

Rally underscores reason for urgency in protecting old growth forests

Timothy Schafer, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter The Nelson Daily

Mar 6, 2023

Immediate action is necessary to protect old growth and primary forests that are still being logged was the message of a peaceful march and rally in downtown Nelson on Saturday.

It was a large turnout for the March Fourth for Old Growth and Biodiversity rally and gathering that began and ended at City Hall Saturday morning, and one in which people were continually urged to keep the pressure on the provincial government.

Although the province is taking steps in the right direction, explained Fox Forest from rally organizers Last Stand West Kootenay, it still needs to do more right now to ensure the old growth and primary forest is protected.

“Old growth and primary forests are still being logged as we speak. We need more public involvement in identifying areas that have been missed and more transparency from government around which deferral areas are being honored (and for how long),” Forest said in a statement before the rally.

“Beyond these interim measures, we are asking for permanent protection that takes into account broader ecosystem connectivity.”

Forest landscape plans promise to do this, Forest added, but only after current forest stewardship plans expire, which could be up to 10 years down the road.

The province is at a critical turning point where our last remaining intact ecosystems must be preserved at all costs, said long-time Nelson and West Kootenay activist, John Alton.

“The survival of several endangered species and our well-being as humans depend on it,” he said. “In this era of climate change, the inland temperate rainforest is our first line of defense against drought and forest fires here in the Kootenay.”

The demonstration in Nelson coincided with Old Growth Revylution’s rally in Revelstoke — an attempt to bring attention to the unique ecosystem of the inland temperate rainforest. It also followed on the heels of the United for Old Growth rally late last month in Victoria that called for implementation of the 14 recommendations of the Old Growth Strategic Review Panel.

There was also a provincial announcement of more money to support programs that would create more forestry jobs, improve old growth forest management and increase community involvement. In addition, protection was to be extended for 2.1 million hectares of the recommended technical advisory panel's priority deferral areas.

Local efforts

Forest said efforts to protect broader landscapes have been attempted by the province when it created a new conservancy in the Incomappleux Valley, in the upper Arrow Lakes region.

"This area is considerable in size but only contains 40 per cent of forested area, including many clear cuts and high elevation rock areas," said Forest.

For the remaining inland temperate rainforest there is only one way to protect it, said Craig Pettit, director for the Valhalla Wilderness Society.

"True protection of the inland temperate rainforest must include low-elevation valley bottoms and protection of the Incomappleux's adjacent wildlife corridors to ensure the survival of the red-listed Deep-Snow Mountain Caribou and all the lesser known endangered species associated with these forests," he said in a press release. Further action

Time is running out on the province to take action, said biologist Amber Peters.

She said the promised 30 per cent land base protection by 2030 will not be enough if the richest forests are left out and heavily clear cut areas are included.

"Thirty per cent protection might also mean that government will resort to Wildlife Habitat Areas, Old Growth Management Areas and other weak designations," she said. "We need to put what remains in Class A Parks and Legislated Tribal Parks for the protection these ecosystems deserve."

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