



GREAT BEAR RAINFOREST OVERVIEW

FEBRUARY 2012



Recent intense logging in the southernmost part of the Great Bear Rainforest underscores the need to increase conservation sooner rather than later. Without full implementation of Ecosystem-Based Management key species like Northern Goshawk remain at risk.



The BC government needs to speed up the process

Canada is home to the Great Bear Rainforest which together with Haida Gwaii represents the largest intact tracts of coastal temperate rainforest on the planet. The Great Bear Rainforest stretches along British Columbia's coast and is the traditional territory of First Nations who have lived in this rainforest for thousands of years. At 6.4 million hectares in size, it is an area larger than Switzerland.

Covering less than one percent of the planet's landmass, temperate rainforests are globally rare and today few areas remain unlogged. A spectacular, largely intact forest ecosystem, the Great Bear Rainforest is also known as 'Canada's Amazon' for its dense web of natural life including towering ancient trees, grizzly bears, salmon, wolves, and the rare white spirit bear.

After years of protests and market campaigns aimed at protecting the region from industrial logging, the British Columbia (BC) government of then-Premier Ujjal Dosanjh, in April 2001, committed to preserving the region. After years of land use planning¹ and negotiations, a historic agreement for conservation and community well-being was reached² in February 2006, between the provincial government of then-Premier Gordon Campbell, First Nations governments, three environmental organizations and most of the major logging companies in the area.

In March 2009 all parties committed to new milestones to increase conservation and improve human well-being in coastal communities. Some of these milestones are seriously delayed, creating an urgent need to speed up the implementation process. Premier Christy Clark must demonstrate leadership by committing to wrapping up the full implementation of the Great Bear Rainforest Agreements.

1. http://archive.ilmb.gov.bc.ca/slrp/lrmp/nanaimo/central_north_coast/index.html

2. Place of Power, <http://tidescanada.org/wp-content/uploads/files/tc-place-of-power.pdf>

FOREST ETHICS

GREENPEACE



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The Kermode Bear or "Spirit Bear" is a subspecies of the Black Bear that only exists in the Great Bear Rainforest. Photo Andy Wright.

The world is watching

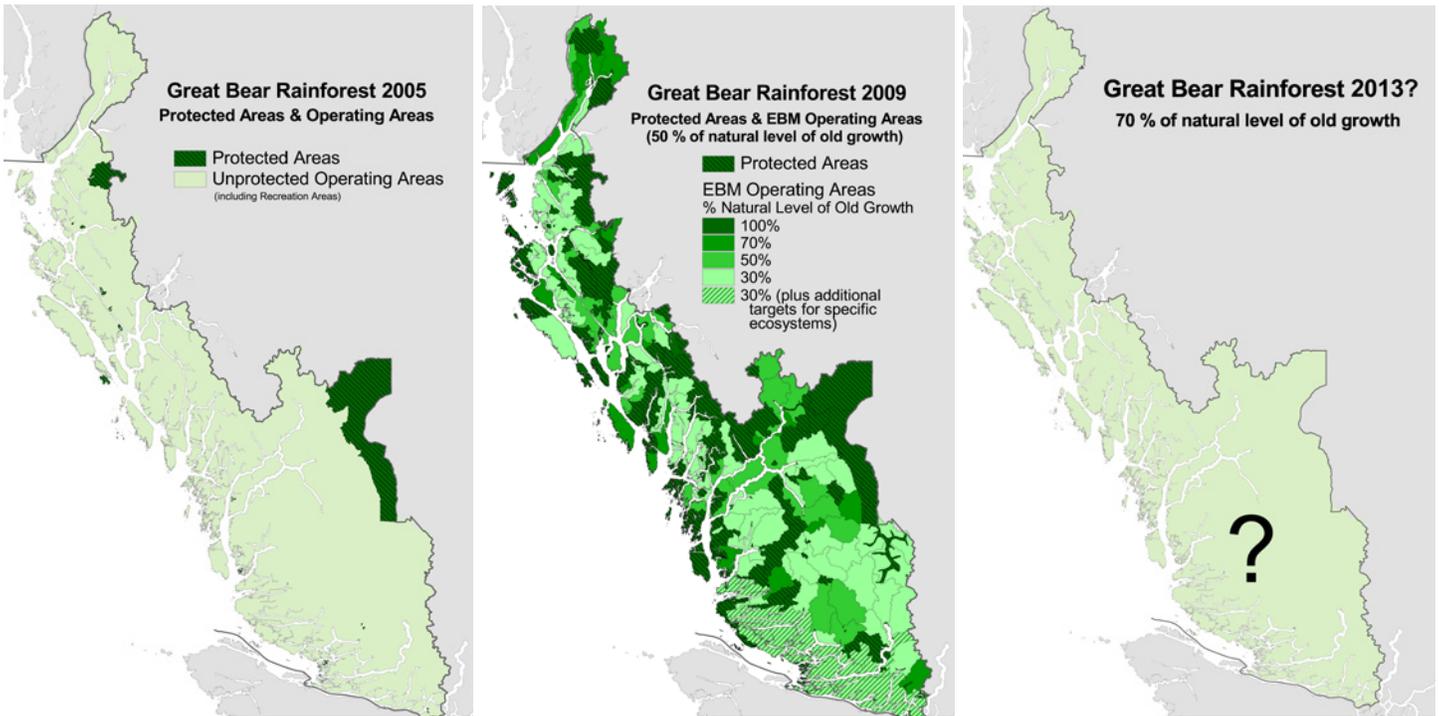
Globally there is increasing concern about the ongoing loss of natural forests and their vital importance for species habitat and carbon storage. On March 31, 2011 the new Premier of BC, Christy Clark, received a unique letter³ which showed that people around the world care about the fate of the Spirit Bear just as much as they care about orangutans and panthers. The letter was sent from tropical rainforest groups from the Amazon, Democratic Republic of Congo and Indonesia. They urged Premier Clark to fully implement the 2009 Agreements.

The letter was remarkable in that environmental organizations in countries of the South are urging an industrialized country to step up to the plate and do the right thing in our own back yard. It was a timely reminder that many around the world continue to watch whether the partners in the agreement succeed in delivering on the promises made. The Great Bear Rainforest Agreements are considered a model that other regions can learn from, but which needs to be a success today rather than tomorrow.

3. See April 1, 2011 press release http://www.savethegreatbear.org/news/category/press_releases

"Protection of the temperate rainforest of British Columbia and in particular, the Great Bear Rainforest, can serve as a model for all of us. The world is waiting for solutions of this kind."

- Amazon Conservation Alliance - Peru,
the Gorilla Organization - Democratic
Republic of Congo, Friends of the Earth
- Indonesia.



Under 2009 transitional logging regulations, 50 percent of the rainforest of the region is off-limits to logging. The outstanding conservation step requires setting aside 70 percent of the natural level of old-growth across all forest types throughout the region.

March 31, 2009: Key Milestones achieved and next steps

The 2006 Agreements had four components with key milestones: legislation of more than 2 million hectares protected from logging; new lighter touch logging regulations applied outside of protected areas; support for conservation-based economies in coastal communities and strengthened First Nations involvement in decisions affecting their traditional territory.

On March 31, 2009 environmental groups along with the BC government, industry and First Nations announced a new multi-year plan to achieve the concurrent goals of achieving and sustaining ecological health⁴ and improving human well-being in coastal communities.

4. The Coast Information Team science experts established that low risk to ecological integrity is attained when 70% or more of the natural levels of old forest are maintained. <http://www.citbc.org/index.html>



Eagle and Bear. Photo Andy Wright.

2006 milestones achieved

Protected areas legislated

2.1 million hectares protected from logging in Conservancies, Parks and Biodiversity, Mining and Tourism Areas, covering one third of the Central and North Coast.

Lighter touch logging implemented

New, transitional, logging regulations require the maintenance of 50% of the natural level of old-growth of all forest ecosystems across the region.

Funding for Conservation Economy

A \$120 million funding package for conservation management and ecologically sustainable business ventures in First Nations territories.

New governance and decision-making

First Nations and the BC government have developed a new Government-to-Government relationship, and mechanisms for collaborative stakeholder involvement.

Status of 2009 milestones

Reserve Network

Mapping of rainforest areas and essential habitat of key species to be set aside as reserves was to be in place by the end of 2009, but remains incomplete.

Further amendments to logging regulations

Current transitional logging regulations to be reviewed and amended to achieve the goal of low ecological risk for the rainforest.

Building the conservation economy

New initiatives to help transition from an economy based on resource extraction to a diversified conservation economy with a high quality of life in coastal communities underway.

Ongoing collaborative planning

Provincial and First Nation governments, environmental organizations and logging companies continue to engage in collaborative planning to meet milestones. Government-to-Government process is being refined.

Key milestones achieved March 2009

1. New protected areas legislated

2.1 million hectares (5 million acres) in the North and Central Coast⁵ - one third of the region - are now protected from logging in Conservancies⁶, Parks and Biodiversity, Mining and Tourism Areas.⁷ In specific terms:

- 115 Conservancies with a total area of 1,360,000 hectares were legislated between 2006 and 2008
- 21 Biodiversity, Mining and Tourism Areas with a total area of 300,000 hectares were legalized in January 2009
- 18 Class 'A' parks were previously established with a total area of 443,000 hectares

On Haida Gwaii, after legislation of new conservancies in 2009, half a million hectares or half of Haida Gwaii's area is now protected.

Conservancies differ from other parks because they prioritize the protection of biological diversity and First Nations values related to social, ceremonial and cultural uses. First Nations are able to pursue low-impact economic activities that do not undermine ecological values in conservancies. Commercial logging, mining, and hydroelectric power generation are prohibited in these areas (except local run-of-river projects to service nearby communities).

Biodiversity, Mining and Tourism Areas (BMTA) contribute to the conservation of species by limiting the range of land uses within these zones. Commercial timber harvesting and commercial hydro-electric power projects are prohibited. Other resource activities and land uses, like mining and tourism, are permitted, subject to existing regulations and legislation and if they can meet ecological and cultural objectives of BMTAs.

In addition to Conservancies and Biodiversity, Mining and Tourism Areas there are 1.3 million hectares designated in three large areas as Grizzly Bear Management Areas. Hunting is prohibited in these areas, but is still allowed in Conservancies and other protected areas.

5. A map that shows the protected areas of the region can be found at <http://www.savethegreatbear.org/resources/category/maps>

6. Conservancy legislation: http://www.leg.bc.ca/38th2nd/3rd_read/gov28-3.htm

7. http://www.ilmb.gov.bc.ca/slrp/lrmp/nanaimo/central_north_coast/biodiversity.html

2. Lighter touch logging based on Ecosystem-Based Management implemented

Outside of protected areas, logging companies, the provincial government, and First Nations governments have made a commitment to a new approach to forestry.⁸ This approach considers ecological and First Nations community requirements to determine what must be left in the forest before deciding where and how much to log.

The transitional logging regulations made legal in March 2009 require that:

- the amount of old-growth forest that can be logged across the landscape, in each watershed, and in each ecosystem type is restricted; over the entire region 50 percent of the natural level of old-growth forest of each ecosystem type has to be maintained - or restored where forests have been heavily logged. This so called “moderate risk management” translates into an additional 700,000 hectares of forest set aside from logging.
- estuaries, streams, wetlands, and lakes are afforded more protection with increased forested buffers
- large portions of grizzly bear habitat are being maintained
- First Nations cultural features and monumental cedar for First Nations use are being maintained

3. Human well-being initiatives in First Nations communities underway

The intent of Ecosystem-Based Management (EBM) in the Great Bear Rainforest is to achieve and sustain both ecological health and improve human well-being in communities.⁹ A key component of the Great Bear Rainforest Agreements and a major contribution towards a higher quality of life in First Nations communities is being achieved through Coast Opportunity Funds.¹⁰ This \$120 million financing package to fund conservation management projects and ecologically sustainable business ventures for First Nations was sparked by environmental groups and funded through private philanthropic donations and funds from the governments of British Columbia and Canada.

8. Ecosystem-Based Management (EBM) is an approach to management that results in low risk to ecological integrity (or values), while at the same time promoting human well-being. The Ecosystem-Based Management Handbook can be found on the website of the Coast Information Team: <http://www.citbc.org/index.html>

9. The EBM handbook defines EBM as “an adaptive approach to managing human activities that seeks to ensure the coexistence of healthy, fully functioning ecosystems and human communities. The intent is to maintain those spatial and temporal characteristics of ecosystems such that component species and ecological processes can be sustained, and human well-being supported and improved.”

10. <http://www.coastfunds.ca/>

This conservation package is divided into two funds to be managed and disbursed through the Coast Opportunity Funds:

- \$60 million for the Economic Development Fund, to support economically viable and environmentally sustainable businesses. To be disbursed during the next 5-7 years;
- \$60 million for the Conservation Endowment Fund, a permanent endowment which will fund grants each year into perpetuity for conservation management in First Nations traditional territories in the Great Bear Rainforest.

As part of the collective efforts to implement EBM on the ground the three environmental organizations together with Coastal First Nations – Great Bear Initiative have facilitated EBM Learning Forums in different communities along the coast, focusing on wide-ranging topics like management planning for protected areas, conservation financing and the new transitional logging regulations. Sierra Club BC also supports local First Nations Guardian Watchman programs to ensure that all communities have ‘eyes and ears’ out in their territories to monitor resource use and the state of the environment. ForestEthics has undertaken some pilot projects related to development of non-timber forest products, and Greenpeace is exploring the possibility of piloting an EBM monitoring regime with an individual First Nation on their traditional territory.

The three RSP organizations are also supportive of new First Nations forestry tenure arrangements that support the implementation of EBM, and First Nations access to resources and revenue.

Supporting First Nations to improve community well-being

For more than a decade the three environmental organizations have worked closely with groups of First Nations whose traditional territories make up the Great Bear Rainforest in order to support implementation of the Great Bear Rainforest Agreements. The environmental organizations assisted in securing \$120 million in funding to seed a new conservation economy for coastal First Nations and have provided support for new initiatives to help transition away from an economy solely based on industrial logging. It is recognized that moving towards the final conservation step of 70% protection of the natural range of old-growth will require BC government leadership to enable further improvements to the community well-being of coastal First Nations.

Environmental organizations and logging companies seeking solutions

ForestEthics, Greenpeace and Sierra Club BC have been working with coastal forest companies BC Timber Sales, Howe Sound Pulp and Paper, Catalyst Paper, Interfor and Western Forest Products to support the implementation of the Great Bear Rainforest Agreements. Together, these groups form the Joint Solutions Project (JSP). The JSP is working through a set of benchmarks to implement Ecosystem-Based Management, including voluntary operating measures during this period of transitional logging regulations. The three logging companies achieved Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification for approximately 850,000 hectares in the Great Bear Rainforest in January 2010.

JSP is currently working to identify the best possible ways to reach the target of setting aside 70 percent of the natural level of old-growth forest, while at the same time allowing for appropriate logging operations in suitable places at an ecologically sustainable scale.

Logging laggard changing course?

Until recently, the only major logging company that had not actively supported the new Ecosystem-Based Management conservation model was TimberWest. This has been of particular concern because this company is operating in the south of the Great Bear Rainforest which is already the hardest hit and least protected of the region.

The company came under new ownership in June 2011 and recently “committed to working toward the full implementation of Ecosystem-Based Management”¹¹ in their Great Bear Rainforest tenure. We expect TimberWest to follow through on its stated commitment.

11. Letter to ForestEthics, Greenpeace and Sierra Club BC, October 14, 2011.



Interim habitat conservation measures seriously delayed

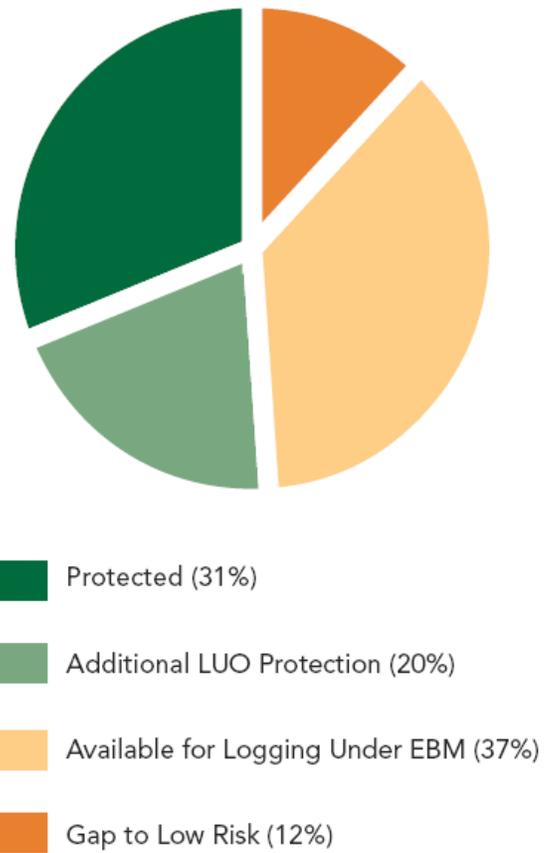
A key commitment in the 2009 Great Bear Rainforest Agreements was to map and set aside a network of forests and critical habitat for five species of conservation concern outside of protected areas. This reserve network was scheduled to be in place by September 2009—over two years ago. The five species are Grizzly Bear, Marbled Murrelet, Northern Goshawk, Mountain Goat and Coastal Tailed Frog.¹² This crucial piece of work has still not been completed. This delay raises particular concern for Marbled Murrelet and Northern Goshawk who are already facing a critical lack of habitat, particularly in the southern part of the Great Bear Rainforest. Analysis of Northern Goshawk habitat indicates that not enough is being set aside for this key species in parts of the region.

12. Slipping through the Cracks, the Fate of Focal Species in the Great Bear Rainforest: http://www.savethegreatbear.org/files/reports/Mar_2010-Slipping_through_the_cracks.pdf

State of forest protection in the Great Bear Rainforest

In the 1990s, only 7 percent of the Great Bear Rainforest was set aside in protected areas. Today 33 per cent of the region (2.1 million hectares) is protected from logging in Parks, Conservancies and Biodiversity, Mining and Tourism Areas. The transitional logging regulations enacted in March 2009 ensure that at least 50 percent of the natural level of old-growth forest is off-limits to logging over the entire region. But that is not enough. The science is clear that low ecological risk in the Great Bear Rainforest will only be achieved when 70% or more of the natural levels of old forest are being maintained. As the pie chart to the right illustrates, the gap to low risk today is 12 percent of the forest area in the region.

Percentages of forest area in the Great Bear Rainforest: in protected areas (31%); area off limits to logging through 2009 Land Use Objectives (LUOs) (20%); remaining gap to meet low ecological risk (12%); and area available for forestry operations under Ecosystem-Based Management (37%).



Gray Landscape Unit in TimberWest tenure, South Central Coast, Great Bear Rainforest, June 2011. The biggest conservation gap in the Great Bear Rainforest is in the South. Only 12 percent of the South Central Coast are in protected areas. Today most of the rainforest in the south of the region has been converted to second growth forest. For example, within TimberWest tenure only 10 percent of the productive forest growing in low elevations remains as old growth forest. Photo: Garth Lenz, with aerial support by Lighthawk.



Andy Wright

Other Threats

There remain other threats to the Great Bear Rainforest: the Enbridge Northern Gateway Pipelines proposal; possible lifting of the oil tanker moratorium off the coast; oil and gas exploration; open net salmon farms; and trophy hunting of bears. These will have to be addressed to preserve this ecological treasure for future generations.

The Great Bear Rainforest Agreements and climate change

The implementation of the Great Bear Rainforest Agreements has been accompanied by new information about the threats of global warming and the urgency to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

The full implementation of the Agreements provides a model to address mitigation (reducing carbon emissions from forests) and adaptation (allowing species space to adapt to global warming). Achieving management to low ecological risk as soon as possible will be key to reducing the cumulative stress for ecosystems and to protecting one of the best carbon storehouses on the planet.¹³ Broad support for achieving this goal will be influenced by First Nations' access to new incentives for reduced logging, like credible, conservation-based carbon credits.

13. Ecosystem-Based Management in the Great Bear Rainforest, Defense for Climate and Species http://www.savethegreatbear.org/files/reports/Mar_2010-Slipping_through_the_cracks.pdf

Outlook

The Great Bear Rainforest Agreements of 2006 and 2009 represent an international milestone in large-scale biodiversity conservation. However, while having achieved substantial and measurable conservation gains, the work of all parties remains unfinished. The Agreements need to be fully implemented as soon as possible. The same concerted and collaborative focus by the B.C. Government, First Nations, the logging industry and environmental groups that got us to where we are today will be required to achieve the overarching and interconnected goals of ecological health, and high quality of life for the communities of the Great Bear Rainforest.

Take Action

Speeding up full implementation of the Great Bear Rainforest Agreements will require the commitment and leadership of the BC government to finish the job to protect this ecological gem. 2012 is the big year for the Great Bear Rainforest and we need your help. Visit our website www.savethegreatbear.org to stay tuned and pledge your support when the time has come. You can also find us on Facebook at "Save the Great Bear Rainforest."

About Us

ForestEthics, Greenpeace and Sierra Club BC are working together as Rainforest Solutions Project to promote conservation options and economic alternatives to industrial logging in the Great Bear Rainforest.

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