

Presentation to the Special Committee on Timber Supply, Vancouver, July 11, 2012

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Sierra Club BC Background

Sierra Club BC is a non-profit environmental organization whose mission is to protect British Columbia's species and ecosystems, especially in light of global warming.

For more than 40 years we have been a leader in many successful campaigns to safeguard B.C. wilderness and wildlife. We advocate the responsible use of B.C.'s natural resources while promoting a modern, equitable economy that sustains our planet in every way.

One of our greatest strengths is our ability to mobilize people in constructive action to protect ecosystems and wild spaces. At the heart of our organization are 18,000 supporters and six local Sierra Club groups around the province. Our youth education program reaches more than 8,000 B.C. school children each year.

Sierra BC works with different levels of government, including First Nations, to ensure that conservation viewpoints are heard and to provide input on policy and other decisions that affect the environment.

Implications of logging reserves in the interior on the economy, the environment and climate change

Before I speak to some specific economic, ecological and climate concerns regarding the question of allowing logging in forests set aside to protect old-growth, wildlife habitat, riparian areas, visual and recreational values in the interior, I would like to point out some big picture considerations.

Allowing logging in the relatively small forest reserves of the interior, particular after the severe degradation of the forest base due to the combination of the Mountain Pine Beetle infestation and the following significant increase of the annual cut is arguably inconsistent with the principle of sustainability.

As a reminder, the most widely quoted definition of sustainability - as a part of the concept *sustainable development* -, was developed by Brundtland Commission of the United Nations in 1987: "*sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.*"

Allowing logging in forest reserves of the interior mirrors the same patterns of overhunting, overfishing and other forms of depletion, that have led to extinction or extirpation of species, economic collapse, the breakdown of environmental services and ultimately of civilizations in many parts of the world.

What is different today compared to the historical examples of collapse (Maya, Easter Island etc.) is that we have almost overwhelming scientific evidence of ecological decline undermining the basis of human well-being, including future economic activity, and we are exhausting both regional and global ecological carrying capacity at the same time.

For example, in June, just before the Earth Summit Rio +20, a group of scientists published a Nature article warning that with green house gas emissions continuing to increase and nearly 50 percent of all ecosystems altered by humans our planet is now moving rapidly towards an irreversible 'state shift'.¹

Decisions like the ones you are considering today will determine if collectively humanity will show the leadership required to restore and maintain the life support systems of the planet.

If the government of a relatively rich part of the world like British Columbia would allow logging forest reserves to maintain industrial overcapacity we should consider what we expect from developing countries like Brazil, the Democratic Republic of Congo or Indonesia with the largest tracts of tropical rainforest and „lungs of the planet“ in terms of forest protection and forest management.

¹ <http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v486/n7401/full/nature11018.html>

Economy

B.C.'s interior has been hit by a double-whammy. First, the climate change induced mountain pine beetle infestation killed millions of trees. Then the province hugely increased the annual allowable cut - not only allowing the cutting of dead stands, but also continued logging of some of the remaining healthy forests and living trees in mixed stands with the beetle-killed pine. Much of this healthy timber would have been better left alone to address future demand and provide much needed ecological functions.

It comes as no surprise that, after significantly increasing the cut, there simply aren't enough logs to support mills, some of which had boosted capacity to handle the fast-tracked cutting of beetle killed trees.

Allowing logging in reserves would not only be bad for our environment but also bad for our economy.

- Instead of undertaking everything possible to make the transition to a future with fewer trees and a more diverse economy, it would support denial: inconvenient business decisions that should be made today would be postponed until tomorrow, only to face an even harsher reality then.
- By opening up reserves that were designated after years of planning, the province would send the short-sighted message that no place is off-limits and put the reputation of BC's logging industry, which continues to be under scrutiny in many markets, at risk.
- Other economic activities, such as tourism and agriculture, will be negatively impacted by a decision to log in areas set aside as forest reserves.
- Businesses that require small quantities of timber for high- quality products will be left without a reliable supply once the last accessible stands are logged to keep big mills running for a little while longer.
- Communities will be left surrounded by devastated landscapes with little natural beauty to enjoy.

According to the just released Economic State of B.C.'s Forest Sector 2011 timber harvest in BC rose 42% from the 2009 slump to 69.2 million cubic meters (49.2 from interior crown lands). Employment in the sector is down to 53,000 (2.3% lower than last year, and down from a peak of 99,000 in 2000).

Instead of continuing to degrade our forest resources while providing with fewer jobs we need to steer towards a truly sustainable forest industry base with sustainable harvest rates, one that adds much more value to the timber we cut, accompanied by new forms of revenue to protect, maintain and restore forests and their environmental services (e.g. Payments for Ecosystem Services, PES).

Ecology and environmental services

Allowing logging of reserves would undermine the ecological integrity and environmental services in an already ecologically degraded part of the province. This path would also put lives at risk. Scientific data shows that as climate changes, extreme weather events causing floods and droughts are increasing and will continue to rise. Environmental services that intact forests provide, including soil retention and flood control, will become even more important in the context of global warming. Logging forest reserves in an already ravaged area like the interior is inviting environmental disaster in the era of climate change.

Alarmingly of thousands of species assessed in BC, over 40 percent are already of conservation concern. As global warming worsens scientists predict a significant increase of extinction rates. According to the International Panel on Climate Change, globally around 20-30 per cent of all species will be at an increased risk of extinction if global average warming exceeds 1.5-2.5 degrees Celsius by 2100 (and 40-70 per cent of species if temperature increase exceeds 3.5 degrees Celsius).

With or without global warming, changes to the ways we manage our forests are urgent to maintain the web of life and the multiple services of animals and plants without which we cannot exist. Undisturbed forests are more resilient and less vulnerable to global warming. Setting aside more forest will help to maintain species. Adaptation to climate change also means that many species have to migrate, for example south, north or into higher altitudes. This is only possible if intact forests are not too small and fragmented or species could become trapped

as the climate shifts around them. To protect as many species as possible, we have to increase conservation, not reduce it.

Considering the latest emissions and warming trends, protected forests and the forests set aside as reserves in the interior will be the only places in this part of the province with a higher likelihood to maintain ecosystems and species as we know them for a longer period of time through this century because they are more resilient than recently cut, younger forests.

Climate

Logging our interior forest reserves would also increase B.C.'s contribution to global warming. The Climate Action Secretariat just released a new greenhouse gas report showing a small decrease in B.C.'s declared emissions. But that decrease is dramatically overshadowed by an explosive growth in uncounted emissions from our forest lands, which now total 82 million tonnes and is, for the first time, significantly higher than our official emissions (62 million tonnes).² In a case of apparent selective perception, the province does not seem willing to take action to address the staggering 363 per cent increase in emissions from provincial forests over the past decade.

These numbers should not only be a huge concern because of their contribution to global warming, they are also an indicator of the ongoing decline of the state of our forests overall. BC's forest emissions are a result of poor forest management, the Mountain Pine Beetle infestation and an extreme increase in forest fires. Restoring our forests and reducing these emissions will be difficult but is not impossible. Since forests are our only opportunity to not only reduce emissions but actually take carbon out of the atmosphere, improved forest management should be one of the most urgent government priorities.

Outlook

All the available information about the state of our forests, the changing climate and the threats to our communities and ecosystems indicates that we need a U-turn in forest management to halt further degradation of provincial forests and their key services. This will require increased conservation measures, new regulation and incentives to improve forest management and stop destructive logging practices³, as well as reforestation and restoration programs in the most severely damaged areas. Most of all, it will require strong and forward-thinking leadership from the province.

² http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/cas/mitigation/ghg_inventory/pdf/pir-2010-full-report.pdf

BC's official emissions were 62 million tonnes carbon dioxide in 2010. "Forestland remaining forestland" pages 56 – 58) considered a memo item and not included were now 82 million tonnes (up from 63 in 2009). Essentially 44 from logging, 66 from wildfires (another huge jump), 8 from slash burning, minus 36 sequestration (a much smaller number than in the 1990ies because of the MPB)

³ Logging and carbon loss don't have to go hand in hand. For example, second growth can be logged selectively while at the same time increasing the volume of standing trees and carbon storage over time. Merv Wilkinson harvested 2 million board feet of lumber from the Wildwood parcel over 70 years of selective logging, with 1.3 million board feet of standing timber at the beginning and 1.6 million board feet at the end of his work at Wildwood.