

OUR LAND IS OUR FUTURE

UNION OF BRITISH COLUMBIA INDIAN CHIEFS

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May 27, 2021

Honorable Katrine Conroy
Minister of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource
Operations and Rural Development
Via Email Only: FLNR.Minister@gov.bc.ca

Honorable John Horgan
Premier of the Province of British Columbia
Via Email: premier@gov.bc.ca

Re: Call to Work with Researchers and First Nations to Protect Old Growth Forest and Enforce Meaningful Old Growth Deferrals

Dear Premier Horgan and Minister Conroy,

The Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC) writes to bring your attention to the significant concerns and points raised in the recent [reports and maps](#) released by a trio of researchers, Dr. Rachel Holt, Dr. Karen Price, and Dave Daust, regarding areas of old growth deferrals. Their data reveals a disturbing reality that needs to be addressed with immediate action and engagement with affected First Nations: there are only pockets of old growth forests remaining and current logging deferrals, which were enacted in September 2021, have done nothing to protect the most at-risk old growth areas.

Mapping 3 million hectares of old forests with high ecological value and areas of existing cutting permits, Dr. Holt concluded that although less than 3% of old growth is found in higher-productivity forests, there is a distinct and alarming lack of protection afforded to them, with protected areas highly biased towards lower-productivity, less-at-risk forests in which 80% of old growth can be found. This reductive, counterintuitive approach towards B.C.'s current old-growth protection strategy needs to be rectified, and UBCIC supports the researchers' call for the Province to not only use their mapping project as a blueprint to figure out which at-risk old growth should be set aside from logging as it transitions to a more sustainable system, but to augment their maps with old-growth areas identified as culturally important by Indigenous Nations.

The Province has a commitment to implement all of the Old Growth Strategic Review (OSGR) Panel's recommendations, including OGSR Recommendation 6, which states: *Until a new strategy is*

implemented, defer development in old forest where ecosystems are at very high and near-term risk of irreversible loss. Moving forward, the Province needs to **immediately** engage and consult with First Nation Title Holders about old growth considerations and decision-making on their territories, and this will fundamentally include working together to develop accurate maps that identify areas of ecological and cultural significance for Nations that must be protected by deferrals.

Previously, by Resolution 2020-23 “Implementation of an Old Growth Strategy that Protects First Nations’ Welfare and Endangered Old Growth Forests,” the UBCIC Chiefs-in-Assembly welcomed and supported the OGSR Report and Recommendations and called upon the Province and the Ministry of FLNRORD to provide further details on how they planned to shift logging deferrals to permanent protection, and to engage and work with impacted First Nations on expanding these deferrals to include all threatened old-growth forests. Unfortunately, months have passed, and old growth forests are still at very high and near-term risk of irreversible loss. Furthermore, tensions have risen between First Nation members and activists, and we are seeing on the ground conflict over old growth in the Fairy Creek Watershed area that is exacerbating and reinforcing harmful divisions within the community.

All of this points the time sensitive and urgent need for the Province to defuse rising tensions. UBCIC subsequently calls upon the Province to work with First Nations and the independent researchers of the mapping report to map and identify at-risk, higher-productivity areas of old growth that meet the OGSR Panel’s criteria for deferral, and to begin critical conversations and shared decision-making with the Nations on whose territories the proposed deferrals are located.

UBCIC reminds you that, facing a global climate and biodiversity crisis, we are at a critical point in time for ensuring the survival of old forests that sustain healthy ecosystems and keep our water and air clean. We cannot protect what is not there. In order to see a revitalized, sustainable old growth strategy that comprehensively actions the OGSR Panel’s recommendations, First Nations must be included up front and engaged every step of the way, with their insight and guidance helping researchers and scientists protect remaining old growth forests well into the future. We look forward to your response.

On behalf of the UNION OF BC INDIAN CHIEFS



Grand Chief Stewart Phillip
President



Chief Don Tom
Vice-President



Kukpi7 Judy Wilson
Secretary-Treasurer

CC: First Nations Summit
BC Assembly of First Nations
First Nations Forestry Council