

# Wild Times

by Joe Foy

British Columbians know that it is possible to hold back nature for a time. Dikes can be built higher – but nature always plays the last hand. Sooner or later, a penned-in river is going to bust its banks under the pressure of a bigger than normal snowmelt.

It's the same way with wilderness preservation in BC. Governments can hold back public expectations – but one day something's got to give.

The pressure has been building for a while now. The signs are everywhere.

On the southwest coast of Vancouver Island a recent logging operation near the Castle Grove in the Walbran Valley has local conservationists on edge. The grove contains some of the oldest and largest trees left on the planet. When will the upper Walbran Valley's forests finally be granted protection from logging? Will it take a storm of public protest – or will the BC government do the right thing in time?

In Clayoquot Sound, an uneasy peace has settled over the region's famous intact ancient forests and roadless valleys. But from time to time, new industrial proposals aim to strip-mine and log the heart out of Clayoquot. Will this former protest hotspot explode once again into civil unrest – or will our provincial government work with local communities to enact legislation that permanently saves Clayoquot Sound?

On southeast Vancouver Island, near the community of Qualicum Beach, local activists were in shock a little over a year ago when the BC government allowed a logging operation to clearcut a huge swath of the Nanoose Forest. This is part of the Coastal Douglas-fir Ecozone, which is the most endangered forest in BC. Less than 1% of this kind of forest remains at an older



## Unfinished Business

age like Nanoose – but the logging was still allowed to proceed. Resentment against short-sighted government decisions now simmers close to the boiling point, intensified by recent news of planned old-growth logging in the Douglas-fir forest near world-famous Cathedral Grove. More and more people are asking, “What is it going to take to save what little is left?”

As local trails and forests are logged off, people are beginning to think that an un-orderly protest may be the only way forward.

In the Lower Mainland and Sunshine Coast, a long-time dream of area residents is to secure protection for many favourite hiking trails and the forested “pocket wilderness areas” they access. Both regions have been waiting for well over a decade for a local land-use planning process to commence, so that these issues can be resolved in an orderly manner. But as local trails and forests are logged off, people are beginning to think that an un-orderly protest may be the only way forward. The latest conflict zone involves a logging company's proposal to log beside Ghost Pass Lake near Manning Park. The logging would scar a destination loved by generations of hikers, which was featured

in the popular book *103 Hikes in Southwest BC*.

In the Chilliwack Valley, residents could scarcely believe their good luck when a local forest popular with day hikers was designated as a protected habitat for spotted owls. Their good fortune soon turned into a nightmare when a logging company pressed the BC government to allow logging in the protected habitat area – and the BC government agreed! The forest near Chilliwack Lake was cut down. Biologists tell us that at one time over 1,000 spotted owls lived in southwest BC forests. Today less than a dozen hang on in the tattered remnants of their former forest habitat. The extinction clock for Canada's spotted owls reads 30 seconds to midnight. Will public pressure prevail in time?

Rising lumber prices, combined with forests laid low by the pine beetle, mean that precious wilderness areas in the interior of BC are also being eyed by the logging industry. Of particular concern is the interior rainforest region of the province, where conservationists have mapped out several spectacular wilderness proposals. These include the 156,461-hectare proposed Selkirk Mountain-Caribou Park, located northeast of Nelson, and the 90,000-hectare Walker Rainforest Wilderness located

east of Prince George – both critical to the survival of local populations of grizzly bears and mountain caribou.

I'd say it's high time the BC government moves to implement a major expansion of the province's protected areas, or else we are in for a mighty big flood of citizen discontent from one end of BC to the other. Expanding our protected area system is one piece of unfinished business that just can't wait any longer



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



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