

FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

News Release

November 4, 2021

BC's Hot Potato Handling of Old Growth Stonewalls Indigenous Decision-Making and Lacks Fulsome Supports for First Nations

(Xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səlilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh)/Vancouver, B.C. – November 4, 2021) Earlier this week, Forests Minister Katrine Conroy announced the province's identification of 2.6 million hectares of old-growth forest in B.C. that could potentially be deferred if First Nations agree, as recommended by the technical advisory panel formed in June. While deferrals are a step in the right direction to protect BC's big tree, ancient, and rare old growth, the First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC) is extremely concerned that old growth remains unprotected today, and that the Province has passed responsibility to First Nations without providing financial support for Nations to replace any revenues that might be lost if they choose to defer logging old growth in their territory.

"The lack of proper consultations with First Nations prior to the announcement, as well as the government's failure to provide details on transition financing and financing for Indigenous-led conservation solutions, all point to the Province's repeated pattern of advancing a mismanaged forestry landscape that fails to uphold Indigenous Title and Rights, jurisdiction, and decision-making," stated Regional Chief Terry Teegee of the BC Assembly of First Nations. "First Nations have asserted inherent jurisdiction over their unceded forest resources for decades, yet the Province has continued to profit from harvesting trees on so-called Crown Lands. Those stolen dollars should be returned to First Nations so they can be true partners in deciding how to manage their forests including old growth."

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs, stated "Instead of the Province's current skittish and unfinished approach to old growth, we want the Horgan government to decisively protect old growth trees as a priority issue with a concrete and fully funded plan developed in partnership with First Nations as the proper Title and Rights holders. There must be legislation created specific to protecting old growth. This requires a whole-of-government approach as the logging of old growth trees is intimately connected to climate change, meaning the impacts of logging in one area are felt everywhere and by everyone. The province has confirmed that the details of the length and exact area coverage of the identified potential deferrals may not take shape for months or years. This uncertainty leaves the most contentious and at-risk areas still available for logging. If BC really wants to make good on its commitment to the implement the *UN Declaration* and tackle climate change, it needs to provide comprehensive financing for Nations to end destructive resource extraction on their lands and waters."

Robert Phillips, of the First Nations Summit Political Executive concluded, "The 30-day window identified by the Province for Nations to come forward with their response on deferrals is inadequate, and places extreme pressure on Nations already struggling with capacity issues and competing priorities. The capacity funding announced is spread out over a three-year period and is for all impacted Nations; we are deeply concerned that Nations will not have adequate financial resources, or the necessary time, to assemble the technical and legal supports required to participate in negotiations with the Province on deferrals in 30 days. Although the Province announced it is addressing old growth 'in partnership with Indigenous Nations' it does not feel that way right now."



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The FNLC hope to meet with Minister Conroy soon to discuss these important issues and will be asking her to convene a meeting with BC Chiefs on BC's approach to protection of old growth forests.

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The First Nations Leadership Council is comprised of the political executives of the BC Assembly of First Nations (BCAFN), First Nations Summit (FNS), and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC).

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