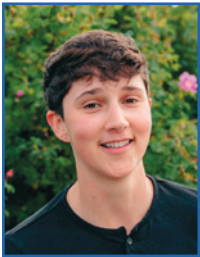




# OLD-GROWTH OLD LIES

## Resisting the Corporate Logging Narrative

### LET’S GET THE FACTS STRAIGHT



**Tobyn Neame**  
Forest  
Campaigner

**F**orests are much more than a uniform mass of trees. From the perpetually wet coastal ecosystems where the land rolls beneath carpets of moss and ferns, and nurse logs cradle new life, to patchworks of muskeg and lakes in the northern boreal where wind threads through needled branches of larch and spruce, forests are intricate networks that are shaped over millennia.

Forests that have never been degraded by logging or other industrial activity are rare. While the government of B.C. has not made data on all primary forests available, old-growth forests — stands 250 years or older in wetter forests and 140 years or older in dryer forests — only make up 11.7 per cent of the total land area.<sup>1</sup> When Europeans first arrived here, more than double of what remains now was old-growth forest and all forest was primary forest.<sup>2</sup>

But these forests weren’t ‘untouched’ — they had housed, clothed and fed people for millennia. First Nations relied on and contributed to these ecosystems in ways that enhanced rather than degraded them.<sup>3</sup> European colonization removed people from

the land to make way for industrial activity. Since then, logging companies have been targeting primary and old-growth forests disproportionately.<sup>4</sup>

Logging in B.C. has become a multi-billion-dollar industry dominated by a handful of corporations, in part because it has controlled the narrative around its impact on the forest.<sup>5</sup> This story changed from “logging is good for the economy” to “logging is good for the environment and climate” and “logging is good for communities

**Logging in B.C. has become a multi-billion-dollar industry dominated by a handful of corporations, in part because it has controlled the narrative around its impact on the forest.**

facing threats like fires and floods”.<sup>6</sup> This deliberate strategy to confuse and obscure has reduced the public’s ability to challenge the B.C. government’s status quo management.<sup>7</sup>

Let’s look at the recent timeline.

In 2019, the provincial government committed to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and signed its own Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (DRIPA) to advance reconciliation with First Nations.<sup>8</sup> In 2020, it released the recommendations of the Old Growth Strategic Review (OGSR), committing to a paradigm shift in the province, away from the prioritization of timber and towards management that equally recognizes cultural practices, biodiversity, carbon sequestration, recreation and more.<sup>9</sup> A key recommendation was to defer logging in the most at-risk old-growth forests to

provide the time needed to make this transition.

Five years later, most of the threatened old-growth remains open to logging, no major legislation or policy has been developed towards the promised paradigm shift and transparency around progress has been abysmal.<sup>10</sup>

Since the BC NDP’s narrow re-election in 2024, the new forest minister’s message has shifted from commitments to protect old-growth forests and prioritize biodiversity back to the promotion of industrial logging.<sup>11</sup> Assurance that the government understands the importance of conservation and respecting Indigenous Rights has given way to decades-old messages about guaranteed access to fibre and cutting red tape for logging companies. The minister has started using corporate talking points, even using US tariffs and protectionism to rationalize opening up more forests to logging.<sup>12</sup>

**We find ourselves in a tough moment, but those are the ones when our activism is most needed.**

The best tool against extractive industries is an informed and organized public. This paper aims to uncover the truth by delving into the science and economics of logging primary and old-growth forests, challenging the corporate lies head-on. In a conversation plagued by disinformation, it’s critical to get the facts straight.



Photo top: Sp̓o̓z̓ém Nation Territory (Joe Foy).  
Photo bottom: Pretty Girl Cove, Clayoquot Sound (Jacqueline Windh).



# WILDFIRES, LOGGING AND THE MYTHS WE'RE SOLD

Wildfires are devastating communities, taking lives and destroying ecosystems. While communities mourn and rebuild, logging corporations are in boardrooms discussing how to profit from the destruction.

One of the dominant stories pushed by corporations is that logging is the solution to wildfires, not the cause. The message goes like this: fewer trees mean less to burn, and old, protected, primary forests are packed with material ready to ignite.<sup>13</sup> It's a message that's been repeated enough times, you'll hear it everywhere, from Facebook comments to speeches by elected officials.<sup>14</sup>

But from an ecological standpoint, this logic doesn't hold up.

Climate change is intensifying wildfires and the logging industry has made things worse, not better.<sup>15</sup> Logging practices have disrupted natural fire cycles by suppressing small, frequent burns that help keep forests healthy.<sup>16</sup> After logging, corporations usually replant densely with just one or two tree species chosen for their profitability — trees that often burn more easily.<sup>17</sup> Add in the widespread use of herbicides to reduce fire-resistant deciduous plants, which aren't profitable to log, and the common result is more flammable forests.

The industry proposes selective logging to remove material that can burn, as well as more roads for fire fighting access. These sound helpful, but in practice, logging companies often harvest the most profitable trees, not the small debris that fuels fires, and more roads mean more chances for fires to start.<sup>18</sup>

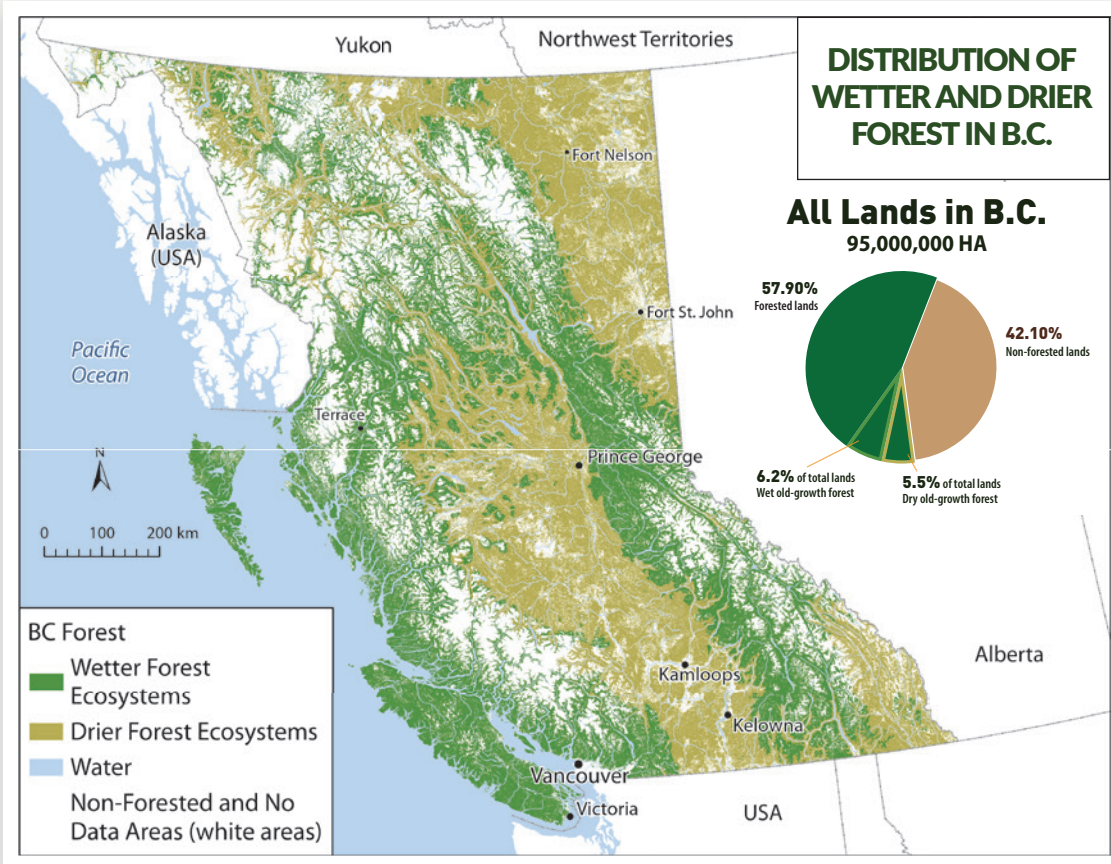
We already have tools that work — ones rooted in ecology and Indigenous knowledge. Since time immemorial, Indigenous communities have used cultural burning to care for the land and prevent devastating fires.<sup>19</sup> Colonial policies banned these practices, pushing them underground and disrupting the transfer of knowledge.<sup>20</sup> It's only recently that Western science has acknowledged cultural burning is one of the best ways to reduce wildfire risk and support healthy ecosystems.<sup>21</sup>

Cultural and prescribed burns reduce dry fuel, return nutrients to the soil, support fire-adapted species like lodgepole pine and help control pests.<sup>22,23</sup> Industrial logging doesn't replicate these benefits.

Where fire isn't a natural part of the ecosystem, other solutions make more sense. In wet old-growth forests, thick-

barked trees and moist underbrush naturally resist fire.<sup>24</sup> But when these forests are replaced with single-species plantations, their resilience vanishes.<sup>25</sup> Protecting old-growth forests and restoring degraded ones is wildfire prevention.

The idea that the logging industry will protect us from wildfires with sustainable, science-backed practices is a myth. The only solution is to embrace Indigenous fire stewardship, invest in true ecological restoration and protect remaining old-growth.



## Restoration vs. Reclamation

**Restoration is bringing an area back to its original ecological state, or as close as possible. It's about healing the land and its processes. Reclamation, on the other hand, just makes land usable again, often without restoring its ecological health. Logging companies often focus on reclamation.**<sup>26</sup>

# CLEARCUTTING AND THE RISING RISK OF FLOODS AND LANDSLIDES

The consequences of old-growth logging stretch far beyond the immediate loss of biodiversity and carbon storage. More communities are facing floods, landslides and other disasters that are becoming more frequent and severe in areas where forests have been logged.<sup>27</sup>

Healthy forests intercept rainfall, anchor the soil, and absorb and slow water runoff.<sup>28</sup> When clearcutting disrupts these systems, landscapes lose their ability to manage heavy rainfall. This leads to faster runoff, destabilized slopes and an increased likelihood of landslides and flooding.<sup>29</sup>

For example, clearcutting just 21 per cent of the Joe Ross Creek watershed northwest of Kamloops increased the size of floods by 84 per cent, a dramatic shift tied directly to the loss of forest cover.<sup>30</sup> During the atmospheric river event in November 2021, nearly half of the 1,300 landslides recorded were linked to areas that had been either logged or burned.<sup>31</sup> Specifically, 15 per cent of landslides began in logged cutblocks and another 14 per cent along logging roads.

These findings underline what

many communities already know: managing forests primarily for logging directly affects public safety. This creates especially hazardous conditions in steep, mountainous terrain, where much of the remaining old-growth is found. After clearcutting, it takes years for new vegetation to establish and for soils to gain structure.<sup>32</sup>

For communities downstream, the risks are real and growing. During the 2021 floods, thousands of residents in southern B.C. were evacuated as roads were washed out and homes were submerged.<sup>33</sup> Highways and railways were severely damaged, cutting off essential supply lines. Farmers lost crops and livestock.<sup>34</sup> Increased runoff from logged watersheds adds to the danger, as sediment washed down from these areas can clog rivers and weaken flood defences, turning a bad storm into a disaster.<sup>35</sup>

All this reinforces the urgency of protecting what little old-



Photo: Ghost Pass, B.C. (Paul Morgan).



Photo: West Fraser Road landslide and washout (Ministry of Transportation).

growth forest remains. **These stands aren't just beautiful or biologically rich, they're essential defences against climate change.** When they're cut down, everyone downstream pays the price.

As climate change brings more frequent and intense storms, the B.C. government must confront the cascading consequences of its forest policies.<sup>36</sup> Logging practices must be re-evaluated with water and community safety in mind. A shift toward sustainable forestry, Indigenous-led stewardship and ecosystem restoration isn't just about preserving trees, it's about protecting lives, infrastructure and the stability of entire watersheds.



Photo: Caycuse Valley clearcut, Vancouver Island (Torrance Coste).





# PROTECTING OLD-GROWTH IS A CLIMATE WIN

When it comes to tackling the climate crisis, old-growth forests in B.C. are one of the most powerful tools on Earth.<sup>37</sup> These ancient ecosystems serve a vital role in storing carbon and regulating the climate.

Old-growth forests are uniquely effective at storing carbon because they’ve had centuries to accumulate it.<sup>38</sup> Massive tree trunks, dense root systems and deep layers of soil act as long-term carbon reservoirs. The largest and oldest trees in a forest store the most carbon and accumulate carbon at higher rates than younger or smaller trees. In B.C., some of the biggest trees have been storing carbon for over 800 years.

The soil in old-growth forests contains layers of decomposed organic matter built up over millennia. When these forests are logged, much of that

stored carbon is released into the atmosphere.<sup>39</sup> It’s a climate cost that cannot be easily reversed.

Some logging industry lobbyists argue cutting down old-growth trees and replanting younger, faster-growing trees can offer a net carbon benefit over time.<sup>40</sup> This theory falls apart when you look at the full carbon equation. Logging old-growth releases an enormous amount of carbon up front and it can take well over a century for a replanted forest to offset that initial loss, if it ever does.<sup>41</sup> And while a small proportion of carbon is stored in the harvested wood, that storage is temporary, usually for no more than a century or two.

Second-growth forests rarely, if ever, achieve the same levels of carbon storage as old-growth

forests.<sup>42</sup> Replanted forests are often single-species stands grown for economic value and these tree farms don’t replicate the complex, multi-layered carbon dynamics of natural forests. They’re also more vulnerable to pests, disease, drought and fire, all of which are becoming more frequent in B.C. due to climate change.

Logging activities themselves contribute to greenhouse gas emissions through the use of heavy machinery, road building and soil disruption.<sup>43</sup> Even when wood products are manufactured and stored long-term, only a fraction of the carbon remains sequestered compared to what was originally held in the forest.<sup>44</sup>

The vast majority of old-growth here has already been

logged, and the rest is under increasing pressure. We can’t afford to gamble on the idea that replanted forests will one day catch up. The science is clear: nothing stores carbon like an old-growth forest and once it’s gone, we can’t get it back.



Photo: Eden Grove, Vancouver Island (Dave Hutchison).



Photo: Fire in Chilcotin region, B.C. (All Canada Photos).



Photo: Logging in Kwakiutl Territory (Em Hoffpauir).

# BUT WHAT ABOUT THE ECONOMY?

Forestry has long been central to the B.C. economy and identity. Logging companies have shaped a powerful story around their role in supporting rural life that’s become embedded in public perception. Slogans like “forestry feeds my family” appear on bumper stickers, lawn signs and even government messaging about the industry. But this image, while emotionally compelling, conceals a more complicated and increasingly troubling reality.

Despite their community stewards branding, many major logging corporations are now large, multinational firms that make decisions based on shareholder returns, not local needs. Mill closures, layoffs and automation have gutted jobs in forestry-dependent towns, while profits continue to climb for the industry

giants. Companies like West Fraser report billions in profits even as they shut down mills and kill hundreds of jobs across the province.<sup>45</sup>

Meanwhile, government employment grants and skills training programs meant to support economic transition and reduce dependence on forestry have fallen short of replacing the employment the industry once provided. According to the province, supports like the Forest Employment Program and the Employer Training Grant aim to help forestry workers “...move into better jobs”.<sup>46</sup> Critics argue these are band-aid solutions that do little to address the deeper structural issues affecting forestry communities.<sup>47</sup>

While workers face precarity, the broader decision-making structures around forest management also

reveal cracks. The province’s Forest Landscape Planning (FLP) tables, introduced to collaboratively manage forest ecosystems and guide old-growth protection, have been criticized for prioritizing industry voices and turning what should be nation-to-nation decision-making into yet another process diluted by corporate influence.<sup>48</sup>

True respect for Indigenous Rights requires centring Indigenous laws, governance systems and ecological knowledge, not just offering a place at a crowded table. The presence of corporate stakeholders often results in a balancing act that maintains the status quo: decisions shaped more by timber supply forecasts than cultural values and long-term ecological health.

The “forestry feeds my family”

narrative also distracts from the fact that many of the benefits from industrial logging no longer stay in the communities where the trees are cut. Raw log exports, outsourcing or automation of jobs in processing, and land-use planning without meaningful input from local residents or First Nations are common.<sup>49</sup> Forestry, as practiced today, feeds fewer families than ever before.

This disconnect between the messaging and reality shields the industry from deeper scrutiny, perpetuates myths about its indispensability and delays necessary reforms. Viable alternatives like Indigenous-led land management, community forestry and ecosystem restoration are often overlooked due to the industry’s powerful influence on public discourse and policy.

If B.C. wants a forestry sector that truly supports communities, we need to go beyond slogans and demand accountability from corporations that extract wealth while shedding responsibility. We need to restructure forest planning so Indigenous Nations are no longer just stakeholders, but final decision-makers. The days of letting the industry write the story, and the rules, must come to an end.



Photo: Giant tanker shipping raw logs from Nanaimo, B.C. (All Canada Photos).



Photo: Spotted owl territory being logged in Spó’zēm Valley (Joe Foy).





HOW WE CHANGE THE STORY

The movement to protect old-growth forests in B.C. has grown beyond environmental concern, into a fight for climate justice, Indigenous Rights and long-term community well-being. Public awareness of the value of these forests has surged. But industry messaging continues to cloud the conversation and government action remains sorely limited. To move forward, we need to sharpen our strategy and build power in ways that align with long-standing frameworks for social change.

Intact ancient forests aren’t just a collection of individual trees; they’re climate stabilizers, water regulators, biodiversity reservoirs and cultural homelands. Logging them doesn’t just degrade and destroy ecosystems, it contributes to economic uncertainty in communities that were promised prosperity from forestry. It worsens the severity of wildfires and increases the risk of climate disasters like floods and landslides. Status quo clearcutting can also undermine First Nations governance, especially when land-use planning processes continue to prioritize corporations’ perspectives.

Logging old-growth and primary forests is not a single-issue problem, it’s a flashpoint that reveals the failures of extractive economies, colonial land management and weak political will. Corporations have



Photo: Old-growth march, Victoria, B.C. (WC Files).

branded themselves as lifelines for rural communities, investing in slogans like “forestry feeds my family”, while automating, reducing and offshoring, and lobbying hard for continued access to the remaining old-growth.

To be effective, our movement to protect old-growth needs to do more than respond to crises and call for reform. We must recognize where we are in the arc of social change and act accordingly. Social movement activist Bill Moyer’s framework offers a guide: build a strong public base, focus on concrete demands and apply strategic pressure that exposes the gap between public values and political decisions.<sup>50</sup> In B.C., we are in the midst of this process: public support for protection is high, yet political and corporate resistance remains strong.

That’s why co-ordinated action matters. We’ve already seen powerful moments, from grassroots blockades to Indigenous-led conservation initiatives

and cross-sector coalitions. What’s needed now is sustained organizing that keeps attention on what’s at stake, holds leaders accountable to their promises and refuses to let industry write the future of the forests.

Old-growth logging is not inevitable, it’s a political choice.

Protecting these forests will help support and safeguard clean water, climate stability, local resilience and First Nations rights. And it will send a broader message that the land is not simply a resource to be extracted, but a relationship to be respected.

The path forward lies not just in defending what’s left, but in building a future where the health of forests and communities are no longer treated as opposites. That’s the real narrative shift we need and we have the power to make it happen.



Photo: Felled big tree in Koksilah Valley (WC Files).

TAKE ACTION

The B.C. government has been weak-willed against the logging industry instead of taking action for forest ecosystems — but we won’t be. It will take unrelenting pressure to get the change we need to see, but with your voice, we can keep that pressure building.

Now is the time to call on Premier David Eby to fulfill the commitments his government made.

Demand Premier Eby:

- 1. Implements all 14 recommendations of the Old Growth Strategic Review
- 2. Acts as a champion for forest protection instead of a bystander to the destruction



Photo: United for Old-Growth March and Rally, Victoria, B.C. (Tim Matheson).

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CREDITS

Writing: Tobyn Neame  
Editing: Frény Fernandes  
Art Director: Sue Fox  
Mapping: Geoff Senichenko  
Graphic Design: Kelvin Yip

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☎ 604-683-8220 or 1-800-661-9453 📠 604-683-8229  
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