

# **CREATE the CAREN RANGE PROVINCIAL PARK**

*to preserve Canada's oldest known forests*



*Snow blankets the Caren's ancient forest, Dec. 1995. Lyon Lake in mid-ground. Texada Island in background. Photo: Mavis Jones.*

# AN 8,500 HECTARE CAREN PARK IS NOT TOO BIG

**T**he need to protect the Caren Range, located on the Sechelt Peninsula on British Columbia's "Sunshine Coast" has gained provincial, national and international recognition. Why? Credit goes to the Friends of Caren, a local grassroots environment group fighting to gain protection for the area. The Friends' volunteer researchers have documented the Caren's ridgetop oldgrowth forests to be the most ancient in Canada. Over the past five years they have guided over 3,500 people into the Caren to marvel at the intricate web of life in this long-lived ecosystem.

Volunteer researchers also discovered, in the summer of 1993, the first active marbled murrelet nest in Canada. The marbled murrelet, a seabird that depends on oldgrowth forests for its nesting habitat, is one of over 60 species threatened with extinction in Canada. Logging is the main threat.

**If an area's biological credentials were the only factor determining park status, there is no doubt that the entire 8,500 hectare proposed Caren Range Provincial Park would be protected without delay.**

Analysis reveals that the Caren is rich in forest ecosystems that are seriously under-represented in the current parks system. Three biogeoclimatic zones, the Coastal Douglas Fir, Coastal Western Hemlock and the Mountain Hemlock, meet in the Caren. Two different ecoregions (another way that scientists divide up the landscape based on distinctive ecological attributes) intersect there, too: the Georgia Lowland and the Southern Pacific Ranges. None of these zones or ecoregions are sufficiently protected to ensure survival of their wild species; nor does preservation even come close to the government's 12 percent target.

About one-half of the proposed Caren Provincial park falls into the Georgia Lowland Ecoregion. It is one of B.C.'s most threatened landscapes. Currently there is not one major park in this ecoregion, despite the fact that it coincides with the region of highest population and heaviest recreational use in the province. In the Caren, this ecologically distinct region rises from the warm, low-elevation, southwest-facing arbutus slopes and dry bluffs above Pender Harbour to the cool, moist subalpine wetlands at the 4,000 foot level.

The other half of the Caren park proposal falls into the Southern Pacific Ranges Ecoregion. It rises from the shores of Sechelt Inlet to a subalpine ridge. None of the existing parks within this ecoregion include access to salt water...except the tiny 35 hectare Skookumchuck Narrows Provincial Park which the proposed Caren Range park encircles (see map, p. 3).

In spite of all the good arguments supporting preservation, and over the strong objections by the Friends of Caren, in 1995 the B.C. Forest



***Bonsai trees on the edge of Spectacle Lake, one of approximately 28 small lakes found within the park proposal. Photo: Mavis Jones.***

Service approved some logging within the proposed Caren park area. Now, in a Lower Mainland park planning process that is supposed to wrap up before the next provincial election, the vision of a sea-to-summit Caren Range park is being sold out.

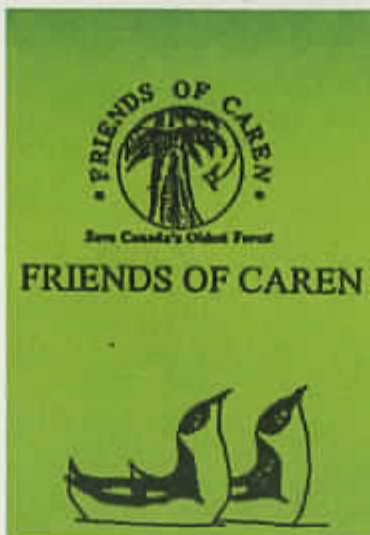
Some enviro-compromisers, who have the audacity to think they can speak for the "movement", are sitting in the behind-closed-doors process, slashing park proposals put forward to government by local grassroots groups like the Friends of Caren.

They are part of the government's Regional Public Advisory Committee (RPAC), that is supposed to figure out the final solution for a Lower Mainland park system. But they've been mandated not to exceed protecting 13 percent of the land base in the region. Representatives on the committee include the forest industry and IWA but not the provincial government's own Parks Branch. Committee members, including the hand-picked moderate environmentalists, have chosen not to hold public meetings. **Western Canada Wilderness Committee and the Friends of Caren are not part of this undemocratic process!**

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*The last fire lookout tower remaining on the B.C. coast, located on the summit of Mt. Hallowell in the Caren Range. The hike to the tower culminates in magnificent views. Photo: Dr. John Field.*



## Fire Lookout Tower on Mount Hallowell

In 1995 the Friends of Caren teamed up with the Sunshine Coast Heritage Society in a project to restore the old fire lookout tower on Mount Hallowell in the centre of the proposed Caren Range park. The Hallowell tower is believed to be the last of the fire lookouts left standing on the B.C. coast—a reminder of forest fire surveillance activities made obsolete by modern technology.

John Dafoe, who heads up the project for the Friends of Caren, enthuses, "More mountains can be seen from the Hallowell Tower than from anywhere else I know. It is a tremendous landscape! You have panoramic views of Vancouver Island, the Coast Range, the Tetrahedron, Tantalus Range, the Earle Range, Tzoonie Mountain and all the way up Jervis Inlet!" Volunteers expect to complete the restoration work by the summer of 1996.

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In January of 1996, the coalition of environment groups who are on RPAC published and distributed a fancy brochure titled "Completing Our Park System in Southwestern British Columbia". It advocates protecting only 3,000 hectares in the Caren.

This is unacceptable. Like never before, grassroots supporters of the Wilderness Committee and Friends of Caren are needed to act to save wilderness on the Sunshine Coast.

We must not submit to a political agenda that compromises ecological sustainability. The locally proposed protected areas for the Sunshine Coast (a 1,500 ha Mt. Elphinstone ecological reserve to protect rare mushroom habitat, a 2,000 ha Mt. Richardson park, and 8,500 Caren Range park), combined with the already-protected 6,000 ha Tetrahedron Plateau add up to less than 2 percent of the Sunshine Coast Forest District's land base.

In the next few months the B.C. government is scheduled to make its decision on Lower Mainland



*Representatives of B.C.'s Ministry of Environment and Parks stand by "Bigfoot", one of the Caren's ancient yellow cedars. Photo: Will Paulik.*

The ancient sub-alpine forests that crest the Caren Range are probably Canada's, and possibly the world's, oldest closed-canopy stands of trees. The annual growth rings on stumps in the clearcuts that surround the Caren testify to the remarkable age of the remaining uncut forest.

In 1991, the Friends of Caren discovered a 1,717 year old yellow cedar stump. In 1993, they found an even older one. Dendrochronological analysis revealed that it was 1,835 years old when cut (without anyone knowing its antiquity) during the normal course of clearcut liquidation of the oldgrowth forest in the late 1980s. These stumps represent the oldest specimens ever found for the yellow

In the next few months the B.C. government is scheduled to make its decision on Lower Mainland parks. Have you made your voice heard about the need to protect what little wilderness is left on the Sunshine Coast...especially the Caren?



**A tour group inspects the clearcut at the foot of Middle Peak in September 1994—some of the 3,500 visitors who have gone on a Friends of Caren guided walk over the last 5 years. Photo: Dr. John Field.**

## Caren Range Tours

In May of 1991, when the Friends of Caren began their free public tours into the proposed Caren Range park, the snow was still on the ground. Each summer since then, regardless of weather conditions, the Friends have mounted their tours, offering people a chance to experience the Caren's ancient forests, the lookout tower's spectacular views, the huge waterfall that cascades over the cliffs above Pender Harbour, as well as the encroaching clearcuts. Over the past five years, more than 3,500 people have participated in the Friends of Caren outings.

The Friends of Caren tours are one of the most important and popular tourist attractions on the Sunshine Coast. Professional biologists and naturalists volunteer their services as tour leaders. They explain to visitors the dynamic nature of the ancient forests and the importance of the forest and lake ecosystems in sustaining the hydrology of the region. As a result of the tours, hundreds of people now make their own way into the Caren Range to enjoy the mountain air, the wonderful views, the hiking, cross-country skiing and the solitude of the forests.

John Field, who has coordinated most of the Friends' tours over the last five years says, "We never turned anyone away. We always found someone who would make sure everyone who wanted to get up to the Caren got there. How else would we have moved our message about the marvellous attributes of the Caren out to the world? The Caren is now known internationally."

clearcut liquidation of the old-growth forest in the late 1980s. These stumps represent the oldest specimens ever found for the yellow cedar tree species. A Caren western hemlock stump, with 1,238 annual growth rings, proved to be the world record in age for this species. These ancient trees are not just isolated anomalies. Many of the Caren trees are well over 1,000 years old. It is quite possible that, as research continues, a tree over 2,000 years old may eventually be discovered in the Caren.

A round cut from the Caren's 1,835 year old stump—the world's oldest known yellow cedar—was dated and placed on public display in the Wilderness Committee's store at 20 Water Street in Gastown—Vancouver's most ancient (less than 150 years old) urban neighbourhood. Near the centre of the yellow cedar round is noted the fall of Rome, 395 A.D.

Why is Caren Range forest so old? No one knows the answer. The absence of any evidence of fire or catastrophic blowdown indicates that this forest's gradual development has been uninterrupted since the great glacial ice sheet that covered the area melted away about 12,000 years ago.



**Close-up of empty marbled murrelet nest on a tree limb in the Caren—taken after the chick had fledged. Note white fecal ring around the nest's edge. This is the first active marbled murrelet nest found in Canada. Photo: Paul Jones.**

## The grassroots-endorsed 8,500 hectare CAREN RANGE PROVINCIAL PARK PROPOSAL



*Spectacular views from the Caren's east slopes, including Sechelt Inlet and Narrows Inlet.*

Photo: Paul Jones.

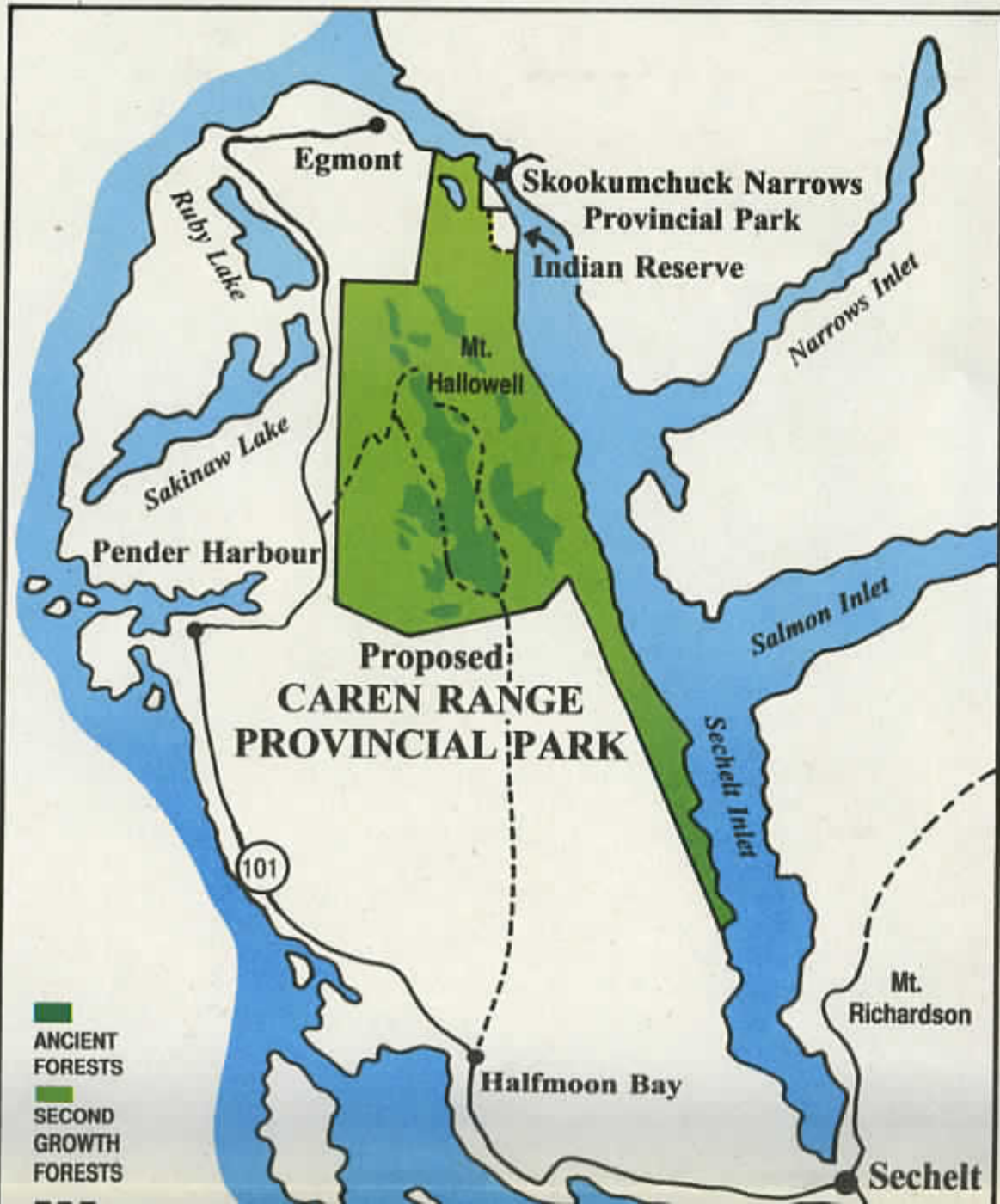


*Marbled murrelets on Malaspina Strait. These birds have been traced to the Caren where they nest.*

Photo: Paul Jones.

Most of the young forest on the western slopes of the proposed Caren Range park area has never felt the destructive force of the axe or chainsaw. This forest naturally regenerated after the area was burned around 1915 by prospectors crudely searching for minerals. Douglas fir grows on the moister sites, and lodgepole pine on the drier sites, but the trees are still small. The productivity of the forest is rated low by foresters because of the preponderance of rocky outcroppings and thin soils, the result of periodic lightning fires on this drier side of the Sechelt Peninsula.

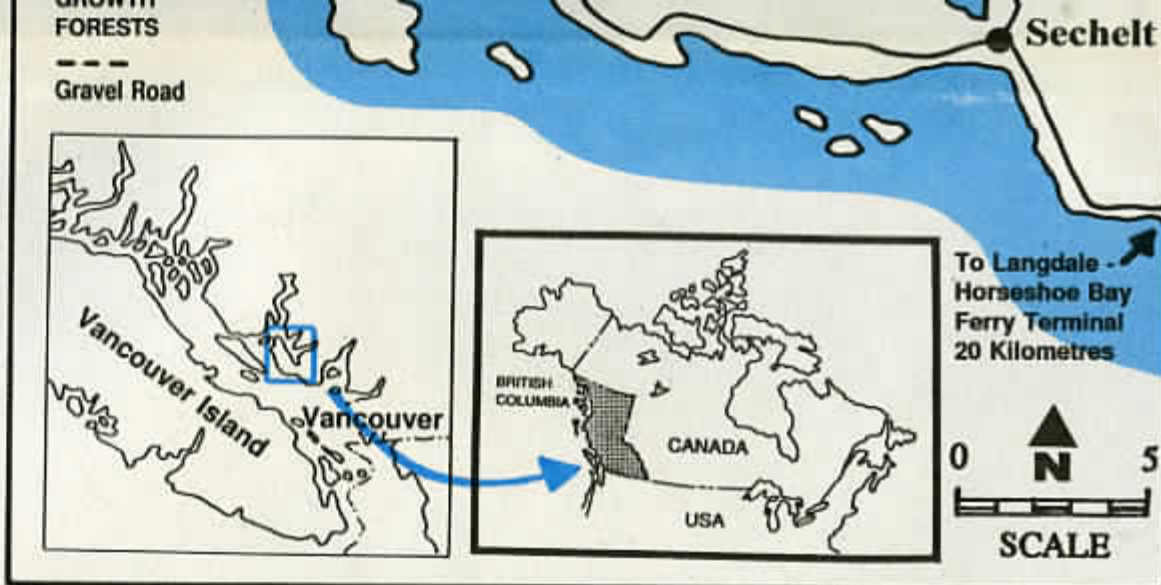
On the eastern slopes of the Caren, a new forest of predominantly Douglas fir, western hemlock and redcedar extends down to tidewater from the ridgetop subalpine oldgrowth forest that was originally spared as a firebreak between the east and west side slopes. The forest is naturally regenerating from ancient Douglas fir seed trees left during the turn-of-the-century logging. These giant veterans dot



...dred as a firebreak between the east and west side slopes. The forest is naturally regenerating from ancient Douglas fir seed trees left during the turn-of-the-century logging. These giant veterans dot the hillside.

The new forests that border the oldgrowth at the top of the Caren Range are extremely important biological buffer zones. They provide natural wildlife corridors, especially for species like marbled murrelets that travel from ocean to ridgetop. They protect the oldgrowth forest from "windthrow"—trees blowing down along the forest edges exposed next to clearcuts. And they will eventually expand oldgrowth habitat as they slowly mature.

Simply protecting the narrow band of ancient forest along the Caren Range ridgetop, as some are suggesting, would fail to preserve biodiversity. The shore-to-summit 8,500 hectare Caren Range park proposal is endorsed by the Friends of Caren, Western Canada Wilderness Committee and the Vancouver Natural History Society's Conservation and Education Committee, as the best chance to protect the Caren's wildlife and ecosystem integrity over the long term.



**Paul Jones of Friends of Caren inspects yellow cedar stump that turned out to be, upon tree ring analysis by a professional dendrochronologist, Canada's oldest known tree, at 1,835 years Photo: Dr. John Field.**



**Clearcutting advanced as far as Middle Peak in the Caren Range before the Friends of Caren began their efforts to create a park on the Caren. Even with the whole Caren protected, less than two percent of the Sunshine Coast Timber Supply area will be protected from logging. Photo: Paul Jones.**



*The Friends of Caren vow to not let clearcutting like this occur again in the Caren. This small creek flows into the stream that supplies the Pender Harbour fish hatchery. Photo: Paul Jones.*



*A 1.6 metre-in-diameter western hemlock growing in the Caren not far from where the oldest specimen of this species was found (a log with 1,238 annual growth rings). Photo: Mavis Jones.*

## **Nature's Need not Industries' Greed**

**T**he B.C. government has decreed that the vast 4.15 million hectare region surrounding the city of Vancouver shall have only 13 percent of its land base left natural--preserved in parks.



**The inclusion of the eastern slopes of the Caren down to the ocean shore is essential to make the Caren Park function to preserve biodiversity and to provide a full range of shore-to-summit recreational activities. Photo: Paul Jones.**

Vancouver still have only 15 percent of its land base left natural—preserved in parks. The politically-drawn boundary of the Lower Mainland region extends from Manning Park and the new Stein Valley Provincial Park on the east to Texada Island on the west. It includes the entire Sunshine Coast, Powell River and the coast north to Bute Inlet and encompasses the headwaters of the Lillooet and Squamish Rivers where WCWC is advocating a 260,000 hectare Randy Stoltmann Wilderness Park to protect the last large stands of oldgrowth coastal Douglas fir.

The government's 13 percent (544,000 hectares) limit has no basis in science. Conservation biologists, who study ways to preserve biodiversity (wild species of plants and animals as well as the complex ecosystems they survive within) estimate that protecting only 12 percent of lands will lead to extinction of 50 percent of Earth's species. Some say that 40 percent of the land base must be protected in a system of large, interconnected parks in order to preserve natural biodiversity.

In the Lower Mainland, 440,000 hectares of land are already set aside (10.6% of the region)...mostly in large parks that predominately encompass rock and ice. These include the 195,000 hectare Garibaldi Park, 71,000 hectare Manning Park, 58,000 Golden Ears Park and 38,000 hectare newly-created Pinecone Lake/Boise Valley/Burke Mountain Park. The B.C. NDP Government says that it will add only another 104,000 hectares to the Lower Mainland's park system. Yet this system must protect spotted owls, grizzly bears, marbled murrelets, and the recreational needs of more than half the population of B.C.—approximately 2 million people.

The human population of the Lower Mainland is projected to more than double in the next 25 years, eventually reaching the size of Los Angeles. If this projection proves to be correct, how can nature survive without at least 40 percent of the surrounding land left in a state of wilderness?

We must make room to protect the entire 8,500 hectare Caren Range Park and much, much more.

## Yes! I will help make the Caren a Park!

I am writing a letter to Environment Minister Moe Sihota (Legislative Buildings, Victoria, BC V8V 1X4) informing him where I stand about protecting the entire 8,500 hectare Caren Range park area, not just the fringe of oldgrowth along the Caren's ridge...and I have asked him where he stands on this vital issue.

I am happy to have this opportunity to contribute to your campaign to create the Caren Range Provincial Park. Enclosed is my tax deductible gift my tax deductible gift of \$25 \$50 \$100 \$500 other to help you win this campaign. WCWC's Federal Registered Charitable Tax Number is 0587113-21-28.

I want to  renew my WCWC membership  become a WCWC member. Enclosed is my \$30 annual membership fee.  I would like to be a Sustaining-Family member here is \$52 (\$1 per week for wilderness preservation).  Please upgrade my regular \$30 membership to a Sustaining-Family membership, enclosed is \$22. Note: call our toll free 1-800-661-9453 number to donate and become a WCWC member and save time and trees!

Name (please print) \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ Province \_\_\_\_\_ Postal Code \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Send to Western Canada Wilderness Committee (WCWC), 20 Water Street, Vancouver, BC V6B 1A4.



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