
Wild Times

Multigenerational ecosystems

by Joe Foy

I have been thinking lately about what type of community determination and vision is required to keep a multigenerational building project moving forward. A recent trip to Spain showed me that such projects are difficult almost beyond comprehension – but are not impossible.

The cathedral I visited in Toledo took two centuries to build and was finally completed in 1493. Despite war and calamity and a thousand other earth-shaking events, the cathedral continues to be part of life in the city, more than seven centuries after its original planners set the first stone.

From my home in New Westminster, I can go for a day hike amid trees older than that cathedral in Toledo. I walk among the ancient giants where I am often the only person there, leaving me in peace to contemplate the wonders of the universe and my place in it.

The local old growth trees are mere babies when compared to the Indigenous communities here. Continuous habitation along the Fraser River between Yale and Spuzzum stretches back at least 9,000 years.

Yet here, as in many places on Earth, the ecosystems we all rely on are unravelling due to out-of-control industrial exploitation. The flashing warning lights of impending disaster are the wild species that have always lived here and are now suffering steep declines in population.

A plan to bring one of those species back from the brink has got me thinking about those long-ago generational projects.

The plan by the government of Canada (which can be found online) is called the Amended Recovery Strategy for the Spotted Owl *caurina* subspecies (*Strix occidentalis caurina*) in Canada [Proposed] 2023.

There is now only one known wild-born spotted owl remaining in Canada. She lives in the old forests of the Fraser Canyon near that 9,000-year-old village site between Yale and Spuzzum. Once a population of 500 pairs of spotted owls lived in the old forests around here, but now, because of a century of out-of-control logging, the wild population has collapsed down to one last owl. There are over 30 captive-raised spotted owls in cages

in a facility in Fort Langley; two were recently released and there are plans to release more into the wild in the coming years. But those owls are going to need proper habitat to survive and grow their numbers.

The government of Canada's plan recognizes that too much old forest has been logged, and so it proposes setting aside some second growth forest corridors, between the remaining old growth patches, that will become old enough to be spotted owl habitat within 50 years.

Many of the people who drafted the plan to help spotted owls survive and be self-sustaining will not survive long enough to see it come to pass. I will not live another 50 years. This is a plan to save existing old forests, and to rebuild more old forests, that will require the support and hard work of present and future generations. Our kids and grandkids and great-grandkids are going to have to see this through, because many of us will be long gone before the job is done.

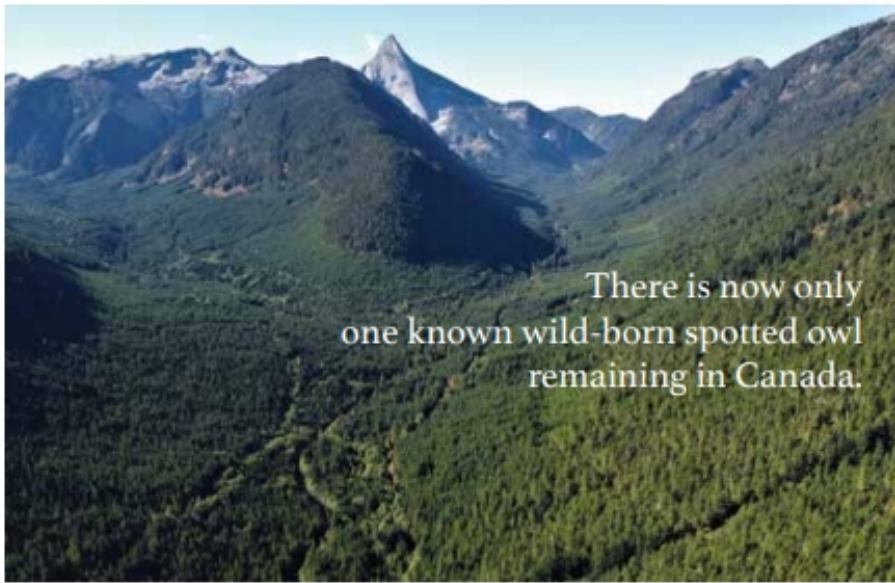
Sadly, BC has rejected Canada's plan and Canada has refused to override BC. Some forests in Canada's plan are being logged right now under permit from BC. These are discouraging developments.

But then, when all seemed lost – a surprising turn of events. On November 3, Canada, BC, and the First Nations Leadership Council announced the Tripartite Framework Agreement on Nature Conservation to double the amount of protected lands in BC by 2030, with funding of a billion dollars to make it all happen.

Will this new agreement work to restore endangered species like the spotted owl back to healthy numbers? That depends on how fast the signatories can put a stop to the rapid elimination of critical forest habitat that has been ongoing for far too long.

What will matter in the long run is how persistent we'll be in pushing our leaders to repair, rebuild, and preserve the ancient forests, home to the wondrous creatures that live here – no matter how difficult the work and how many generations it takes.

Joe Foy is the protected areas campaigner for the Wilderness Committee.



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