



B.C. appoints expert panel on further old-growth forest preservation

24 June 2021

The B.C. government is calling in experts to add to the province's old-growth forest strategy, with more areas to be deferred from logging this summer.

Forests Minister Katrine Conroy announced the five-person panel Thursday, including Gary Merkel, a professional forester from the Tahltan Nation in Northwest B.C. who co-authored the province's old growth strategy review in September 2020.

Conroy said [the panel](#) will provide technical advice and improve data and mapping of B.C.'s vast forests, but it will not be determining what is harvested. That will continue to be determined by discussions with Indigenous communities who claim title to the areas.

"The panel is giving us advice but it's not making decisions," Conroy said June 24. "The decisions will be made in those government-to-government discussions."

The Huu-ay-aht First Nation released a statement Thursday, objecting to the latest environmental group demand for a halt to all old-growth logging in its territory around Port Alberni, saying it gives "little consideration to the economic and social needs of first nations." The response comes two weeks after the Huu-ay-aht, Pacheedaht and Ditidaht First Nations issued their own [declaration](#) of sovereignty over the forest resource, which has been targeted by roadblocks and subject to a court order allowing approved logging to go ahead.

"For the past 150 years, we have watched as others have decided what is best for our lands, water, and people, the statement says. "The Hišuk ma cāwak Declaration brings this practice to an end."

The B.C. government approved additional deferral areas for old-growth forest June 9, accepting the declaration and designating areas in the Central Walbran Valley and the Fairy Creek watershed. Premier John Horgan said logging of second-growth forest will continue in the region while the Indigenous groups with land title develop their own plans.

Conroy released a 20-point forest policy paper on June 1, which sets a target to increase the Indigenous share of annual allowable cut on Crown land to 10 per cent. Horgan, whose home constituency has been the target of protests since last summer, said deferral areas are more than 2,000 square kilometres in addition to vast parks and protected areas established over the years.

"It's hard work, and it involves not going back to our colonial past and dictating to Indigenous communities what they can and cannot do."

Source: <https://www.pqbnews.com/business/b-c-appoints-expert-panel-on-further-old-growth-forest-preservation/>