Resolution on Old-Growth Forest Protection and Sustainable Forestry

Whereas:
Old-growth forests provide many environmental services to BC. They filter water for fish-bearing waterways, stabilize riverbanks, and produce woody debris, which provides habitat for juvenile and adult salmon. This in turn supports wild salmon populations which are vital to BC's recreational and commercial fisheries and are a key food source of iconic species such as orcas and bears. They also store vast amounts of atmospheric carbon; provide non-timber forest products like wild mushrooms, medicinal herbs, and berries; provide clean drinking water for communities; help prevent landslides on steep slopes; and sustain unique and endangered wildlife such as the marbled murrelet, northern spotted owl, and mountain caribou.

Old-growth forests provide and support unparalleled opportunities for outdoor recreation. They are an important part of BC's appeal as an outdoor recreation destination and are pillars of BC's multi-billion dollar outdoor recreation and nature-based tourism industry. Some of the recreation opportunities old-growth forests support include recreational fishing; hiking and camping in areas such as the Carmanah and Walbran Valleys, Meares Island, and Pacific Rim National Park; kayaking and paddling in Clayoquot Sound and the Broken Group Islands; hiking and rafting in the Elaho Valley and the Capilano River; and other recreational opportunities such as wildlife viewing, bird-watching, forest bathing, photography, caving, geocaching, and more.

Across BC, communities stand to receive a greater net economic benefit in revenues and jobs over the ensuing decades by keeping nearby old-growth forests standing. Studies have shown that keeping old-growth forests standing can provide a greater overall economic benefit than cutting them down when factoring in their value in supporting tourism, recreation, carbon offsets, water filtration, recreational and commercial fisheries, and non-timber forest products.

Old-growth forests are central to many First Nations cultures which rely on ancient cedars for building traditional canoes, long houses, totem poles, masks and other items, and on plants, wildlife, and wild salmon for food and medicine. While the protection of old-growth forests in First Nations' territories would support their cultures and help lay the foundation for sustainable economies, many of these communities lack the financial capacity and support needed to diversify their economies so that old-growth forests can be protected rather than logged.

Old-growth forests are scarce in much of BC today. For example, on BC's southern coast, over 75% of original, productive, old-growth has been logged, including well over 90% of the highest productivity, valley-bottom forests where the largest trees grow. Old-growth forests now make up a minority fraction of the productive, forested land base, meaning second-growth forests now dominate most of the productive forest lands in BC.

We therefore recommend the Provincial Government:
1. Develop a science-based, legislated plan to protect endangered old-growth forests in BC to sustain both the economy and the ecology of the province.

2. Support policies that facilitate a sustainable, value-added, second-growth forest industry in BC, as second-growth forests now constitute the majority of its productive forest lands.

3. Support the sustainable economic development of First Nations communities through conservation financing mechanisms that assist new Indigenous enterprises to develop. This will help First Nations communities grow and diversify economically in such enterprises as cultural and eco-tourism, clean energy, sustainable seafood, and value-added, second-growth forestry, while keeping their old-growth forests alive and standing.
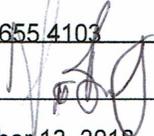
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