opportunities for Indigenous peoples to be full partners in forestry.

We ask you to instruct your officials to contact the Forestry Council on a priority basis to work out the arrangements necessary to facilitate the required resourcing.

Sincerely,
FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

On behalf of the FIRST NATIONS SUMMIT



Cheryl Casimer



Robert Phillips



Lydia Hwitsum

On behalf of the UNION OF BC INDIAN CHIEFS



Grand Chief Stewart Phillip



Chief Don Tom



Kukpi7 Judy Wilson

On behalf of the BC ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS:



Regional Chief Terry Teegee