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British Columbia News

B.C. introduces new measures on old growth, innovation, forest stewardship

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The B.C. government is launching new measures to protect more old growth by fast-tracking innovation and co-developing new local plans with First Nations to better care for B.C.'s forests.

“Our forests are foundational to B.C. In collaboration with First Nations and industry, we are accelerating our actions to protect our oldest and rarest forests,” said Premier David Eby. “At the same time, we will support innovation in the forestry sector so our forests can deliver good, family-supporting jobs for generations to come.”

At the centre of the eight-point plan is \$25 million for new Forest Landscape Planning (FLP) tables that will drive improved old-growth management while incorporating local knowledge and community priorities. Enabled by 2021 amendments to the Forest and Range Practices Act, forest landscape plans are a more comprehensive and inclusive approach to forest stewardship that will replace existing, industry-developed plans.

In response to requests from First Nations for more in-depth discussions about old growth, this funding will support eight new regional FLP tables with the participation of approximately 50 First Nations. These tables will prevent harvesting in old-growth forests important for ecosystem health, biodiversity, clean water, carbon storage and Indigenous values. They will also provide greater certainty about the areas where sustainable harvesting can occur to support jobs and investment.

The announcement also includes ramping up government investments to support innovation in the forestry industry. The Province is doubling the new BC Manufacturing Jobs Fund to \$180 million and expanding eligibility provincewide. The BC Manufacturing Jobs Fund will, for example, support mills to process smaller-diameter trees and manufacture higher-value wood products, such as mass timber. It will accelerate shovel-ready projects across the manufacturing ecosystem that will bring direct benefits and stable, family-supporting jobs to communities throughout the province. Previously, the fund was restricted to projects outside of the Metro Vancouver and the Capital regional districts.

“As we work to protect more old growth, we know we need to accelerate our efforts to build a stronger, more innovative forestry industry that better shares the benefits with workers and communities. Forestry is a foundation of B.C.'s economy,” said Bruce Ralston, Minister of Forests. “That’s why we are doubling provincial investments to help mills retrofit to get off old-growth logs and manufacture more high-value wood products right here in B.C., so we create more jobs from every tree.”

Additional actions to accelerate implementation of the Old Growth Strategic Review during the next year include:

- developing and implementing alternatives to clear-cutting practices, such as selective harvesting techniques, that better support forest resiliency, ecosystem health and climate adaptation, through a new \$10-million silviculture innovation program;
- repealing outdated wording in the Forest and Range Practices Act regulations that prioritizes timber supply over all other forest objectives, like water quality, wildlife habitat and biodiversity;
- increasing Indigenous participation in co-developing changes to forest policy through \$2.4 million provided to the First Nations Forestry Council;
- protecting more old-growth forests and biodiverse areas by leveraging hundreds of millions of dollars of philanthropic donations to fund conservation measures supported by the Province and First Nations, through a new conservation financing mechanism to be set up within six months;
- enabling local communities and First Nations to finance old-growth protection by selling verified carbon offsets that represent long-term emission reductions through the new Forest Carbon Offset Protocol 2.0, which will be finalized this year; and
- completing the Old Growth Strategic Action Plan by the end of 2023, to be developed in collaboration with First Nations and in consultation with stakeholders.

Since November 2021, the Province has been engaging with First Nations about deferring harvest within old-growth forests. Deferrals have now been implemented on approximately 2.1 million hectares of old growth. As recommended by the Old Growth Strategic Review, deferrals are intended to prevent biodiversity loss while the Province, First Nations and other partners develop a new, long-term approach to forest management that prioritizes ecosystem health and community resiliency.

The Technical Advisory Panel recommended that the Province implement deferrals within 2.6 million hectares of forests identified as most at risk of biodiversity loss. An additional 1.4 million hectares was already permanently protected.

Since November 2021, 11,600 hectares have been harvested while engagements with First Nations were underway. This is equal to less than 0.5% of the area recommended for deferral.

Quotes:

Nathan Cullen, Minister of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship –

“Old-growth forests are a part of who we are and we want to share all the benefits they offer for many generations to come. In the coming months, our government will develop a new conservation-financing mechanism that ensures British Columbians, as well as those individuals who share our love for B.C.’s iconic forests, can join in supporting protection of biodiverse areas throughout our province.”

George Heyman, Minister of Environment and Climate Change Strategy –

“Our government is committed to working together with First Nations and communities to build a better future where forest ecosystem health is at the heart of forest stewardship and management. We are developing new transparent and verifiable rules for B.C. forest carbon offsets projects so Indigenous Peoples and communities can benefit through the large-scale storage of carbon that occurs in old-growth forests.”

Brenda Bailey, Minister of Jobs, Economic Development and Innovation –

“By expanding the B.C. Manufacturing Jobs Fund to include the entire province and doubling its funding, we’re ensuring more help is available for the needs of people and communities throughout B.C. This fund will create good-paying jobs for British Columbians by driving long-term economic diversification and sustainability as we build a clean and inclusive economy that works for everybody.”

Garry Merkel, independent coach and mentor for Old Growth Strategic Review (OGSR) implementation –

“When creating the Old Growth Strategic Review, Al Gorley and I had the honour of listening to people from all backgrounds and from all corners of the province as they shared their values on forests and forestry. One overriding theme was the need to ensure the continuity and integrity of our natural systems. Also clear was that we needed to have many voices around the table while doing so, in particular those of First Nations. As the Province continues to implement the OGSR recommendations and associated Forest and Range Practices Act changes – in this case, forest landscape-level planning – we are collaborating with First Nations as full partners to meaningfully engage stakeholders and manage the land to create healthy ecosystems with resilient forests that continue to provide many benefits for B.C. communities.”

Lennard Joe, CEO, First Nations Forestry Council –

“The BC First Nations Forestry Council is looking forward to continue working with the Province to modernize forest policy in B.C. The forestry council will continue to support Nations in efforts to increase their role in the governance and stewardship of forest lands and resources. The Province’s commitment to continue implementation of the Old Growth Strategic Review and to increase Forest Landscape Planning opportunities for First Nations are both vital to increasing the participation of First Nations in the forest sector as full partners.”

A backgrounder follows.

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Backgrounders

Information on the eight-point plan to protect old-growth forests

The B.C. government is taking action through an eight-point plan to accelerate action on old-growth protection, innovation and forest stewardship:

Forest Landscape Planning (\$25 million)

Developed in partnership with First Nations and full engagement of local governments and stakeholders, Forest Landscape Planning (FLP) better incorporates local knowledge and values into sustainable forest management. FLP establishes clear objectives for the long-term management of old growth, biodiversity, climate change and wildfire risk. By providing direction about where harvesting and roadbuilding may occur, FLPs also provide greater certainty for industry, communities and workers. Enabled by 2021 amendments to the Forest and Range Practices Act, FLPs will replace existing industry-developed forest stewardship plans. Four FLP tables are underway. This new funding will allow eight more regional tables to be established with participation from approximately 50 First Nations.

BC Manufacturing Jobs Fund (additional \$90 million)

First announced in January 2023, the Province is doubling the new BC Manufacturing Jobs Fund to \$180 million and making it open to projects provincewide. For example, it may provide funding to a forestry company that needs to buy new equipment to support new product lines, such as mass-timber production or paper packaging, or for smaller-diameter tree processing and manufacturing, or a company that wants to build or expand a plastics-alternative manufacturing facility. The fund is in addition to the \$185-million support package announced in Budget 2022 to ensure that co-ordinated and comprehensive supports are in place to offset any economic impacts from a changing forestry industry.

Silviculture Innovation Program (\$10 million)

The new Silviculture Innovation Program will support new research and innovative practices that better address forest resiliency, ecosystem health and climate adaptation. This could include selective harvesting approaches or treatments that retain and promote old-growth stand characteristics, make ecosystems more resilient, or restore wildlife or aquatic habitat. The Bulkley Valley Centre for Natural Resources Research and Management, a world-class research institute based in Smithers, will manage the \$10-million program. It is expected to be up and running in fall 2023. This investment directly responds to the recommendation of the Old Growth Strategic Review to create a Silviculture Innovation Program aimed at developing harvesting alternatives to clearcutting that maintain old forest values.

Updating Forest and Range Practices Act Regulations

Government has repealed outdated wording in the Forest and Range Practices Act regulations that prioritizes timber supply over all other forest objectives, such as water quality, wildlife habitat and biodiversity. This change will allow statutory decision-makers to better consider and balance a broader range of forest objectives. It responds to the recommendation of the Old Growth Strategic Review to shift from a management approach focused on timber supply to managing for multiple values, recognizing that a shift to prioritize ecosystem health is necessary if forests are to continue to provide essential benefits, such as clean air, clean water, carbon storage, conservation of biodiversity and sustainable timber.

Support for First Nations Forestry Council (\$2.4 million)

The Province is providing \$2.4 million to support the continued participation of the First Nations Forestry Council (FNFC) in modernizing B.C. forestry policy and legislation. Founded in 2006 by the First Nations Leadership Council, the FNFC will be a key partner in developing the old-growth strategic action plan and finalizing the regulatory framework for FLP. With this funding, FNFC will design and deliver a series of provincial and regional-level engagement sessions open to all First Nations and Indigenous organizations. The Old Growth Strategic Review recommended fully engaging with First Nations about its findings, policy development and implementation.

Conservation financing mechanism

The Province is working to protect more old-growth forests and other biodiverse areas at risk of irreversible loss. The Province recognizes that there is significant interest from British Columbians in supporting this objective. In the coming months, the Province will establish a new conservation financing mechanism aimed at leveraging its investments by attracting private and philanthropic funds to support conservation measures aligned with provincial and First Nation interests. This will be key to implementing the Old Growth Strategic Review and the Province's commitment to protect 30% of the land base by 2030.

Forest Carbon Offset Protocol 2.0

As part of its CleanBC 2030 Roadmap, the Province is developing renewed rules to govern how forest carbon offsets are developed to ensure they support local communities, promote ecosystem health and represent verifiable, long-term reductions of emissions. A final version of the protocol will be released this year. The new protocol will enable First Nations and others to finance new conservation projects, such as permanently protecting old-growth forests by earning verified carbon credits.

Old-growth strategic action plan

The Old Growth Strategic Review advised that the Province develop a formal, comprehensive implementation plan in collaboration with First Nations and in consultation with stakeholders. Provincial forums were held early this year and a series of regional sessions is planned for the coming months. To be completed by the end of this year, the old-growth strategic action plan will outline the shared vision, key priorities and timeline of actions to implement the remaining recommendations and paradigm shift envisioned by the Old Growth Strategic Review. As part of this engagement process, the Province is engaging about the ecosystem health and biodiversity of B.C.'s forests as an overarching priority for all sectors, in response to Recommendation 2 of the review.

Acknowledgment

The B.C. Public Service acknowledges the territories of First Nations around B.C. and is grateful to carry out our work on these lands. We acknowledge the rights, interests, priorities, and concerns of all Indigenous Peoples - First Nations, Métis, and Inuit - respecting and acknowledging their distinct cultures, histories, rights, laws, and governments.