

Old Growth Strategic Review Recommendations (2020) At a Glance Summary

From the April 2020 Report, *A New Future for Old Forests*

Summary

This document provides rationales and implementation advice for each of the 14 recommendations outlined in the “*A New Future for Old Forests: A Strategic Review of How British Columbia Manages for Old Forests Within its Ancient Ecosystems*”. The purpose of this document is to provide First Nations, stakeholders, and provincial government staff with clear and consistent information from the Old Growth Strategic Review report, to inform future engagement sessions and the development of an Action Plan that addresses these recommendations.

Recommendation 1: Indigenous Involvement

Engage the full involvement of Indigenous leaders and organizations to review the report and any subsequent policy or strategy development and implementation.

Rationale:

Indigenous involvement is essential to the successful and a sustainable implementation of all recommendations.

- The province has legal consultation and accommodation obligations with respect to Indigenous rights which have been affirmed through the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (DRIPA).
- There is overwhelming support for Indigenous involvement in forest management.
- Historic Indigenous commitment to environmental stewardship and taking care of the land.
- Indigenous communities depend on the natural resources of their traditional territories for sustenance and livelihood and are becoming more active in all aspects of the forest sector.

Implementation advice:

- As soon as practicable, engage provincial Indigenous governments in developing a policy response to these recommendations and an approach for involving stakeholders.
- In collaboration with Indigenous leadership, establish and develop:
 - a. Provincial guidelines for implementation.
 - b. Criteria for planning relationships.
 - c. Planning units that conform to local Indigenous group’s territories, while still adhering to ecologically and administratively practical planning units, and
 - d. Mechanisms for local Indigenous groups to meet provincial targets and standards for biodiversity protection, ecosystem representation, etc.
- Establish support programs for Indigenous groups to build their land/forest management expertise and capacity.
- Focused training for government staff to support government to government relationships and meet provincial responsibilities under these relationships.

Recommendation 2: Prioritizing Ecosystem Health and Resilience

Declare the conservation and management of ecosystem health and biodiversity of British Columbia’s forests as an overarching priority and enact legislation that legally establishes this priority for all sectors.

Rationale:

- Conserving and managing old forests are cornerstones of the province's biodiversity conservation strategy, but that strategy has underperformed in several areas due to competing pressures.
- BC's biodiversity conservation strategy has been constrained by requirements to not unduly reduce the supply of timber.
- Scientists project that under our current management approach, much of the province, especially the areas covered with productive forest, will be in a high biodiversity risk situation soon.

Implementation advice:

- The province should declare that managing for ecosystem health and minimizing biodiversity risk are key priorities and create overarching legislation that applies to every sector.
- The principles guiding this legislation would include: an Indigenous government-to-government foundation; science-based; monitoring, evaluation, and regular updates; planning and oversight involving a range of interests; and accountability, particularly to the public.

Recommendation 3: A Formalized Three-Zone Forest Management Framework

Adopt a three-zone forest management framework to guide forest planning and decision-making.

Rationale:

- Our current system lacks clarity about which forests should be managed for which goals and values.
- Currently there are second growth forests being managed intensively for timber, but we still try to manage them as part of an ecosystem to reduce biodiversity risk. We have forests that are protected for ecosystem biodiversity reasons but are experiencing landscape ecosystem health problems because of our no-touch policy.
- Partitioning the forest into three distinct and overarching management zones, with specific goals and guidelines for each partition would help focus and improve management efforts.
- Having well defined categories with clear goals will help eliminate confusion, provide greater certainty to industry, and increase transparency for the public.

The following categories have been recommended in the OGSR: (The names can change but the substance should remain relatively the same)

1. Protected: These are forests (such as those currently in parks) that will be largely left alone, although there may be some management activities within them to maintain ecosystem health and manage risk from fire, disease or insects depending on their designation and associated jurisdiction.
2. Converted: These forests have already changed or intend to change from their natural state to intensive management areas as industrial timberlands. Although these lands do not have all the same attributes as old and ancient primary forests, they can still provide important ecosystem services in addition to timber (i.e., water, recreation, carbon sequestration, wildlife, tourism, etc.). Conversion areas may have multiple objectives compatible with industrial timber production.
3. Consistent: These forests are managed for ecosystem health and biodiversity, while also supporting economic activity, including timber harvesting, by using planning and practices that result in forest landscapes that are reasonably consistent with the attributes of the original forests and forest landscapes.

Implementation advice:

- The designation of these areas should be through a collaborative process under the umbrella of a Provincial-Indigenous government-to-government framework.
- The zones should be formally recognized through legislation, with mandatory transition plans to implement changes on a scheduled basis, specific to the management unit(s) involved.

- The framework should have clear rules about if and when partitions can contribute to another partition's goals (e.g., protected areas contributing to ecosystem health) or when an area can move from one partition to another).
-

Recommendation 4: A More Inclusive and Stabilizing Approach to Governance

Adopt a more inclusive and stable governance model that gives local communities and stakeholders a greater role in forest management decisions that affect them.

Rationale:

- BC is managing ecosystems that often take thousands of years to form with policies that can change based on election outcomes. Having governance grounded in long-term stable model that is bound by province-wide targets helps overcome these politically driven cycles.
- BC needs a new forest management governance system that is: more collaborative, more committed to long-term approaches that respect ecosystem timeframes; more grounded in the long-term vision of local communities and Indigenous Nations, and better harnesses the collective forest management experience and expertise.
- Managing forests to achieve a spectrum of community and provincial interests requires an understanding that benefits from local knowledge, continuity, and accumulated wisdom. Involving more people in the process of informing and making decisions increases the opportunity to retain and pass on knowledge.

Implementation advice:

- The transition should include a redefinition of planning areas considering existing administrative boundaries, Indigenous territories, ecosystem boundaries and administrative practicality.
- The new governance system should include the establishment (through legislation) of local forest boards for each planning area that include a range of groups, including (potentially), scientific experts, land planners, general public, resource professionals (foresters, biologists, ecologists, hydrologists), and others. Responsibilities of local boards may include supporting forest management goal setting, implementation, monitoring and public reporting related to their planning area.

Recommendation 5: Public Information

Provide the public with timely and objective information about forest conditions and trends.

Rationale:

Many local governments, organizations, and individuals do not trust information regarding the condition of BC's forests and feel it is biased, regardless of its source.

- People want to be better informed about old forests but are not sure where to go for accurate and objective information that is free from political influence.
- The polarization of views regarding how best to manage BC's forests are often based on misleading and biased information. Although those views may never be fully reconciled, the level of conflict can likely be reduced, and the quality of dialogue increased, with an objective presentation and better understanding of the facts.
- Having a more informed public can foster increased and more meaningful public engagement and bring more wisdom and stability to the forest management process.

Implementation advice:

- Consider information collection and reporting structures such as expanding the role of the Forest Practices Board, an ombudsperson-type role, an independent scientific panel, and/or a new office dedicated to public reporting.
- Information sharing formats could include local and regional scale or value-themed reports (e.g., biodiversity) and periodic provincial forest condition reports.

Recommendation 6: Immediate Response to Ecosystems at Very High Risk

Until a new strategy is implemented, defer development in old forests where ecosystems are at very high and near-term risk of irreversible biodiversity loss.

Rationale:

- There are areas of the province where failure to act now could lead to the permanent loss of rare or unique ecosystem components contained in old and ancient forests.
- Many of these areas are iconic stands that have numerous economic, ecosystem services and intrinsic values.
- A system of new, more sustainable, and effective approaches to managing biodiversity and other old-forest values will take some time to fully develop and implement.

Implementation advice:

- Government should lead a process to identify each of these areas as soon as practicable.
- Areas to consider for short-term deferrals include any BEC variant with less than 10% old forest remaining today, any BEC-Landscape Unit combination that has less than 10% old forest today, ancient forests (e.g., forests >500 years on the coast and wet ICH, forests > 330 years in ecosystems with higher disturbance intervals); and areas with a >20m site index.
- Implement a strategy to address these deferred areas and report back to the public within a short time.

Recommendation 7: Compliance with Existing Requirements

Bring management of old forests into compliance with existing provincial targets and guidelines for maintaining biological diversity.

Rationale:

- The province has guidelines, legal orders and targets for protection of old forest, however these targets are minimums and many of the existing targets already reflect a negotiated compromise where a high risk to biodiversity was accepted in favor of economic benefits.
- There are regions of the province that are below existing targets and are at higher biodiversity risk than current policy allows. Failure to meet minimum targets increases the risk of moving into high biodiversity risk situation and likely irreversible losses.
- The province's reputation as a forest land steward is at risk.
- An accurate status update on progress to targets and management of OGMAs is essential to future decision-making.

Implementation advice:

- Complete an evaluation for all priority regions by the end of 2020 and the entire province by the end of 2021.
- Where evaluation shows non-compliance, take the necessary steps to bring the area into compliance as soon as practicable.

Recommendation 8: Monitoring and Evaluation

Establish and fund a more robust monitoring and evaluation system for updating management of old forests.

Rationale:

- There is little value in setting objectives and targets if they are not monitored. Not only can we not know if they are being complied with, we can't know if they are effective.
- Currently, there is no formal monitoring plan for old growth management, even though guidelines have been in place for more than two decades.
- Evidence shows that we are very likely out of compliance in some areas and may have already exceeded originally intended risk thresholds in many more.
- Sound, science-based management requires monitoring and evaluation of results.

Implementation advice:

- Adopt a formal management discipline, such as adaptive management or continuous improvement as the underpinning to monitoring, evaluation and updates.
 - Ensure the system includes dedicated research, monitoring, links to operations, regular updates, and objectivity.
 - Establish a dedicated organization or build onto an existing program like the Forest and Range Evaluation Program (FREP).
 - Update the management system for old forests using the latest research and conduct regular effectiveness audits.
 - Integrate government and external experts into this system to support information gathering and analysis, evaluation, and ongoing system improvements.
 - Use monitoring and evaluation information to enhance public reporting.
-

Recommendation 9: Setting and Managing Objectives and Targets

Establish a standardized system and guidance that integrates provincial goals and priorities to local objectives and targets.

Rationale:

- The current management system for old forests is not achieving its original intent.
- Many areas have different methodologies and rules that do not work in their local situations.
- The original guidance for the management of old forests (Biodiversity Guidebook (1995) and the Landscape Unit Planning Guide (1999)) were not fully and consistently implemented, and since they were published, some ecosystems have been heavily disturbed, circumstances have changed due to climate change, and risk to biodiversity has increased.
- There is a need to decide whether to update or replace these guidebooks and to determine whether the focus will be on biological diversity, old forest (and the various values and objectives assigned to them) or both.
- Many managers feel the OGMA approach is not working and that many OGMA's are ineffective and sometimes managed inconsistently with natural forest processes.

Implementation advice:

Create consistent reporting, planning and operational processes and requirements across the province, such as:

- a. A scientific and technical panel to provide oversight and advice.
 - b. Regularly scheduled guidance reviews and updates, and
 - c. Ongoing professional development for practitioners, managers, and decision makers.
-

Recommendation 10: Update Biodiversity Targets and Guidance

Update the targets for retention and management of old and ancient forest.

Rationale:

Managing for ecosystem health requires an updating of retention targets and improving our guidance for retention and management of old forests.

- Scientific research shows that under the current old forest policies and practices, almost all of the province's most productive forest ecosystems are, or very shortly will be, in a high biodiversity risk scenario, with the rest of the ecosystems also moving in that direction. This will result in lower ecosystem resilience, further loss of species and compromised ecosystem services in many areas.
- Our current management guidelines are 25 years old and do not reflect today's reality. Targets must be revised to incorporate the latest research and practices and recognize the current impacts to old forests.
- New targets need to consider conservation and management of very old and ancient primary forests that have not experienced significant stand-replacing events (repositories of biota and process we may not be aware of understand). These are extremely important buffers against species extinction, climate change, and lost future opportunities.

Implementation advice:

- Re-evaluate biodiversity risk assessments and identify priority areas to reflect revised commitments to ecosystem health and managing biodiversity risk.
- Develop classifications, management targets and guidelines recognizing the importance of very old or ancient forests.
- Address connectivity and multiple scale objectives.
- Where there isn't enough old forest necessary to meet updated targets, incorporate a recruitment strategy.
- Conduct short and long-term analysis of socio-economic benefits and costs related to proposed changes.
- Involve local communities in decisions and choosing options.
- Adopt a standard set of provincial guidelines for OGMA's under the new classification system.

Recommendation 11: Inventory and Old Forest Classification

Improve the mapping and classification of old forests to recognize multiple values.

Rationale:

- The current system of old forest classification, based on age class must be refined because it does not recognize the complexity in old forests, the range of values they contain or how they should be managed to protect those values.
- The mature and over-mature age classes, which were created from a timber perspective, are too broad and therefore inadequate for managing for genetic or biological diversity.
- The current system does not allow for the classification of forests according to the specific values that we may want to protect. (e.g., recreation, vs critical habitat vs biodiversity).
- OGMA's and management strategies for old forests rely on older, lower quality mapping. Some areas have updated, but many areas haven't updated their old forest strategies to reflect the new information.

Implementation advice:

- Work with inventory and habitat mapping specialists and experts in the management of old forests and classification to develop a new classification system for old forests.
- Create additional, more narrowly defined Natural Disturbance Types (NDTs).
- Refine OGMA names to reflect objectives (e.g., biodiversity, iconic, ancient, recreation, spiritual, etc.).
- Create additional new age classes (e.g., 250-500, 500-1,000 and 1,000 plus).
- Work with industry to acquire inventory information for public use.

- Refine mapping of all old forest using the new classification system, LIDAR, ground-truthing and other means.
-

Recommendation 12: Innovative Silviculture Systems

Create a silviculture innovation program aimed at developing harvesting alternatives to clearcutting that maintain old forest values.

Rationale:

- The clearcut silviculture system is the most common and the most cost-effective silviculture system. However, it is also the most contentious system because it often significantly compromises many other values on the land (e.g., biodiversity, tourism, Indigenous sustenance use, etc.) and many ecosystem services.
- There is frustration that this system results in clearing landscapes and compromising values (particularly water supply) with little or no local return or compensation.
- There is a desire to use alternate silviculture systems that mimic natural disturbance patterns or enhance ecosystem services (e.g., water retention, visual, and habitat).
- Managing for ecosystem health and low biodiversity risk by mimicking the NDT can support ecosystem health at a stand and a landscape level and preserve the integrity of many ecosystem services.
- Using alternate systems that manage for multiple values builds public trust.
- Designing, operationally testing, measuring, and reporting on innovative silviculture systems will increase the options available to forest managers.

Implementation advice:

- Collaboration of industry, operations practitioners, and scientists to develop cost-effective alternative silviculture systems.
 - Partnerships with existing research organizations (e.g., FP Innovations, universities, non-profits), forest licensees, other governments (e.g., Forestry Canada and Indigenous), BC Timber Sales program, and other potential public and private sector collaborators.
 - Test and demonstrate silviculture systems and encourage new practices.
 - Make proven silviculture systems the default requirement for each NDT and/or ecosystem type and provide clear guidance on variations if required due to local constraints.
 - Acknowledge the increased costs associated with implementing alternate silviculture systems and ensure these costs are captured and reflected in the provincial appraisal system.
-

Recommendation 13: Transition Planning at the Provincial and Local Levels

Developed and implement new policies and strategies for the management of old forest through mandatory provincial and local transition plans that define, schedule, and monitor the process.

Rationale:

- Past attempts at changing the management system for old forests have fallen short because they lacked, comprehensive implementation, appropriate resourcing, and effective public accountability mechanisms.
- Without comprehensive implementation plans we could fall back to old habits, further compromise ecosystem health, continue to impact other forest values and create more negative socio-economic impacts.
- Transition requirements vary depending on how much primary forest currently exists, economic conditions and land-use decisions.

Implementation advice:

- Develop and formally approve a comprehensive implementation plan as part of the overall provincial old forest policy and strategy.
 - Immediately engage Indigenous leadership at the appropriate provincial and local level as well as various government, scientific, operational, and planning experts in each of these transitions.
 - Recognize the unique ecological, social, economic, and timber supply circumstances of each management unit and develop customized local plans collaboratively with the most directly affected communities.
 - Provide for local transition plans in legislation, including as a consideration in AAC determinations.
 - Assess local economic diversification opportunities, options, and related timelines.
 - Review the stumpage system to evaluate the true direct and indirect costs and effects of silviculture systems that are carried out and its effect on our ability to meet biodiversity targets and other established old forest objectives.
 - Explore a land acquisition fund to enable the purchase of land or covenants to retain or recruit old forest in ecosystems at high biodiversity risk, or otherwise of high public interest.
-

Recommendation 14: Transition Support for Communities

Support forest sector workers and communities as they adapt to changes resulting from a new forest management system.

Rationale:

- Areas in BC are already facing significant economic restructuring because they are at or near the point of diminished timber supply.
- The importance of the forest sector to the economy and social well-being of the province is diminishing but still important. However, there are still a significant number of communities that are highly dependent on this sector and any transition away from a timber-based economy will have serious consequences and possibly even impact the survival of those communities.
- Forest-dependent communities that will bear the brunt of broader societal decisions that affect the sector and their livelihood will need substantive support to meaningfully mitigate the effects of those consequences and develop other options while they still have choices.
- Through innovation, many areas can continue to benefit from timber sector opportunities and perhaps expand them in the future. Areas will also have non-timber forest-based economic options that can be realized, which will add to long term sustainability.

Implementation advice:

- Socio-economic planning and funding to support economic diversification research, bridge financing for businesses, workforce transition, conservation funding (e.g., carbon, biodiversity) etc.
 - Develop and implement policies and programs aimed directly at:
 - a) promoting local manufacture, especially for value-added specialty and high-value products, and
 - b) generating sustainable economic benefits from forest-focused tourism (e.g., improved access, facilities and interpretation for visiting big trees and unique ecosystems – similar to Cathedral Grove) and other non-timber forest businesses.
-