

Wild Times

Smouldering Forests



by Joe Foy

While doing a recent media interview about the campaign to stop Kinder Morgan's tar sands pipeline, I was asked a question that made me pause.

The interviewer was interested in comparing the climate change campaigns of today to the long-past "War in the Woods" campaigns of the 1990s.

"The War in the Woods in BC never really ended – it's still going on today," I explained to the interviewer.

From the lush rainforest of giant cedars and firs in the fabled Walbran Valley on southwest Vancouver Island to the windswept pine-scented forests around Taseko Lake on the Chilcotin Plateau, to the much loved Cherry Ridge forest in the North Okanagan, pockets of resistance are lining up against logging companies and the

BC government. Citizen activists are hoping that reinforcements arrive soon to help save BC's beleaguered wilderness forests.

Last June, I went on a photographic expedition to document the

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front line in the campaign to protect spotted owl forest habitat around the Lower Mainland. With me was Wilderness Committee mapper Geoff Senichenko. His maps showed where logging cutblocks had been planned within forests that had supposedly been set aside for the spotted owl.

With Geoff calling out directions from the maps spread out on his lap, I bounced our pickup truck through a maze of potholed and muddy logging roads. Our first destination was the Chilliwack Valley.

In a so-called Wildlife Habitat

Area (WHA) set aside for the preservation of the spotted owl, we documented swaths of forest laid low by recent logging up on Ford Ridge. On one stump we found a soggy cardboard sign put there the year before (when the stump had been a tall tree) by local residents pleading for the forest's preservation.

Past logging has so decimated the spotted owl's forest habitat that biologists estimate that less than a dozen wild owls survive in forests that once housed hundreds.

The WHAs were supposed to become a safe home for a population of owls destined to reach 250 individuals.

And yet in the Lower Mainland, from Lillooet to the US border, the BC government is still allowing logging companies into WHAs that were supposed to be refuges for this extremely endangered species. Government maps show the WHAs as a network of green – but our on-the-ground survey

was revealing far too many fields of recently cut stumps.

At the south end of Chilliwack Lake, we hit a clearcut within a Wildlife Habitat Area. It was so fresh the logging equipment was still there, and the sweet aroma of cut trees hung in the air. Massive logs and stumps were scattered across the hillside. I thought to myself as I walked along the rough logging track, "This is what extinction smells like."

Eventually we did find WHAs where no logging had been allowed. The Ghost Pass Trail, a popular recreation area located just west of Manning Park, is now completely off-limits to logging within the WHA there. But even here, recent logging has been chewing at its border in the forest around Ghost Pass Lake.

It was the same thing everywhere we surveyed. Some WHAs are totally

protected from logging, but others are suffering a chainsaw massacre.

At Chehalis Lake we discovered a WHA logging zone on the steep mountainside overlooking the lake. Up the Lillooet Valley on the east side of Garibaldi Park we found a massive logged area right up against the park boundary.

Sitting on a stump I put my head in my hands and wondered, "What will it take to stop this slide to extinction?"

For those who love nature and wildlife, anger smoulders in BC's remaining wild forests.



Joe Foy is the National Campaign Director for the Western Canada Wilderness Committee, Canada's largest citizen-funded membership based wilderness preservation organization.

Photos: Joe Foy



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