

## FORESTRY POLICY. Submission to the BC Finance Committee.

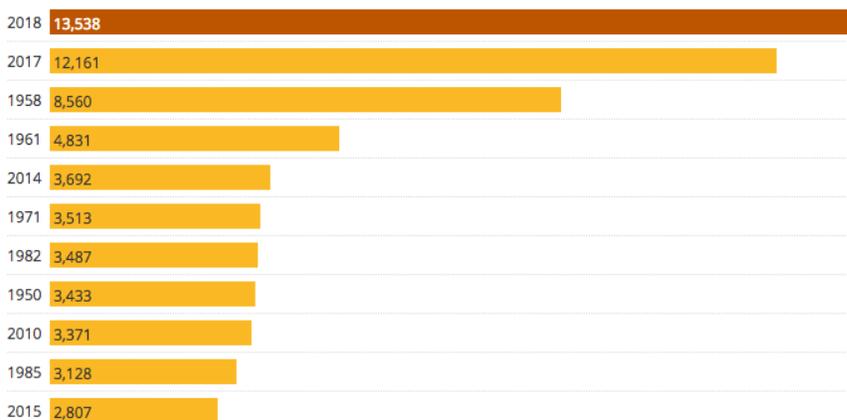
This summer in the Okanagan was the first where many residents got a strong taste of what Climate Change is likely to mean for us. The heat dome in late June was very difficult for all and fatal for some. It was rapidly followed by two months of more hot weather, drought, and frequent smoke as fires raged in many parts of the province. One of the worst fires, the White Rock Lake fire, burned just west of Vernon. Most of Vernon was on evacuation alert at least once, some areas twice, and all of us have friends who were evacuated and some unfortunate ones whose homes went up in smoke. Nobody in the Vernon area came out of the summer with anything but relief that it was over. For a region that is known as a summer playground, there was very little play. As well as the human cost, wildlife suffered immensely. For instance, buffalo berries, saskatoon berries and thimbleberries in the forests produced little or no fruit for the bears.

Many people living on rural areas, including one of us and many of our friends, are now afraid to travel during the summer so that all hands are on deck for the next summer of forest fires which we all know is coming. The psychological trauma of what we experienced this summer will affect many of us for years to come. We also know that it will happen again and again. The impacts of smoke inhalation on our health is well documented. It is also clear that the Okanagan, which is known for its fruit and vineyards, for its pristine lakes and hot summer weather, is highly dependent on a healthy agriculture industry and a healthy tourism industry. Both of these are suffering increasingly from drought, floods, excessive heat and forest fires, and the economic impacts are serious and growing. We cannot continue with business as usual.

The last three forest fire years, 2017, 2018, and 2021, were the three biggest in BC recorded history.

### Top 10 fire seasons in B.C. since 1950

Chart shows number of square kilometres burned in wildfires each season. Does not include false alarms, nuisance fires or training fires.



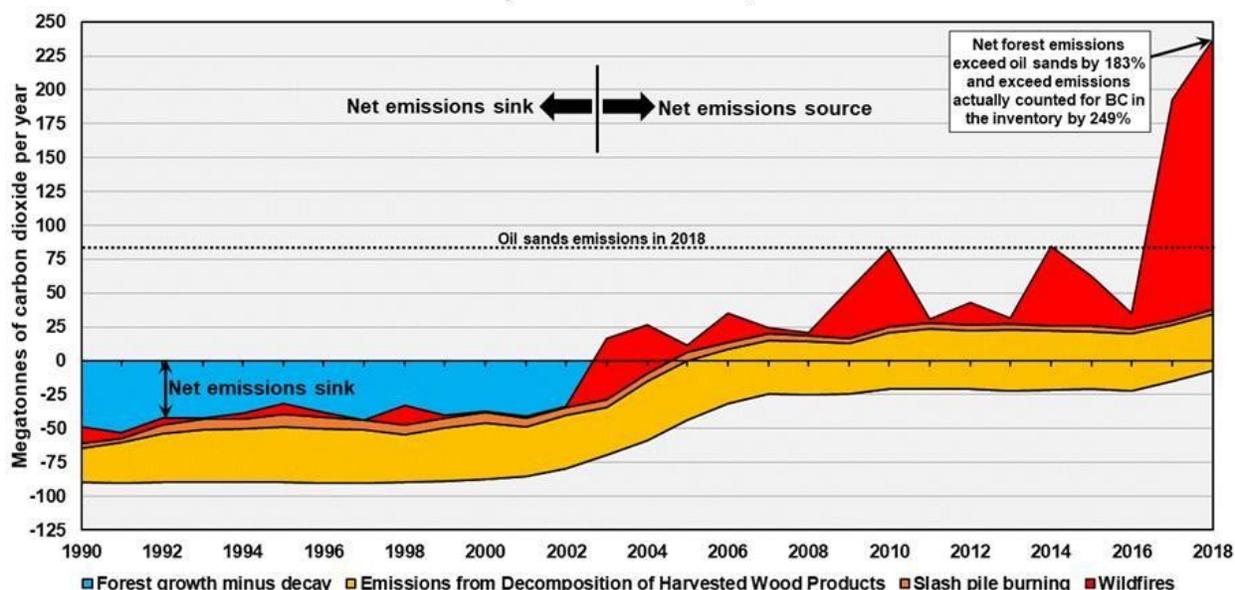
2018 data is current as of Dec. 12

Chart: Bethany Lindsay, CBC News • Source: B.C. Wildfire Service



In these 3 years, our forests emitted two to three times as much greenhouse gases (GHGs) as the BC Carbon budget from all sources included in the GHG inventory. The graph below was assembled from BC GHG emissions data by energy analyst, David Hughes, an earth scientist and energy analyst who worked for the Geological Survey of Canada for 32 years.

### BC Forestry Net Emissions, 1990-2018



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[https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/environment/climate-change/data/provincial-inventory/2018/bc\\_provincial\\_ghg\\_inventory\\_1990-2018.xlsx](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/environment/climate-change/data/provincial-inventory/2018/bc_provincial_ghg_inventory_1990-2018.xlsx) (data from BC 2020 update of Provincial Inventory)

It is absolutely critical that we treat the current situation as the emergency that it clearly is. Some people want to pretend that the Covid pandemic is not a real emergency, and Alberta, among other jurisdictions, has seen how well that works out. The same is true for the climate crisis.

#### A personal account from one of the authors.

*On August 15th I drove back from the Coast over the Coquihalla Highway. For long stretches of the highway we could see the mountainside burning and we had to slow down because the smoke was so thick. At some points the fire was so close I could feel the heat through the car door. I remained calm and referred to the fire as "interesting" so my kids would not be scared. I trusted that if we were actually in danger they would have closed the highway. When we were just outside of Kelowna I stopped the car to call my husband. While we were talking I saw a thin black plume of smoke appear in the hills. Minutes later I saw at least ten different emergency vehicles speed past in the direction of the smoke. I decided we better keep driving.*

*By the time we got to Vernon the smoke was so thick it was as dark as night. My husband texted to say that Armstrong was now on evacuation alert (for the second time), and the Coquihalla had been closed because of the fires. A few days later we learned that the fire we had witnessed had become the Mount Law fire. Even though we were on evacuation alert I still went to work and sent my kids to daycare - at least that way we would be in air conditioned buildings. My husband who often works outside spent the summer getting multiple nosebleeds*

*a day from the smoke exposure. My work let me bring my dog with me in case we were evacuated and couldn't get home.*

*When I asked my husband, the more level-headed of the two of us, "How can we live like this?" I was surprised by his response, "We can't." My husband grew up here. His family and best friends are here. He has a job that he likes. It is the only home our kids have ever known. And still all of that is not enough to make him believe that we should stay. We are making plans to eventually leave our home because, if this is the future that climate change is bringing us, (summers spent with air too toxic to be outside, with the constant threat that our community will burn to the ground) none of all the wonderful reasons we chose to be here are worth it. Climate change is making the future of the Okanagan uninhabitable. And it is certainly not a place we feel safe raising our kids.*

It is no coincidence that these forest fires corresponded with one of the largest protest movements in Canadian history. Fairy Creek, where Indigenous people and their allies are striving to protect some of the last stands of Old Growth in the province, is the result of a long term neglect of both science-based forestry policy, and Indigenous reconciliation. Despite some bands agreeing to the logging at Fairy Creek it is apparent that continuing to move forward in this way will tear Indigenous (and non-Indigenous) communities apart. This is because the way things are being done is inconsistent with Indigenous world views and protocols.

As a letter sent to Premier Horgan on September 8th from the BC First Nations Forestry Council about 'First Nations Involvement in Modernizing Forest Policy in BC' outlines (<https://silkstart.s3.amazonaws.com/52b9371e-9ff0-4045-88ed-a31029f98a64.pdf>), passing UNDRIP into law has not yet led to meaningful consultation. Indigenous consultation is not a box to be checked off in order to move forward with plans already determined. Creating new policies without meaningful Indigenous input merely creates a new colonial system. There is no short cut here.

Indigenous management, following the BC adoption of UNDRIP, needs to be central to new forestry policy. Historically and practically, Indigenous people have done a far better job of forest management than government and industry. Among other reasons, they are tied physically, emotionally and spiritually to specific areas of land. Indigenous worldviews have been shaped over thousands of years by the land where they live. As a province we are blessed to have Indigenous people and communities that are willing and able to provide us with the guidance we desperately need in-order to create sustainable forestry practices. Failing to invest the necessary resources and time into this opportunity would be a massive oversight and inevitably lead to a resounding failure in our efforts to address the worsening condition of our forests, climate change and reconciliation.

One clear conclusion from this summer is that we, as a province, need to cut down on our GHG emissions. BC is beginning to do that with Clean BC, the many city Climate Action Plans and other programs, but it is apparent that we are not moving fast enough. As a rich jurisdiction we have a responsibility to be a leader in this crisis. But beyond reducing emissions, there are other

changes we need to make. Our forests are currently spiraling into a positive feedback loop. The more the climate warms, the more forest fires we experience. The more forest fires we experience, the more GHG emissions there are which causes the climate to warm even more. We need to do everything possible to end this cycle.

Fortunately or unfortunately, the warming climate is not the only reason for the worsening forest fire situation. Forestry practices are having a serious impact on forest fire severity and number, and this is an area which, unlike the climate crisis as a whole, can be solved by policy changes wholly within BC.

The BC Old Growth Strategic Review (<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/farming-natural-resources-and-industry/forestry/stewardship/old-growth-forests/strategic-review-20200430.pdf>) needs to be adhered to. Old growth forests of major ecological importance have almost been eliminated in BC (<https://thenarwhal.ca/bc-forests-old-growth-impacts-map/>), largely due to an out-dated, simplistic forestry model which has erroneously viewed forests only as a source of timber and old growth as 'decadent forests' which are no longer growing and need to be eliminated. This neglects their many other values including their critical role in ecosystem maintenance, carbon sequestration, and fire resistance. It does not even make sense in forestry terms as old growth plays an important role in nurturing new tree growth as UBC Professor Suzanne Simard lays out so eloquently in her book, **Finding the Mother Tree: Discovering the Wisdom of the Forest (2021)**. The loss of old growth has many negative implications including exacerbating both forest fires and climate change, slower growth of our forests, diminishing salmon populations, and general loss of biodiversity. The sad decline of our caribou populations is an inevitable result of the loss of old growth and the increase in roads into areas of old growth (<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/plants-animals-ecosystems/wildlife/wildlife-conservation/caribou/southern-mountain-caribou>).

Clearcuts are major contributors to forest fires (<https://www.focusonvictoria.ca/forests/90/>), reduces the ability of forests to regrow and reduces biodiversity (Suzanne Simard's 2021 book). Even after planting, for up to 50 years, these plantations are at increased risk of burning. Clearcutting is a practice which must be rapidly phased out. This recognition is not a new or radical idea. Prior to being bought out by Weyerhauseur, MacMillian Bloedel stopped clearcutting and began a policy of stewardship zones (<https://www.pulpandpaperonline.com/doc/macmillan-bloedel-leaves-bc-forest-alliance-0001>). If 20 years ago a major corporation can see the necessity and economic viability of ending clearcutting, surely we as a province can see that same wisdom today.

Herbicide spraying of broadleaf forested areas is also reducing the biodiversity of our forests and is also increasing their susceptibility to fire (<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/it-blows-my-mind-how-b-c-destroys-a-key-natural-wildfire-defence-every-year-1.4907358#:~:text=CBC%20News%20Loaded-,%20blows%20my%20mind'%3A%20How%20B.C.%20destroys%20a%20key,trees%20mandated%20by%20the%20province>). Not only that, but glyphosate, the main herbicide used, is a suspected carcinogen and has been

outlawed in many jurisdictions. So much of it has been used that it is becoming ubiquitous in our environment.

The wood pellet industry in BC in 2019 exported 2.6 million tonnes of wood pellets, primarily to the UK and Japan, due to misguided efforts there to reduce GHG emissions. Not only does wood pellet burning produce more GHG emissions than burning coal, but the massive demand means that we are clear-cutting forests, especially around Prince George, to meet the demand (<https://www.policynote.ca/burning-our-way/>) and this has to stop.

Part of the request for submission to the Finance Committee includes how to tie in our case for a forestry industry overhaul to provincial cabinet mandate letters. Minister of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development - Katrine Conroy in cooperation with Minister of State for Lands and Natural Resources Operations - Nathan Cullen have been tasked to work together on developing and implementing land use policies that support B.C.'s goals for economic activity, environmental sustainability, and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. When the path of fires burn through clear cut areas of forest, economic activity is dented as the entire province is called in to mitigate fire damage, and the tourism sector plummets. We are not proposing that the forestry industry take a hit to support the tourism industry, we are asking for a moratorium on old-growth logging and a rapid phase-out of clearcut logging, because neither of these are environmentally or economically viable. The "fire camp" in Vernon, literally rows upon rows of tents for [500 firefighters and support staff](#) to reside in for over 60 days is not the sign of economic viability.

Another key task assigned to Minister Conroy in her portfolio, is to continue work to update and modernize forest policy and legislation to ensure a competitive, sustainable future for forest communities, Indigenous peoples, workers, and companies. Upon reading this statement, one would assume that each of these groups of people have been given equal standing however, the Fairy Creek demonstration has shown the world that the needs of forest communities and Indigenous peoples are of lower standing to workers and companies. This same issue of meaningful reconciliation comes up in the mandate letter for Minister Cullen as well as for Minister Murray Rankin, who was provided the portfolio of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation. Their mandate key tasks included to support the work of the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Strategy (Minister George Heyman) to reflect Indigenous peoples' history and cultures in provincial parks and wilderness areas, and to facilitate partnership with First Nations around key decisions on regional land and resource use allocation through evolving shared decision making, building on the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act, to provide a clear, stable and sustainable path for everyone to work together, respectively.

Minister Conroy has also been tasked with implementing the recommendations of the [Old Growth Strategic Review](#) in collaboration with Indigenous leaders, labour, industry, and environmental groups to protect more old-growth stands. The above review from 2019 speaks to the same things we are proposing to you, today. Minister Conroy was also tasked to implement the recommendations from the Interior Forest Sector renewal process which includes

suggestions such as “increasing reforestation efforts to enhance carbon sequestration into the natural ecosystem; improving forest biodiversity by planting a full range of tree species (not just species associated with marketable products), including more native species; and protecting old-growth forests because they sequester a lot more carbon and more quickly, as compared to young forests” (page 11 of [this document](#)). As mentioned above, this is also in alignment with our suggestions. Your government has taken many steps to gather information from a variety of people. We applaud you for that. We are asking you now to take action on it.

Among other sources of ideas for change, the government should consider the Great Bear Rainforest Agreements and the [Ahousaht First Nation](#) land use vision. The government definitely needs a more aggressive hands-on approach to forestry management. The professional reliance model instituted by past Liberal governments is clearly inadequate to the task and must be replaced by hiring many more foresters.

The forest industry has radically changed since 2000. Between 2000 and 2015, roughly half of BC forestry-related jobs have disappeared due primarily to technology and automation (64% of job losses) and low paper demand (22%). Making the needed changes could actually increase jobs if smaller scale forestry was encouraged, as community forests tend to create 3-4X as many jobs as large industrial operations and make more efficient use of the trees while maintaining forest health. Much more aggressive silvicultural practices will further create jobs as we improve the health of our forests.

In summary, all of the practices that need to change (ending old growth logging, greatly reducing wood pellet exports, a phase-out of clear cut logging, ending herbicide spraying, much more input and involvement from Indigenous communities as well as consultation with non-Indigenous communities) are based on a model that treats forests as if they are simply a source of timber to be exploited. It does not take into account all the other valuable uses of the forest including the long term health of the forests, recreation, hunting and gathering, water retention and purification, biodiversity, shading of streams, and fire resistance. In its simplistic view of the trees as disconnected from the soil, the fungi and other trees, it is not an effective model even for growing trees. Further, it does not respect the forest and its inhabitants as having a right to exist and to have the interference of humans be limited. BC deserves far better than the status quo. As British Columbians, we need to safeguard what is left of our natural heritage and restore it for future generations. A big part of that is a forest policy which will leave us with healthy forests, healthy communities and far fewer forest fires.

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