



Loss of old-growth on Vancouver Island and Clayoquot Sound, 1993 - 2022

Background to the media release “More than a third of Vancouver Island’s last old-growth forests logged since 1993 Clayoquot protests”, August 28, 2023

On the 30th anniversary of the historic Clayoquot Sound mass protests and arrests in August 1993, a new Sierra Club BC map and data review show that about 35 per cent of the productive old-growth rainforests that remained standing on Vancouver Island in 1993 have been destroyed in just the last 30 years.

Vancouver Island has a land mass of about 3.3 million hectares (including some neighboring islands as shown in our map) and about 2.2 million hectares were covered with productive old-growth forests with relatively big trees before large-scale logging started in the 19th century.

While 31 percent (687,000 hectares) of this original old-growth remained standing in 1993, the year protests and arrests made headlines globally, this amount has been further reduced to only 20 percent (447,000 hectares) in the last three decades.

Another 25,000 hectares (equivalent to 35,000 soccer fields) was logged in the last five years, since we shared our last map and data in August 2018.¹ This translates to an average loss of approximately 19 soccer fields of old-growth per day on Vancouver Island alone during the last five years.

Our map and data contain an Island story of two tales—the dramatic ecological loss reflected in the old-growth logging trend of the last thirty years for Vancouver Island overall, and the very different story in one region of the Island: Clayoquot Sound (a region covering about 8 per cent of the land mass of Vancouver Island). Here, more than half of the original old-growth forest remains standing today, with little change in the last three decades.

In 1993, 60 percent of the old-growth rainforest in the Clayoquot Sound region, the territory of the Ahousaht, Tla-o-qui-aht and Hesquiaht First Nations, was still intact. Proposed large-scale logging plans for the region were met with fierce resistance by Indigenous Peoples and environmental activists, culminating in mass arrests in August 1993.

Although only part of the region (seventeen per cent) received formal protection after the protests, the vast majority of the old-growth rainforest that remained intact in the region thirty years ago remains intact today (56 percent). This is thanks to the ongoing leadership of the region’s First Nations which have been pursuing Indigenous-led conservation solutions for many years but not yet received the needed support to fully realize their vision.

The situation is drastically different across most of the remainder of Vancouver Island. The data looking at Vancouver Island’s state of the forest looks even more dramatic without including Clayoquot Sound.

¹ <https://sierraclub.bc.ca/on-clayoquot-sound-anniversary-sierra-club-bc-map-shows-more-than-30-per-cent-of-vancouver-islands-remaining-old-growth-rainforest-destroyed-since-protests/>



Using this approach, only 29 percent of intact productive old-growth rainforest remained in 1993 and this number is now reduced to 18 per cent. The amount protected remains dismal at about six per cent and has not changed significantly since 2018.

The following table shows hectare numbers and percentages of the original productive old-growth rainforest on Vancouver Island before large-scale logging began, how much of it remained in 1993, how much remained in 2022 and how much is protected for Vancouver Island, for the Island without Clayoquot Sound; and for Clayoquot Sound alone.

Productive old-growth rainforest	Vancouver Island		Island without Clayoquot Sound		Clayoquot Sound	
	Hectares	Percentage	Hectares	Percentage	Hectares	Percentage
Old-growth pre-large scale logging	2,236,000	100%	2,135,900	96%	100,100	4%
Remaining old-growth in 1993	687,000	31%	627,200	29%	59,800	60%
Protected old-growth in 1993	87,700	4%	81,700	4%	6,000	6%
Remaining old-growth in 2022	447,000	20%	390,300	18%	56,700	56%
Protected old-growth in 2022	137,000	6%	119,700	6%	17,300	17%
Old-growth loss 1993 - 2022	239,000	35%	235,700	38%	3,300	6%

ⁱ Productive old-growth rainforest excluding very low-productivity stands that generally grow smaller trees, not targeted for logging and therefore not endangered. Sierra Club BC maps of Vancouver Island show forests over 140 years and older as old-growth forests. With a large number of ecosystems retaining only small percentages of old-growth and very high risk of species extirpation on Vancouver Island, it is important to use a definition that captures all the remaining older forests with old-growth characteristics to inform conservation efforts. On public land, over 80 per cent of these stands are older than 250 years.