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British Columbia News

Old growth harvesting deferred in Fairy Creek, Walbran areas

<https://news.gov.bc.ca/24654>

Wednesday, June 9, 2021 2:40 PM

Victoria - The Province is honouring the request of the Pacheedaht, Ditidaht and Huu-ay-aht First Nations and deferring old-growth harvesting in the Fairy Creek watershed and central Walbran areas in their territories.

This action is consistent with government's commitments to reconciliation and to protecting old-growth forests.

"Reconciliation with Indigenous peoples and protecting the environment are top priorities for our government. We believe they must go hand in hand," said Premier John Horgan. "That's why we're pleased to approve the request from three First Nations to defer old-growth logging on their territory — including in the Fairy Creek watershed. The first step in protecting old growth must be respecting Indigenous peoples' land-management rights in their territories."

The deferrals follow a request made by the Pacheedaht, Ditidaht and Huu-ay-aht First Nations, who issued the Hišuk ma čawak Declaration on June 7, 2021. The deferrals protect all old growth in the Fairy Creek watershed and the central Walbran area – spanning over 2,000 hectares – for two years while the First Nations title holders build resource-stewardship plans for their lands.

"True reconciliation means meaningful partnerships, listening to Indigenous peoples and trusting their stewardship of their territories," said Katrine Conroy, Minister of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development. "This is a step in the right direction, but we know there is more work to do. Our government is doing the hard, but necessary, work to build a plan that protects B.C.'s old growth forests for future generations."

In 2019, government committed to aligning its policies, legislation and actions with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples through the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act.

In 2020, government committed to adopting all 14 recommendations of the independent panel on old growth, beginning with the immediate deferral of nearly 200,000 hectares of old-growth forests. Government has committed to continued consultations with Indigenous peoples on further deferrals of old-growth forests.

Learn More:

Old-growth forests and B.C.'s new approach to managing them: www.gov.bc.ca/oldgrowth
(<http://www.gov.bc.ca/oldgrowth>)

B.C. Declaration Act: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/indigenous-people/new-relationship/united-nations-declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples>
(<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/indigenous-people/new-relationship/united-nations-declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples>)

B.C.'s new vision for forest policy: www.gov.bc.ca/modernforestpolicy (<http://www.gov.bc.ca/modernforestpolicy>)

A backgrounder follows.
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Backgrounders

Government honours First Nations request for deferrals

In response to the Hišuk ma c̓awak Declaration and deferral request issued June 7, 2021, by the Chiefs of the Pacheedaht, Ditidaht and Huu-ay-aht First Nations, the Government of British Columbia has deferred old-growth logging for two years in the Fairy Creek and central Walbran areas while the Nations prepare their resource-stewardship plans for these areas.

Under these deferrals, all old growth – approximately 2,034 hectares – in the Fairy Creek watershed and central Walbran area will be protected.

- The Fairy Creek watershed is 1,199 hectares in size and includes approximately 884 hectares of old forest.
- The central Walbran area (west of Lake Cowichan) is 1,489 hectares, of which approximately 1,150 hectares is old forest.

Maps of the deferral areas in the Fairy Creek watershed and central Walbran area are available here:

https://news.gov.bc.ca/files/FairyCreek_Walbran_map.pdf

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The Fairy Creek deferral areas are identified as zone A and zone B. All harvesting in zone A is suspended, including all old-growth areas and an additional 145 hectares of second-growth forest, with two exceptions: removal of trees already on the ground and to harvest trees for Indigenous cultural purposes. In zone B, forestry activities are suspended in all identified old-growth stands, with limited exceptions for safety, environmental and personal uses (firewood).

These latest deferrals are in addition to the nearly 200,000 hectares of old growth – an area nearly double the size of Metro Vancouver – that government protected in September 2020.

In accordance with the request from the Huu-ay-aht, Ditidaht and Pacheedaht First Nations, tenure holders in the Fairy Creek watershed and the central Walbran area will be able to harvest timber in areas not identified as old growth.

New road construction activities will be suspended within identified old growth areas in the central Walbran and Fairy Creek watershed as part of the deferrals. For existing roads in these areas, government and the three Nations expect tenure holders to carry out necessary maintenance to make sure roads are safe and that there is an appropriate level of environmental protection.