

A New Climate for Conservation - Summary

Humanity faces two urgent and related challenges: the rapidly escalating loss of biodiversity and the predicted impacts of global climate change. A new report by senior scientist Dr. Jim Pojar identifies a comprehensive solution to both of these threats: a biodiversity and climate action strategy to help prevent the release of greenhouse gases, to ensure sufficient intact habitats to support healthy numbers of wild species, and to help plants and animals adapt to climate change impacts. This strategy should be anchored by a policy of maintaining intact forest ecosystems such that approximately 50% of B.C.'s land base is managed with conservation as the priority goal.

Global climate change is already having an impact in the province and these effects will escalate in the coming decades. Annual temperatures are generally expected to increase by an average of 3 to 5°C. Winters are expected to be warmer and wetter, while summers will be wetter in the north and drier in the south of the province.

The most effective response to these changes is to preserve intact, functional ecosystems. Natural ecosystems are innately more resilient to the impacts of climate change than are fragmented, disturbed or degraded ecosystems. Intact systems are better able to regenerate after disturbances, to resist or recover from outbreaks of pests or diseases and to adapt to changes in temperature and available water supply.

Intact, connected natural landscapes also help to pave the way for adaptation to occur by making it possible for plant and animal species to move to more hospitable habitats. Further, intact ecosystems, especially forests and their soils, capture and store carbon dioxide. An estimated 18 billion tones of CO₂ are stored in B.C.'s forests. Deforestation releases carbon dioxide. Logging discharges more CO₂ into the atmosphere than any other single activity in B.C. Avoided deforestation thus prevents increased greenhouse gas emissions. Restoration of deforested landscapes can increase the capacity for carbon capture and storage and needs to be pursued with increased vigour in the province.

Finally and importantly, human well being depends on the vital, life-supporting goods and services (e.g., clean air, clean water, productive soils, soil and water conservation, flood control and many other benefits) inherent in natural ecosystems.

There are economic benefits to this strategy. Pilot projects in California are generating revenues from the sale of carbon credits for improved forest management and avoided deforestation.

Existing parks and protected areas will be the “arks” of survival and recovery for B.C.'s variety of wild species. However, they are not large or numerous enough to do the job on their own. B.C.'s system of conservation lands needs to be significantly enhanced by new conservation land use designations that make the protection of intact ecosystems a priority.