

The Great Bear Rainforest

Everything has changed

Photo courtesy of Moresby Consulting Ltd.

The Great Bear Rainforest is one of the largest tracts of temperate rainforest in the world—64,000 square kilometres along British Columbia's Central and North Pacific Coast.

Fifteen years ago, the region was the focus of an international controversy over the logging of old-growth forests.

In 2000, everything began to change when forest companies and environmental organizations came together through the Joint Solutions Project, and agreed to work collaboratively toward ecosystem-based management, a unique and innovative approach to conservation and development.

This led to a landmark agreement in 2006 involving First Nations, the BC government, environmental groups, forest companies and coastal communities. In May 2007, the World Wildlife Fund bestowed the Gift to the Earth Award—its highest honour—to the participants in the Great Bear Rainforest process for environmental leadership and contribution to global conservation.

Since that time, Joint Solutions Project participants have dedicated significant effort and resources to reach their common goal of achieving the two key objectives—low ecological risk and a high degree of well-being for local people and communities.

Highlights of the 2006 landmark agreement

- ✓ Agreed upon timeline of March 2014 for full transition.
- ✓ Full protection from logging in one third of the planning area.
- ✓ Logging will take place on only 16% of the forest area and is subject to some of the most stringent environmental rules in the world.
- ✓ A new government-to-government relationship between First Nations and the BC government.
- ✓ A legally designated system of ecosystem-based management designed for the Great Bear Rainforest that seeks, over time, to secure low ecological risk to the forest and high degrees of human well-being.

ECOSYSTEM-BASED MANAGEMENT

Ecosystem-based management is an adaptive, systematic approach to managing human activities that seeks to ensure the co-existence of healthy, fully functioning ecosystems and human communities. By definition, it is an adaptive process that evolves to reflect new understanding and knowledge.

THE JOINT SOLUTIONS PROJECT

The Joint Solutions Project is an initiative of a group of coastal forestry businesses (BC Timber Sales, Catalyst Paper Corp., Howe Sound Pulp & Paper, Interfor and Western Forest Products) and environmental organizations (ForestEthics, Greenpeace and Sierra Club BC).

Ecosystem-based management is a process, not an event.

INVESTING THE TIME TO GET IT RIGHT

Ecosystem-based management is a process, not an event. Following two years of discussion between the BC government and First Nations, the Province ratified the Great Bear Rainforest land use agreements in 2006. Three years later in 2009, a legal framework was established to support transition to ecosystem-based management, with all industry and environmental groups agreeing to fully implement the new system by March 2014. This timeframe provides the time required to plan, improve knowledge, design new management techniques, achieve social objectives, and further develop consensus among First Nations, the BC government and stakeholders.

Forest companies involved in the process have been working with ecosystem-based management since 2004, and are committed to reaching full implementation by March 2014 or sooner, if the ecological and human well-being objectives are both being met.

Changes in the practice of forestry on the ground are already in place, including:

- ✓ **LESS HARVESTING:** a 35% drop in the allowable annual cut between 2001 and 2009.
- ✓ **SMALLER HARVEST AREAS:** in 1996, 42% of cutblocks were less than 10 hectares in size; today more than 70% are less than 10 hectares.
- ✓ **MORE OLD FOREST:** the intent is to secure 70% representation of old-growth forest across the entire planning area over time.
- ✓ **MORE PROTECTION** of wildlife habitat, streams and wetlands.

MORE PARKS, LESS LOGGING

The forested area in the region shifted from timber harvesting to protection once the agreement was signed. Before 2006, very little was protected. However, three years later, the protected forest area was twice the size of the area available for logging.

When the coast land use planning began in 1997, the allowable annual cut was about 4.8 million cubic metres—substantially lower than 5.4 million cubic metres in the 1980s. It is expected to continue to drop until it reaches 2.7 million cubic metres, enough to maintain a viable commercial industry, one that can support local communities and supply quality products for customers around the world.

A fraction of one per cent of the forested area could be logged each year.

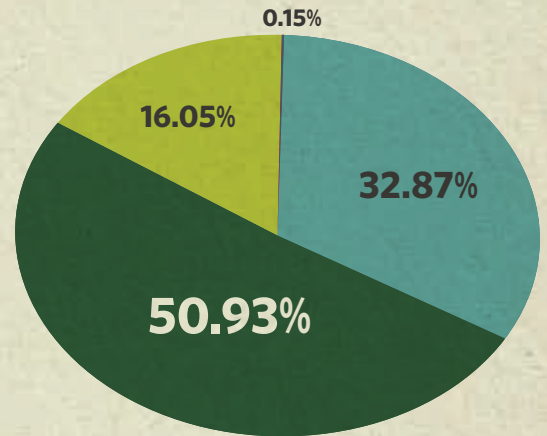
The coast agreement led to a 350% increase in parks and conservancies, and legal designations for 137 new protected areas were completed in 2009.

Currently, one-third of the forest in the planning area is fully protected, and industry has agreed to operate in just 16% of the remaining forested area over the next 250 years.

Potentially, up to 5,300 hectares—a fraction of one per cent of the forested area—could actually be logged each year.

EBM PLAN AREA LANDBASE

- Natural Forest
- Forested Park & Protected
- Managed Forest* for next 250 years
- Area Potentially Harvested Each Year



* Logging will take place on only 16% of the forest area and is subject to some of the most stringent environmental rules in the world.

PROTECTING MORE SPECIAL AREAS

Since the BC government first set aside parkland on the coast in 1938, the area protected remained basically static until 2006. The coast agreement led to a 350% increase in parks and conservancies, and legal designations for 137 new protected areas were completed in 2009.

PARKS, CONSERVANCIES & PROTECTED AREAS IN THE EBM PLAN AREA: 1938 TO PRESENT

INCREMENTAL FORESTED PARK AREA ESTABLISHED CUMULATIVE FORESTED AREA IN PROTECTED STATUS

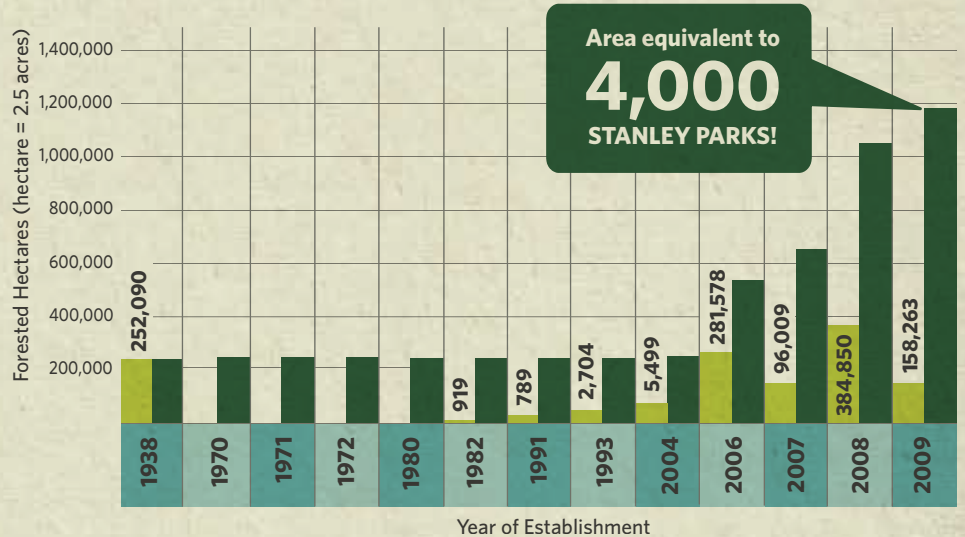
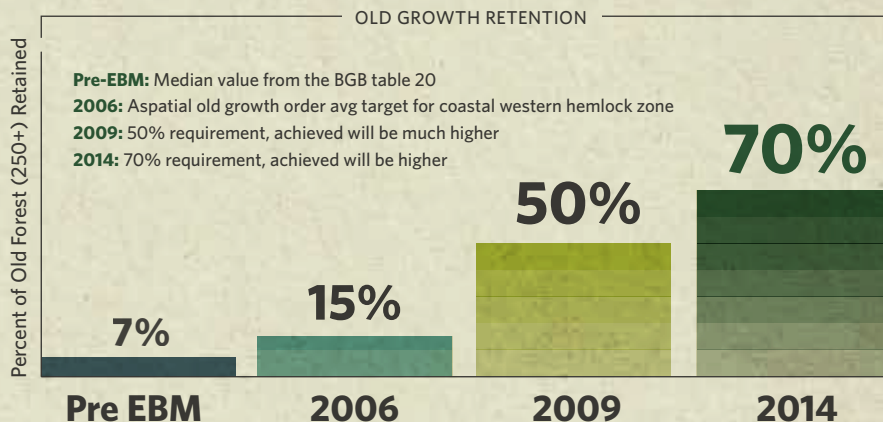


Photo courtesy of Moresby Consulting Ltd.

MAINTAINING OLD FORESTS

While a healthy forest will have a range of naturally occurring stand ages, older forests provide specialized habitats that play a significant role in maintaining biological diversity. On the BC coast, a stand is considered old growth when most of the larger trees are more than 250 years old. When full ecosystem-based management is in place by 2014, the intent is to secure 70% representation of naturally occurring old forest across the entire area over time.

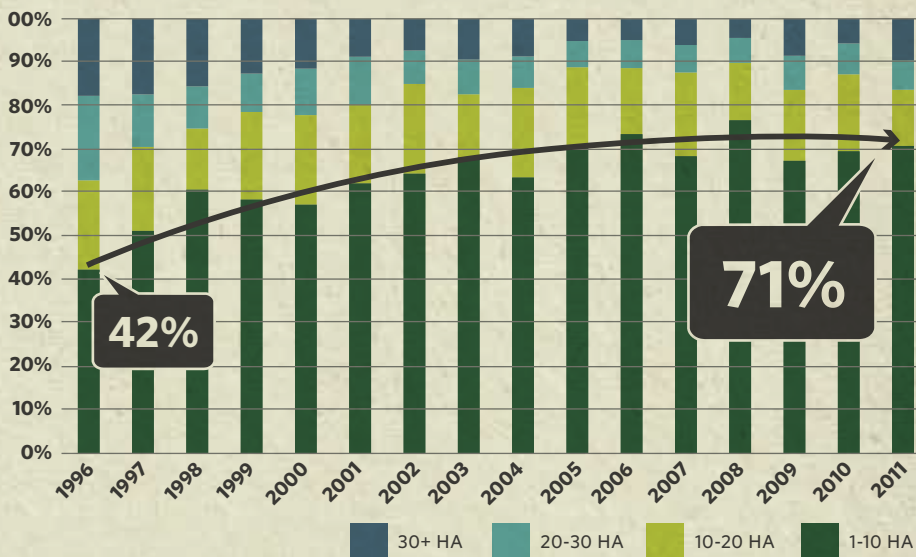
OLD GROWTH RETENTION REQUIREMENTS



MOVING TO SMALLER HARVEST AREAS

Resource professionals plan harvesting to meet the unique needs of each site, including habitat, scenery, water resources, old-growth areas and other values. The move to ecosystem-based management has led to smaller harvest areas that are more conducive to coastal ecosystems. In 1996, 42% of the blocks in the Great Bear Rainforest were less than 10 hectares in size; today more than 70% are less than 10 hectares.

EBM PLAN AREA — FREQUENCY OF BLOCK SIZE



Industry is committed to full implementation of ecosystem-based management earlier if appropriate solutions can be found sooner.

Photo courtesy of Moresby Consulting Ltd.



RESPECTING THE NEEDS OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Human well-being is partially defined as maintaining a viable forest industry. In 2009, a harvest rate of 2.7 million cubic metres—40% below historic levels—became a benchmark for full implementation of EBM.

The Great Bear Rainforest is the size of Ireland, with a population of just 22,000 people. It is the traditional territory of 27 First Nations.

Commercial logging on a small percentage of the land base has provided employment and economic development for communities as diverse as Prince Rupert and Bella Coola for more than 100 years. Nearly 5,000 direct jobs in forestry, silviculture and manufacturing are supported by timber harvesting in the Great Bear Rainforest. These jobs are located in communities within the Great Bear Rainforest, Vancouver Island and the Lower Mainland.

The 2006 agreement reflects a commitment to managing resources on the basis of sound science while maintaining a viable forestry industry to provide social and economic benefits for people who live and work in the area.

Ultimately, any solution reached between the forest sector and environmental groups will have to be approved by both the BC government and First Nations who have the ultimate decision-making authority for both land use decisions and social choices to support human well-being.

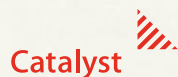
CLOSING IN ON THE SOLUTION

The forest industry is committed to finding the best solution in the Great Bear Rainforest, one that addresses the unique coastal environment and the needs of local people and communities.

Ecosystem-based management is a complex, multi-year process based on flexibility and adaptive management. It must be scientifically and operationally sound, and the outcome must be approved by the BC government and First Nations who both have a strong interest in ecological integrity and viable commercial forestry in the region.

Top foresters, biologists and other professionals are working to a deadline of March 2014 to develop a world-class model for managing this high conservation value forest region. While this deadline was accepted by all participants, industry is committed to full implementation of ecosystem-based management earlier if appropriate solutions can be found sooner.

In the meantime, nearly one third of the entire area is fully protected and just 16% of the forest is available for commercial harvesting. Less than one per cent is actually harvested each year—under some of the most stringent forest practices in the world and all of it meeting third-party forest certification standards.



For more information visit:
www.coastforestconservationinitiative.com