



TIME TO CHANGE DIRECTION IN THE WOODS



Torrance Coste
National Campaign Director
[@TorranceCoste](#)

The west coast of Canada is synonymous with windswept coastlines, jagged mountain peaks and lush temperate rainforests between them.

A series of epic landscapes span Vancouver Island. Taken care of by Kwakwaka'wakw, Nuu-chah-nulth and Coast Salish Nations since time immemorial, this place is loved by residents and visitors alike. I'll always consider myself lucky to have been born and raised on the Island, to have grown up in awe of this place and its potential. Unfortunately, when it comes to

forests, the logging industry has pushed that potential too far and moved way beyond the point of balance.

In short, we've cut too much forest in too many places. The list of unlogged valleys has shrunk. Parts of the Island unaffected by the industry are few and far between — non-existent in some places.

What we lose when these forests are logged is often irreplaceable and couldn't be more important. Medicines and resources integral to First Nations' cultures, habitat for endangered species unique to the region, the local foundations of the multi-billion dollar tourism industry, safeguards for clean air and water and areas where we can connect with nature — these are just a few things ancient forests provide. In the fight against climate change old-growth rainforests could be our best ally, storing climate-changing carbon and buffering

against the impacts of the crisis.

For those of us living on the West Coast, it can be easy to forget some of these forest types exist nowhere else on Earth.¹ They aren't just significant to this coast, but to the whole country and the entire world too.

Despite the global significance of intact old-growth temperate rainforests, forest management here doesn't prioritize their protection.

Instead, logging corporations and successive provincial governments have pushed ecosystems and species to the brink while less and less value is returned to communities. Resources dwindle while short-sighted practices like raw log exports continue.

On Vancouver Island alone, the equivalent of 34 soccer fields worth of original forest is logged every single day.²

Nothing short of a bold, foundational shift is needed to protect remaining ancient forests and transition the forest industry to sustain itself beyond another few decades. This means legislated changes to forestry laws to place healthy intact ecosystems and community well-being above the profits of logging companies.

Any solutions must centre Indigenous Rights and Title, social and economic justice for Indigenous Peoples and the return of land to First Nations.

At the same time we address the ecological and economic crises unfolding in the woods, we must tackle injustice against the peoples who have always called these forests home. Any solutions must centre Indigenous Rights and Title, social and economic justice for Indigenous Peoples and the return of land to First Nations. This country sits on the lands of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. Putting these Nations in the driver's seat of conservation initiatives is the only way we'll protect enough ecosystems in the time required to combat the biodiversity and climate crisis.

These aren't simple tasks, but the stakes couldn't be higher.

Read this report to learn more about the state of old-growth forests on Vancouver Island and what's needed to achieve environmental justice in the woods.



Photomontage top: Tessium Creek, clearcut in Schmidt Creek (Louis Bockner), Vancouver Island.
Photos above: pine marten (Adam Gibbs), clearcut Schmidt Creek (Louis Bockner).



THE INDUSTRIAL STATUS QUO

not working for Island ecosystems or communities

It's been a busy few years for us on Vancouver Island, as we've been on the road connecting with local community members and spending time in the forests surrounding their homes.

We've spent hundreds of hours down backroads documenting threatened old-growth forests and recent clearcut logging. We've met with municipal and First Nations leaders to hear their concerns about the forest industry and their visions for change.

Most importantly, we've held more than a dozen townhall-style meetings about the future of forests and forestry on Vancouver Island.

These public conversations were informative, energized and at times tense and emotional. People want to talk about forestry, but no one else — not government nor industry — is hosting these public forums or having these conversations.

Many Island communities still rely on an unsustainable economic model where a handful of corporations extract as much old-growth as they can, as fast as they can. When the old-growth is gone many of these companies cut jobs and close mills, keeping huge profits while families and towns suffer.³

We have to choose whether we should make a swift, managed shift away from old-growth logging now or face a chaotic collapse in the near future. **The only thing no one denies: old-growth logging will come to an end within a few decades.**

So what's the plan for a just transition for our local communities? How can we ensure forests are managed

so that biodiversity thrives, water quality is protected and landscapes remain resilient in a changing climate?

These are the questions we are asking. And we'll continue to work with forest communities until we find the answers.



Photos: clearcut in Schmidt Creek, townhall meeting in Courtenay, Vancouver Island (Louis Bockner).

BC TIMBER SALES:

a provincial government agency out of control

Massive clearcuts in some of the richest ancient forests in the country, steep slope logging above critical whale habitat, runaway roads and new cutblocks in key conservation corridors — which greedy, profit-driven corporation is behind all this?

None of them. This is the work of the government of British Columbia.⁸

About one-fifth of all logging in

B.C. is controlled by a standalone government agency called BC Timber Sales (BCTS).⁹ This could be a massive opportunity for the province to lead the shift to forestry that sets aside old-growth, respects ecosystems, prioritizes Indigenous Rights, benefits communities and manages for the climate crisis.

But the B.C. government continues to squander this opportunity.

Instead of leading the way in phasing out old-growth logging, BCTS is targeting some of the most endangered ancient forests on the coast. Where it could set a new norm for First Nations and community consultation BCTS instead operates on a "clearcut now, ask questions later" model.¹⁰

From the Nahmint Valley to the Tahsish River, from Port Renfrew to Schmidt Creek, BCTS is destroying old-growth like there's no tomorrow. And for some of these rainforests, there won't be.

To date, the B.C. government has ignored our calls to stop destroying old-growth forests. It's time for government to accept old-growth logging has no place in a healthy future and no place in a public agency.



Photos: killer whales (Andrew S. Wright), clearcut in Schmidt Creek (Louis Bockner).

DIFFERENT GOVERNMENT,

same old broken policies

In the summer of 2017, some hope emerged for the West Coast's iconic rainforests. After a decade and a half of disastrous B.C. Liberal government policies resulted in the continued destruction of ancient forests, record levels of raw log exports and tens of thousands of lost forestry jobs, the election of an NDP minority government backed by the Green Party had many expecting better.⁴

Two years later, virtually nothing has changed.

Beyond piecemeal protections for limited areas and individual trees and a vague commitment to look at the problem, this government hasn't taken the necessary action required to address the crisis in old-growth forests.^{5,6,7}

B.C. needs a government willing to take stock of the state of landscapes and watersheds and make plans to ensure these forests remain healthy into the future. Instead, the province continues to parrot the logging industry and hide behind the misconstrued threat of job losses as an excuse for inaction.

It should go without saying a healthy forest industry requires healthy forests. However, after decades of mismanagement and greed, we're at real risk of having neither in B.C.

The NDP government needs to change direction in the woods and enact laws and policies putting Indigenous Rights, intact ecosystems, endangered species and local communities ahead of logging companies.

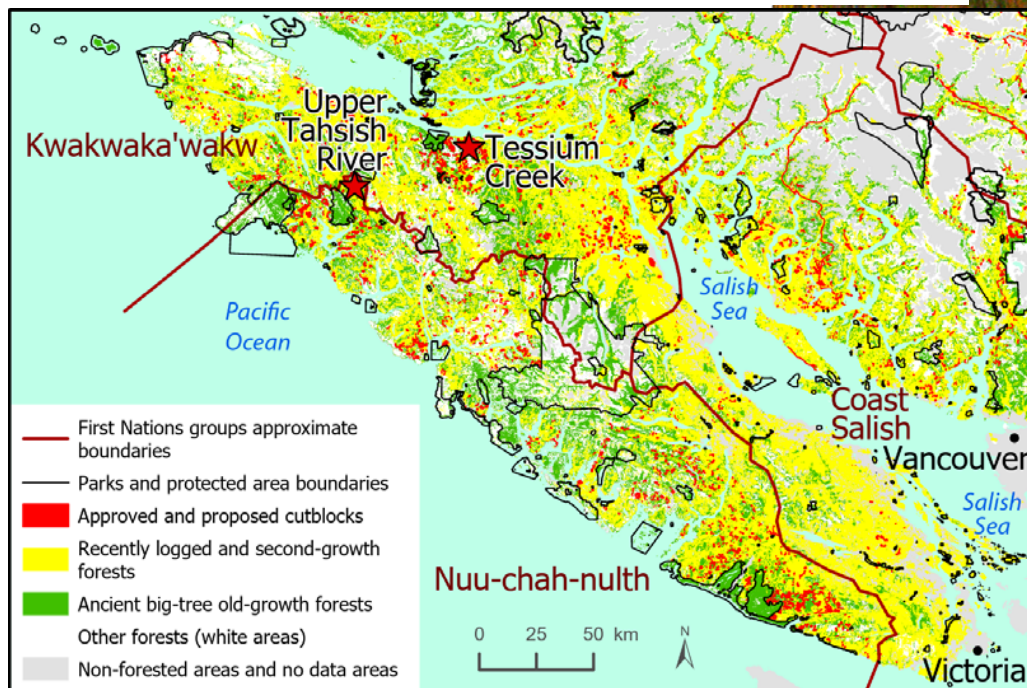


Photos: Sydney Inlet rainforest (J. Windh), logging truck in Eve River (Louis Bockner), old-growth in Naka Creek (WC Files) all Vancouver Island.



Photos: old-growth in Tessium Creek (Louis Bockner), burnt clearcut in Tahsish Valley (WC Files), sea otters (Roberta Olenick) all Vancouver Island.

REMAINING OLD-GROWTH FOR VANCOUVER ISLAND



SNAPSHOT OF MISMANAGEMENT: TESSIUM CREEK

On northeastern Vancouver Island, in the unceded territory of the Ma'amtagila Nation, a creek called Tessium drains into the Johnstone Strait. The bottom of this valley, where the densest forest, biggest trees and richest habitat once existed, has been almost entirely logged over the last several decades.

Ecologically, this watershed has been completely disrupted. And the replanted forest — which ranges in size from seedling to Christmas tree — won't be of economic value to north Island communities for decades to come.

Just one stand of old-growth remains — an incredibly beautiful cedar and hemlock forest near the head of the valley. But it too is under immediate threat, slated for extensive road building and clearcut logging by BC Timber Sales in 2019 and 2020.¹¹

Tessium Creek highlights how far past balance the forest industry has come and what we're at risk of losing — forever.

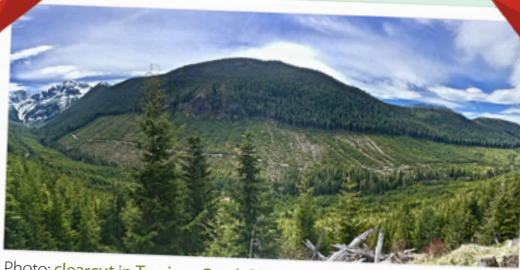


Photo: clearcut in Tessium Creek (WC Files).

SNAPSHOT OF MISMANAGEMENT: UPPER TAHSISH

The Tahsish River flows south and west out of the Karmutzen Range into Kyuquot Sound through the unceded territories of the Ka'yu:'k't'h'/Che:k:tl'es7et'h' Nations on northwestern Vancouver Island. While the lower part of the river is protected within Tahsish-Kwois Provincial Park, most of the watershed is unprotected. Huge stretches of clearcuts, many of which have burned in the last decade, scar the region.

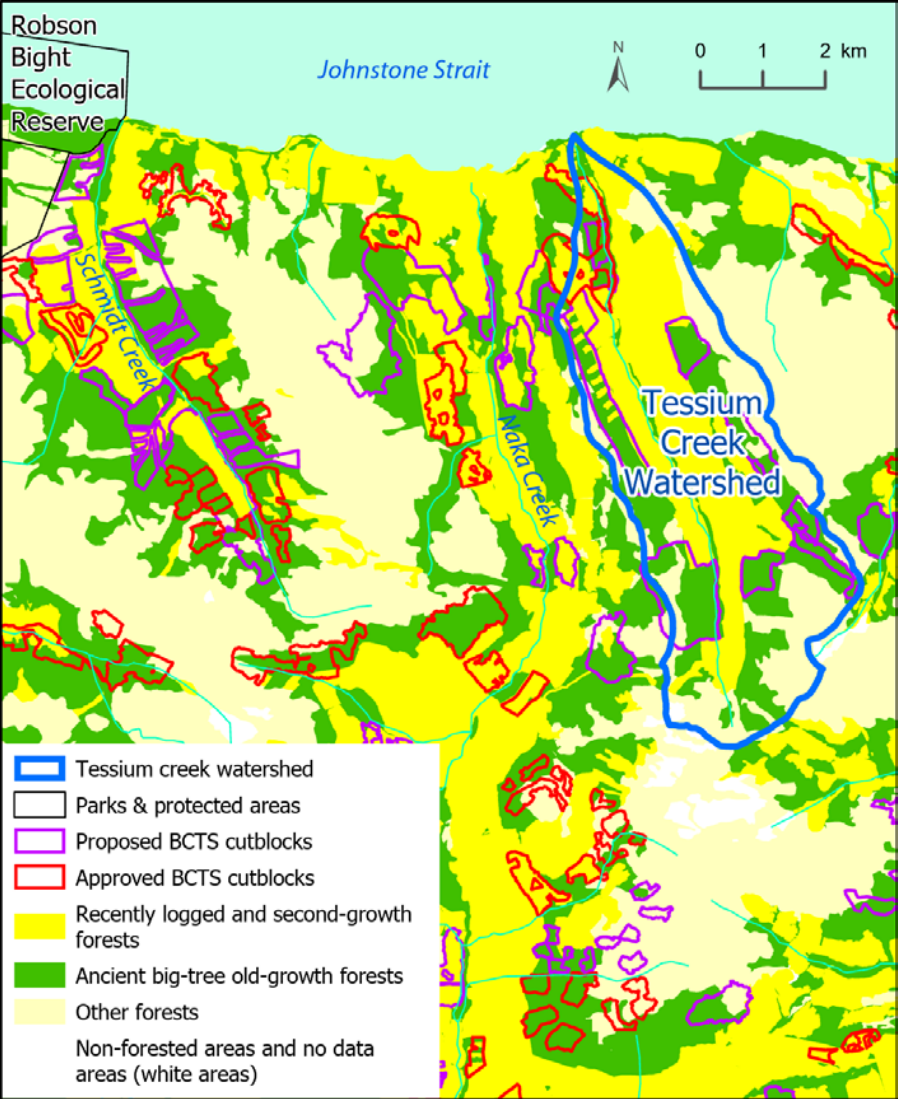
One of the last tracts of intact rainforests in the valley on the west side of the river, filled with giant hemlock and fir, is on the chopping block. The culprit? BC Timber Sales.¹²

Heavily-impacted watersheds like the Tahsish should be left alone and given a chance to recover, not targeted for tax payer-funded old-growth logging.

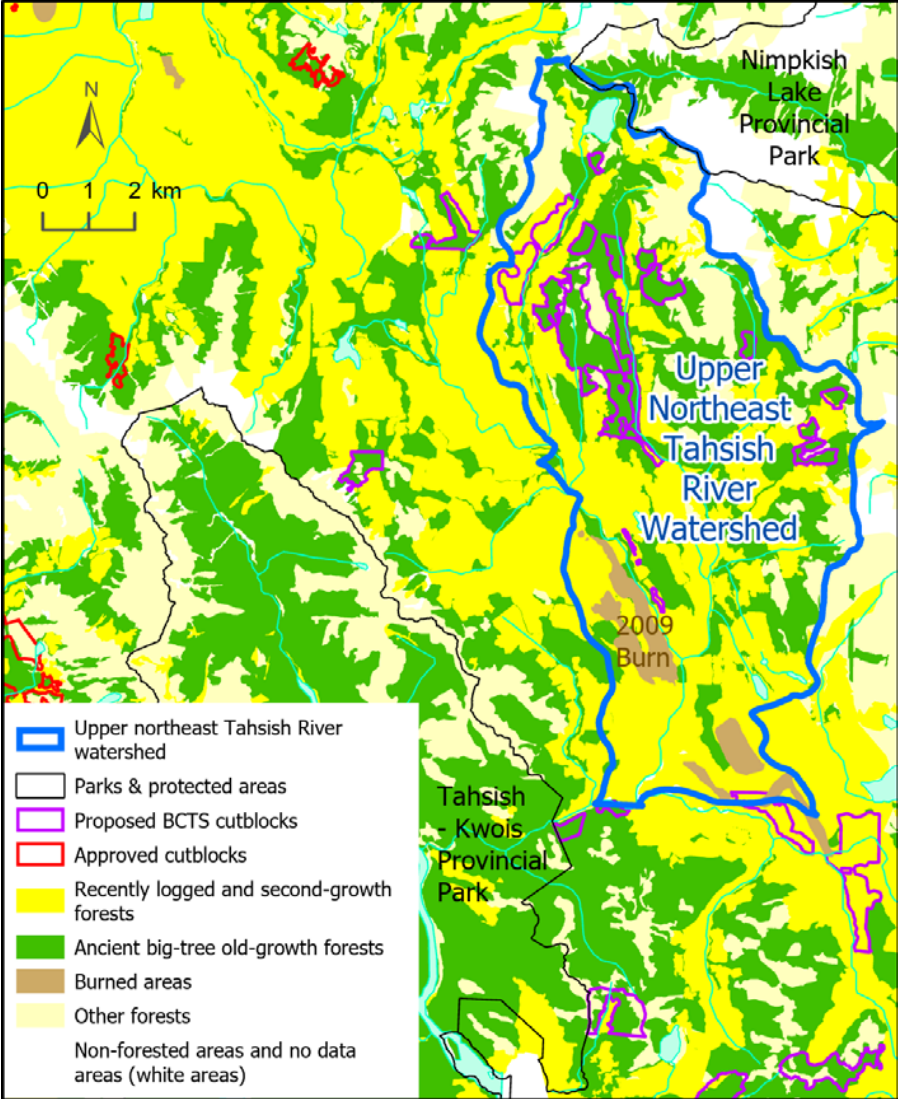


Photo: burnt clearcut in Upper Tahsish (WC Files).

TESSIUM CREEK AREA



UPPER TAHSISH



PROTECTING REMAINING OLD-GROWTH means changing the forest industry

The destruction of ancient temperate rainforests happens for one reason: a small number of people can make a lot of money doing it.

Knowing this isn't a good excuse, government and industry push the narrative that local jobs and rural economies are the reason we must continue to log old-growth. But this argument breaks down with a simple look at local news headlines. For every story about another lost forest grove or a community fighting for its favourite recreational area, there are three about mass layoffs, a closed mill or a contractor declaring bankruptcy.¹³

Logging companies cut critical endangered species habitat and thousand year-old trees for the exact same reason they eliminate jobs and close mills — it benefits their bottom line. These corporations continue to post huge profits while communities lose more rainforests and more jobs.

Millions of unprocessed raw logs are exported from the province each year, while B.C. receives fewer dollars and fewer jobs per tree cut than any

other province in Canada.^{14 15 16}

This has to change. We can set aside remaining old-growth forests while ensuring justice for workers and communities — but only if we change the way second-growth forests are managed and their resources are used.

Government can incentivize local production by curbing raw log exports and reinstating laws requiring timber be sent to mills in the same region it's harvested — both changes the BC NDP committed to while in opposition.

Massive public investments in additional processing and manufacturing so forest communities can produce more valuable products would provide a needed kick to rural economies. It would also hasten the transition to a green economy and away from fossil fuel extraction by creating more local jobs and reducing the distance needed to transport forest products. Additionally, government should aggressively pursue opportunities to return forest tenures to First Nations and local communities, who will inherently have more motivation to manage them for local benefits.

These would be big changes. But forests and forestry are in crisis and now is the time for boldness.

WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH RAW LOG EXPORTS?

While most of the trees cut down in Canada eventually go through mills here, a growing number of them are exported without any processing at all. The vast majority of these **raw logs** come from B.C. and in the last decade this practice has skyrocketed.¹⁷

For decades, unions representing mill workers and environmental groups have fought side-by-side against these job-killing exports. Sustainable forestry means protecting more forests and at the same time getting more value from the trees we are cutting by processing them locally.



Photos: raw log export ship in Alberni Inlet (WC Files), Upper Tsitika Valley (Louis Bockner) all Vancouver Island.

THE BEST OFFENCE AND DEFENCE AGAINST CLIMATE CHANGE

The climate crisis is the greatest challenge we've ever faced.¹⁸ If future generations are to have safety and security, we must radically transform every aspect of our society in a dauntingly short amount of time.

We're going to need all the help we can get, and we could get a lot from forests.

It's estimated one-third of global annual carbon emissions are absorbed by forests.¹⁹ Older forests with bigger trees can store more carbon, keeping it out of the atmosphere where it warms the climate and makes our world more dangerous.²⁰

Logging old-growth forests makes climate change worse.

Old-growth logging takes a lot of carbon. Building roads, cutting down the trees, transporting them to mills and processing them into wood and paper products — these processes cancel out most of the carbon these trees have stored over their lives. When forests are replanted the small trees growing back aren't able to store as much carbon as the old-growth, especially when they're more susceptible to drought or forest fires.^{21 22}

What's more, old forests slow down and store more water making them more resilient and less vulnerable to floods, droughts, wildfires and other impacts of a changing climate.^{23 24} So in addition

to all the damage it causes, old-growth logging reduces our ability to both limit climate change and withstand its impacts.

Wealthy countries like Canada have a responsibility to leave fossil fuels underground. And we have a responsibility to protect the most carbon-dense forests on the planet — for the benefit of everyone on it.

Unfortunately, we've gone in the opposite direction: **between clearcut logging, slash-burning and wildfires, forests in B.C. have emitted more carbon than they've absorbed since the early 2000s.**²⁵ In a tragic climate change feedback loop, record wildfires, which are intensified

by warming, now generate up to three times as many emissions as all of the province of B.C.²⁶

We must change the values we place on forests and manage them for climate resiliency. Rather than being income sources for logging companies, forests can be our most effective weapon and our sturdiest shield in the fight of our lives.



Photos: clearcut in Central Walbran Valley, Vancouver Island (WC Files), coastal giant salamander (Jared Hobbs).

TAKE ACTION

Join the movement to protect old-growth forests!

▶ Sign the petition to ban old-growth logging

▶ Email, meet with and tweet @ your provincial representative

Thousands of citizens are taking action and building the momentum to protect old-growth forests, honour Indigenous Rights and create a just transition to sustainable second-growth forestry.

Visit: WildernessCommittee.org/SaveOldGrowth to join!

Premier of B.C. ✉ premier@gov.bc.ca or ☎ 250-387-1715

B.C.'s forest minister ✉ FLNR.Minister@gov.bc.ca or ☎ 250-387-6240



Photo: Avatar Grove, Vancouver Island (Chris Istace).

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YES! I'LL SAVE ANCIENT FORESTS NOW!



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FORESTS FOR DECOLONIZATION

Every tree in North America grows on the territory of an Indigenous Nation whose peoples have utilized and managed forests for millennia.

As we fight to protect remaining old-growth forests and build a transition to sustainable forestry, we must keep strategies and plans focused on achieving justice for the original stewards of these lands.

Our governments can and should move immediately to fully implement the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. They must act to enshrine the right to free, prior and informed consent in all laws and regulations — including those for forestry. Next, they must take action to give back land and return forest tenures to First Nations, giving Indigenous peoples the freedom to look after these ecosystems based on their own values, knowledge and science.

This isn't just the right thing to do — because of the legal strength of Indigenous Rights, it's also the best chance to protect forests and their life-giving attributes.²⁷

Properly managed forests could provide so many benefits, right across the country. If we recognize and respect the rights of the peoples who've always lived here, these forests can also be part of the process of decolonization.

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CREDITS

Writing: Torrance Coste

Editing: Alex Hsuan Tsui

Art Director: Sue Fox

Graphic Design: Perry Sky Jack

Mapping: Geoff Senichenko

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