

# OUR LAND IS OUR FUTURE

UNION OF BRITISH COLUMBIA INDIAN CHIEFS

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## News Release

July 28, 2021

### **Wildfires, Logging, and Climate Change Jeopardize Old Growth: UBCIC Advances *Protect Our Elder Trees Declaration***

((X̣ẉṃə̣θ̣ḳẉə̣ỵəm (Musqueam), Sḳẉx̣ẉụ́7̣mesh (Squamish) and sə̣ḷiḷẉə̣ṭə̣ł (Tseil Waututh/  
Vancouver, B.C. – July 28, 2021) The Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC) is calling on the provincial government for immediate action and meaningful engagement with First Nations to protect old-growth forests that, having been pushed to the brink of extinction by years of over-logging and systemic mismanagement, now risk further irreparable destruction as intense wildfires rage across the province.

Recognizing that a colonial legacy of resource extraction and the violation of First Nations' free, prior, and informed consent has critically endangered old growth forests and undermined Indigenous Title and Rights, UBCIC continues to fight for the changes needed to protect our disappearing giants. In the face of escalating aggressive wildfires that have led to a provincial state of emergency, by Resolution 2021-38, UBCIC has advanced and endorsed a critical guiding document – the *Protect Our Elder Trees Declaration*. Developed by First Nation chiefs and UBCIC members, this Declaration affirms support for the implementation of the Old Growth Strategic Review Panel's recommendations and advances a First Nations approach to old growth management that is guided by ancestral laws, responsibilities, and upholding Title and Rights.

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, UBCIC President, stated "As we go deeper into a deadly and aggressive wildfire season, it is *imperative* the provincial government takes rapid action to protect old growth. We've heard the commitments, but where is the action? The *Protect Our Elder Trees Declaration* describes the critical relationship First Nations have with old growth forests and strengthens a sustainable, First Nations-led approach to old growth conservation that supports our ancestral laws and responsibilities. UBCIC encourages all First Nations in the province to review, adapt, and adopt the Declaration so that we may work collectively to transform an outdated forestry system that continues to deprive First Nations of their consent and leave them the most at-risk and contentious areas for logging. If this government is serious about protecting old growth

they must stop the chainsaws now to maintain all options and begin the process of working with First Nations on support for permanent protection. This opt in strategy the government is currently pursuing for deferrals is too slow and is resulting in critical old growth being logged without the consent of First Nations. The government should instead pursue a province-wide deferral and an opt into permanent protection option for discussions with First Nations. "

"Recent [reports and maps](#) released by researchers verify a disturbing reality we are fighting to correct: there is only a small fraction of the original big-treed 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. These areas are now further imperiled by the wildfires which have burned more than [360,000 hectares](#) in B.C. since April 1<sup>st</sup> of this year " stated Chief Don Tom, Vice-President. "Now more than ever, do we need the *Protect Our Elder Trees Declaration* and a strong, unified approach to old growth and forest management. Over the past few months, tensions have risen between First Nation members and activists, and we have seen on the ground conflict over old growth exacerbate and reinforce harmful divisions within communities. The Province must do a full assessment of its annual allowable harvest and have a frank consideration of changing forestry practices immediately. They need to create a system that ensures First Nations will have their elder trees, such as the big cedars we have enjoyed and carved since time immemorial, for generations to come."

"Our elder trees are vital for the health and future survival of our forests – their survival ensures we will have forests that are not only capable of sustaining the cultural needs and livelihood of Indigenous peoples but are more resilient to wildfires and climate change," stated Kukpi7 Judy Wilson, Secretary-Treasurer of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs. "As we transition into a period in which extreme wildfires are becoming norm as a result of climate change, and in which logging and post-logging practices have created more uniform landscapes that are more susceptible to severe fires, the protection of old growth will be integral. Large, thick barked old growth trees are more resilient to wildfires and help create biodiverse landscapes that are more resistant to burning. These forests also hold some of the highest carbon stores of any on the planet – and harvesting releases the vast majority of that carbon immediately, something the planet cannot afford. We urge the Province to take 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. We need ecological restoration, not logging in these forests. If it is not possible to identify these at-risk areas immediately, then all old forest should be deferred from harvest for an interim period so that irreplaceable opportunities are not lost."

Enclosed: [Resolution 2021-38 "Support for the Protect Our Elder Trees Declaration"](#)  
[Protect Our Elder Trees Declaration](#)

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*UBCIC is an NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.*

For more information, please visit [www.ubcic.bc.ca](http://www.ubcic.bc.ca)