

2021/22 Estimates Debate

Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development

Issue: Old Growth Implementation and Timeline

Recommend Response:

- The panel report *A New Future for Old Forests* was developed in early 2020 and is comprised of detailed and complex recommendations. The recommendations go far beyond just old forest management, with many applying to forestry as a whole.
- As the panel members indicate, the challenge with old growth in BC has been many decades in the making, and it will require time to consider each of the recommendations and in a manner that involves Indigenous Nations, industry, environmental organizations, local governments and stakeholders.
- Since receiving the report, we've been working on the analysis and implications of the recommendations and preparing for the significant amount of work needed over the next several years to address the 14 recommendations of the panel.
- We knew from the start this was going to be challenging, but no one could have foreseen the COVID-19 global pandemic and the extra challenges it has created.
- Our first task – and this was recommended by the panel – is to engage with Indigenous Nations on deferrals. We did this with our first deferrals last year, and we continue to work towards engagement with First Nations and with stakeholders.
- Many recommendations will take time to act on. The old growth panel recognized this, that's why their recommendations were prioritized as near, mid or long-term. It is important to recognize, the timelines given were to begin work in these areas, not to complete it. Some recommendations make take many years to fully implement.
- The independent panel reviewed a topic that is very technical and inter-connected to all sectors and communities in B.C.
- Most importantly the independent panel suggested that the full involvement of Indigenous Nations and leaders is required, and that this should guide the timeline.
- We are following the panel's priorities and are on track with its recommended timeline.
- This is one of several high priority topics for government. But foremost is ensuring the health and safety of British Columbians with our COVID response and vaccination plan, and economic recovery from the pandemic's impacts.

Key Facts:

- The Old Growth Strategic Review was submitted to Minister Donaldson April 30, 2020 including 14 recommendations covering broad areas of forest policy
- The report included a timeline of 3 years to get all 14 recommendations "started". This timeline was pre-COVID 19.
- On November 26, 2020 the Premier directed me in a mandate letter, to continue to "make progress on implementing the recommendations of the Old Growth Strategic

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Review in collaboration with Indigenous leaders, labour, industry, and environmental groups to protect more old growth stands”.

- The mandate also includes a commitment to “lasting and meaningful reconciliation” with Indigenous Peoples and actions to protect forest industry communities and jobs.
- Top priorities for the near future include:
 - Recommendation #1: Engagement with Indigenous Nations
 - Recommendation #5: Improving public information
 - Recommendation #6: Additional deferrals
 - Recommendation #7: Address compliance issues where they may occur

Date Revised: April 8, 2021

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Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development

Issue: Old Growth Deferrals

Recommend Response:

- Government recognizes that building a consensus on management of old growth forests has been a challenge for more than 30 years.
- Old growth forests are valued for their economic contribution to the forest industry, tourism and jobs, and for their habitat, conservation, social and cultural values.
- In July 2019, Government announced a strategic approach to guide the future of old growth management. That approach included an independent two-person panel that engaged British Columbians and resulted in a recommendation report to government.
- Government has committed to implementing all recommendations provided by the independent panel.
- The strategic review by the panel did not say there needs to be a moratorium on old growth logging, and as such, we are not considering one.
- We do recognize that deferrals are important where there is immediate risk of biodiversity loss, and that deferrals must be considered through engagement with Indigenous Nations.
- Work is underway to identify areas of the province where additional deferrals are needed to protect areas that are at risk of irreversible loss, in addition to 9 areas identified in September 2020. Some of the recommended criteria in the report is ambiguous and may require ground-truthing prior to final decision.
- A key recommendation in the report, recommendation #1 states *Engage the full involvement of Indigenous leaders and organizations to review this report and any subsequent policy or strategy development and implementation*. Indigenous engagement is critical but will take time.
- Economic analysis will be an important consideration given the importance of forestry in BC.
- It is important to recognize the report was prepared prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, and timelines and the work ahead must be cognisant of the impact on the provincial and Indigenous governments.
- The deferrals that were implemented in September we based on areas where we already had a deep understanding with Indigenous Nations on the areas. That is why we were able to act so quickly.

Key Facts:

- Nine temporary deferral areas implemented in September 2020 to demonstrate commitment to Recommendation #6. These areas were known to the provincial government and to Indigenous Nations as areas under government-to-government discussions on forestry activities.

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- There are high levels of pressure from ENGOs, and many Indigenous Nations who expect additional deferrals. Some Nations may be opposed to deferrals as they have greater involvement in forestry in their territories.
- New deferrals will result in loss of government revenue, and jobs, negative impacts on communities, risk timber pricing and lumber trade negotiations, and may not align to Indigenous nation interests
- The nine initial deferral areas were designated under Part 13 of the *Forest Act*. A broad Designated Area was established followed by a Ministerial Order applied to the old growth stands that prohibited harvesting of the old growth component.
- The Designated Areas totalled 353,000 hectares and the Ministerial Order applies to 196,000 hectares of old forest within the areas. Second growth forestry is allowed.
- These deferrals are in place for 2 years, allowing us time to develop a new strategy for old growth.

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