

Wild Times



Old growth Douglas Fir tree on Sumas Mountain in the Fraser Valley, slated to be logged. Local folks are working to preserve the grove.

Rolling with Mother Nature

by Joe Foy

It's happened again. I guess I was so busy living in the moment, I didn't even notice a new decade sneaking up on us. And here I am, staring at the blank calendar pages of the 2010s, wondering what is in store for BC's environment. Previous decades have seen spectacular successes, mighty battles and heartbreaking defeats for those who love BC nature – so I am thinking that the same will be true of the 2010s.

One hundred years ago in BC there were no provincial parks. Strathcona Provincial Park on Vancouver Island was designated as BC's first protected park reserve in 1910, thanks in part to the work of the Alpine Club of Canada, a group born in the Rockies around Banff National Park.

In the 1920s, the BC Mountaineering Club, made up generally of regular working folks from the Vancouver area, gained protection for what became known as Garibaldi Provincial Park in 1920.

In 1929, the last old growth forest in Surrey was clearcut. Up until that time people had come from all around to see the massive tall trees that lined the highway. Local folks had put up a good fight, but after the King and Farris Logging Company was finished, all that remained of this natural wonder were the giant stumps.

In 1937, Tweedsmuir Provincial Park, BC's biggest provincial park, was designated as a result of the relentless work of a local hunting guide and outfitter Tommy Walker, who was concerned about the ongoing loss of big wild country to encroaching industry.

In 1941, Manning Provincial Park was designated and named for one of BC's Chief Foresters, E. C. Manning, who had been a strong advocate of setting aside areas from logging and mining for future generations.

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The 1950s and 1960s were tough decades for those seeking to defend nature. Tired of two decades of hard times in the Great Depression and Second World War, the BC government turned its eyes from the past to the future. And the future to them meant rapidly ramping up heavy industry in the province.

Hundreds of kilometres of river valleys were flooded in a massive expansion of hydro power facilities. Huge swaths of old growth forests, so-called Tree Farm Licenses, were given to logging companies. To accommodate all this industrial activity, provincial park lands were rolled back.

By the 1970s, BC conservationists had regained the high ground. Buoyed by the winds of change sweeping the globe, new provincial parks in the northern half of the province, such as Spatsizi Provincial Park, were established. By the end of the decade, Greenpeace had been born right here in BC.

The '80s, '90s, and 2000s saw First Nations increasingly shaping environmental protection with spectacular results at Stein Valley, Gwaii Haanas, Meares Island, to name a few. These decades also saw unprecedented levels of environmental protests at places like the Walbran Valley, Clayoquot Sound, and Elaho Valley. New environment groups sprung up like mushrooms after a spring rain. Unprecedented levels of new park protection were achieved too – with the province more than doubling its park land.

So what can be predicted for the 2010s? Perhaps a ban on salmon farms and the logging of old growth forests. Maybe another doubling of BC's protected area system. Could be freeway expansion is stopped in favour of more public transit. Provincial endangered species legislation would be a very good thing. Legislation getting rid of cosmetic pesticides looks attainable. Forbidding more coal mines and ramping down existing ones to protect the climate is an idea whose time has come. Preserving our wild rivers in the face of a private power greed rush is the hope of many. Ending the cruel grizzly bear hunt can be a dream come true. Keeping tankers off our coast and tar sands pipe lines off our lands is a goal of many British Columbians.

All I can say for sure is that in the finest of BC traditions, the 2010s look to me to be another wild ride with the friends of Mother Nature. Best of luck of luck to us all.



Joe Foy is Campaign Director for the Wilderness Committee, Canada's largest citizen-funded membership-based wilderness preservation organization.