



# THE GREAT BEAR RAINFOREST

## A VISION REALIZED

February 2016

The Great Bear Rainforest is a spectacular part of the world. It is home to many First Nations communities. Together, the B.C. and First Nations governments along with environmental organizations and several forestry companies worked hard to move from conflict to a shared outcome rooted in 15 years of collaboration and negotiation. The vision for Ecosystem-Based Management committed to in 2006 is now established with legal and policy agreements as of February 2016.

Eighty-five per cent (3.1 million hectares) of the remote wilderness region's coastal temperate rainforests will be permanently off-limits to industrial logging. The remaining 15 per cent (550,000 hectares) of the forest will be subject to the most stringent legal standards for commercial logging operations in North America.

The plan solidifies First Nations shared decision-making with the province over land use in their traditional territories and contains measures to improve the well-being of their communities.

The conservation and human well-being initiatives, which were set into motion in the 2006 Great Bear Rainforest Agreements are widely acknowledged as a global model for collaborative solutions to help resolve conflict over land use, indigenous rights and for large-scale conservation.

### The Region

The Great Bear Rainforest is 6.4 million hectares (15 million acres). Over half of the region) is covered by forest ecosystems (3.6 million hectares). It stretches from British Columbia's Discovery Islands northwards to the Tongass Rainforest of Alaska. Together with the islands of Haida Gwaii it represents the largest tracts of intact temperate rainforest remaining on the planet. It is the traditional territory of 26 First Nations who have lived in this rainforest for thousands of years.

Covering less than one per cent of the planet's landmass, temperate rainforests are globally rare and today few areas remain unlogged. The Great Bear Rainforest is a remarkable example of this forest type, hosting a dense web of natural life, including towering ancient trees, orcas, salmon, wolves, grizzlies, and the unique white-furred black bear, known as the Spirit bear.



*All photos by Jens Wieting*





## The History

### From Conflict to Collaboration to Solutions

The 1990s was a period fraught with conflict over industrial logging of old-growth rainforest. Known as “The War in the Woods,” the conflict between First Nations concerned about the fate of their unceded traditional territories, environmental organizations and the forestry industry resulted in protests and international market campaigns. These resulted in major wood and paper buyers cancelling their contracts or steering clear of products from the region. Customers of forest products demanded change. This created the willingness among the stakeholders to collaboratively work towards solutions with decision-makers, namely the provincial and First Nations governments.

In 2000, a coalition of environmental groups (Rainforest Solutions Project – RSP)<sup>1</sup> and an alliance of forestry companies (Coast Forest Conservation Initiative – CFCI)<sup>2</sup> formed the Joint Solutions Project (JSP) to resolve conflict over logging in the Great Bear Rainforest.

In 2001 the forest companies deferred logging in 100 key intact valleys and environmental groups suspended “do not buy” market campaigns in order to allow space for the development of independent scientific recommendations and multi-lateral land use planning.



A parallel conflict resolution process was also emerging between the provincial government and First Nations whose communities were disenfranchised from decision-making and economic access to their territories. The majority of First Nations communities in the region are part of two strategic alliances: Nanwakolas Council and Coastal First Nations–Great Bear Initiative. As decision-makers in a government-to-government relationship, First Nations and the province focused on reconciliation, shared decision-making, implementation of Ecosystem-Based Management and revenue generating opportunities.

In addition, in the mid-2000s an independent science team conducted the most comprehensive analysis ever undertaken of these globally significant forests. They developed the Ecosystem-Based Management Handbook, to guide forest management in achieving low ecological risk to the forests and high levels of human well-being—the two goals of the 2006 Agreements. This cutting-edge work was a global first.

Over the last ten years the JSP played a key stakeholder role, developing recommendations for the B.C. and First Nations governments for conservation and forest management. These led to conservation and human well-being milestones in 2006 and then 2009 (the latter resulting in 50 per cent of the region’s rainforest being set off-limits to logging) and to final implementation of Ecosystem-Based Management in 2016. One major company, TimberWest, with tenure in the very southern part of the region did not support the Agreements until very late in the process. More endangered rainforest could have been saved if they had changed course sooner.

<sup>1</sup> Rainforest Solutions Project is formed of Sierra Club BC, ForestEthics Solutions and Greenpeace (as a project of Tides Canada Initiative)

<sup>2</sup> Coast Forest Conservation Initiative is an alliance of BC Timber Sales, Catalyst Paper, Howe Sound Pulp and Paper, International Forest Products and Western Forest Products





## Final Ecosystem-Based Management Implementation Milestones

Ecosystem-Based Management (EBM) in the Great Bear Rainforest is one of the most comprehensive conservation and forest management achievements of this scale on Earth. The goals of Ecosystem-Based Management are twofold: low ecological risk (maintain 70 per cent of the natural levels of old-growth across all rainforest types) and high levels of human well-being. The measures set a new global model for forest conservation that strengthens indigenous rights, increases wildlife and ecological resilience, and keeps carbon stored in old-growth forests as a result of avoided logging. The conservation model sustains (and in some cases aims to restore) the long-term health for all types of forest ecosystems in the region. The science-based goal agreed to by all parties, to maintain 70 per cent of natural levels of old-growth ecosystems across all forest types, will be achieved for most ecosystems and exceeded in many. The plan puts an area the size of Nova Scotia under a new legal, scientific and principled standard for maintaining forest and wildlife health, and the health of the communities that depend on them, into the future.

### Protected Areas

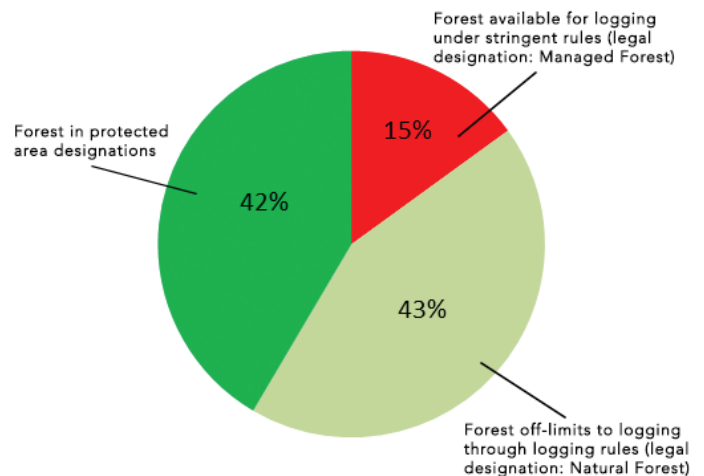
2.4 million hectares<sup>3</sup>, approximately 38 per cent of the region, protected from logging in conservancies, parks and Biodiversity, Mining and Tourism Areas<sup>4</sup>. (8 new protected areas added in 2016)

### New Forest Management System

- 85 per cent of the forested land base of the Great

Bear Rainforest (3.1 million hectares, including protected areas) will now be off limits to industrial logging, equal to an area the size of Vancouver Island.

- The 15 per cent (550,000 hectares) that can be logged will be subject to the most stringent commercial logging legal standards in North America.
- 40 per cent reduction in logging from 2006. Logging will be reduced to 2.5 million cubic metres per year for the next 10 years, and on a conservation trajectory after that.
- Transparency - logging companies will have to report out publicly on an annual basis how they are achieving the legally required conservation targets.



<sup>3</sup> A map that shows all parks, conservancies and biodiversity areas of the region can be found at <http://www.savethegreatbear.org/resources/category/maps>

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.ilmb.gov.bc.ca/slrp/lrmp/nanaimo/central\\_north\\_coast/biodiversity.html](http://www.ilmb.gov.bc.ca/slrp/lrmp/nanaimo/central_north_coast/biodiversity.html)

## First Nations Community Well-being

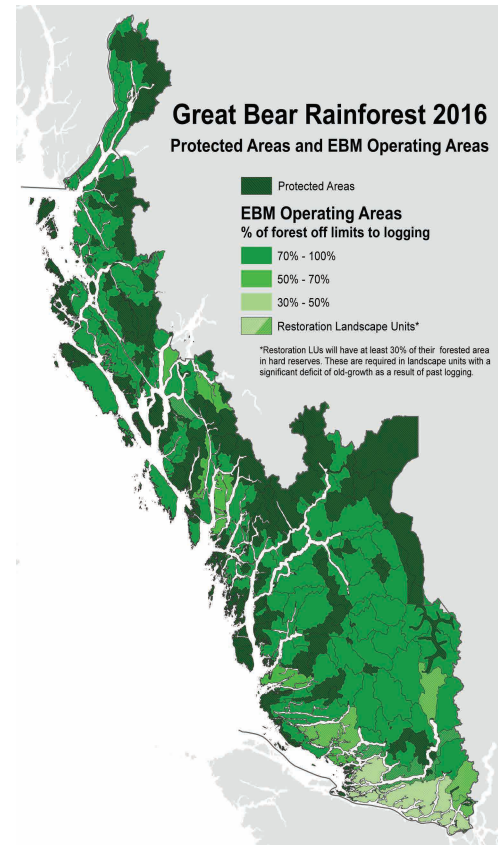
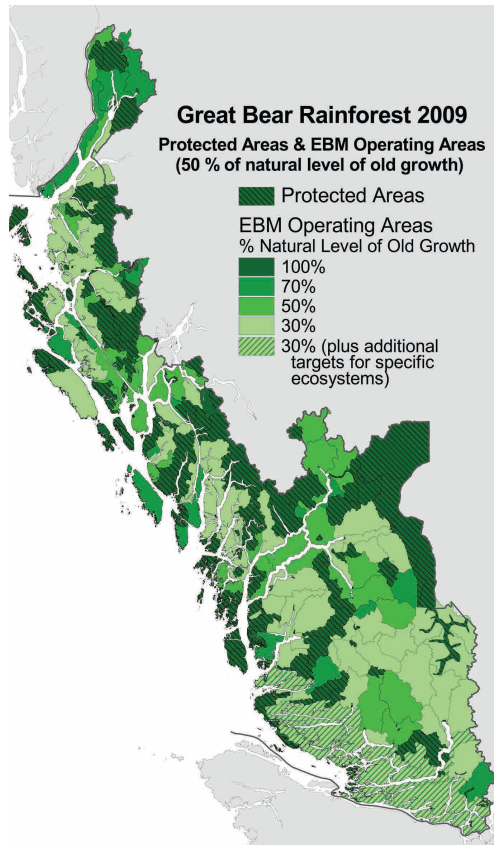
- Solidifies First Nations shared decision-making with the province over land use in their traditional territories.
- Legal requirements to maintain areas of cultural, ecological and economic significance to First Nations.
- Economic opportunities for the communities, including revenue sharing, access to timber, and

Coast Opportunity Funds<sup>5</sup> available for conservation management and economic development.

## Carbon Emissions and Forest Resilience

B.C.'s coastal old-growth rainforests store record high amounts of carbon per hectare accumulated over thousands of years and continue to sequester carbon. Increased protection of old-growth will result in an immediate reduction of carbon losses from logging.

## Protected and Operating Areas in the Great Bear Rainforest



## More Information

Rainforest Solutions Project:  
[www.savethegreatbear.org](http://www.savethegreatbear.org)

The scientific basis for Ecosystem-Based Management:  
<https://www.for.gov.bc.ca/tasb/slrp/citbc/abo.html>

Great Bear Rainforest forestry management requirements:  
<https://www.for.gov.bc.ca/tasb/SLRP/plan17.html>



<sup>5</sup> The Coast Opportunity Fund (COF) was established in 2007 with \$120 million in conservation financing (\$60 million from private philanthropic funds and \$60 million from B.C. and Canadian governments). COF funds conservation management projects and ecologically sustainable business ventures for First Nations communities in the Great Bear Rainforest.