

It is time to take bold and extraordinary action to reverse the decline of the BC Forest Industry. Exerting greater control over Private Managed Forest Lands is an important step.

I began my electrical apprenticeship in 2005 during an upgrade to an Interfor mill in New Westminster. That mill has since closed. Since 2013, I have been working in coastal pulp and saw mills on Vancouver Island. I am a member of the PPWC, USW, and IBEW – it literally takes that many union memberships to secure a family supporting career in the forest industry on the coast in BC.

I am writing today to implore the government to restore the public confidence in forestry and set ecosystem productivity and resilience as the top priority of acceptable forest management strategies.

In my opinion, the major tenure holders of BC have failed to steward the land and maximize the value of the timber resource since the BC Liberals gutted the forest practices code and embarked on the policy of industry self regulation. Private land managers like Timberwest and Island Timberlands are even worse, as they are primary raw log exporters operating on short rotations with massive clear cuts in vital salmon bearing watersheds throughout coastal BC.

All around us, the evidence is clear that the regulatory and economic paradigm we have carried out in BC is failing. From 2003 - 2017 (14 years!), the forest industry has been given everything it asked for, up to and including a legislated end to a major strike by the IWA in 2004. In return, the industry has run rampant on the land, closed mills, and ramped up log exports.

Our ecosystems on the coast are in dire shape – drought is revealing that the hydrology of our watersheds has been altered, and already vulnerable salmonid stocks are being pushed to the brink of extinction. Just recently, journalists Sarah Cox and Ben Parfitt reported in *The Narwhal* that logging companies are not obligated to preserve black bear dens, nor are resource extraction decisions being analyzed for cumulative ecological impact.

The sham investigations by the Managed Forest Program are an insult to our collective intelligence. Research from BC shows clearcuts drastically affect stream flow. Yet, the Managed Forest Program has failed to account for the destruction of our Vancouver Island watersheds, specifically Comox and Cowichan Lakes.

Foresters are aware that there are more timber supply shortfalls to come, and the effects of climate change on our silviculture systems has yet to be seen. The uncertainty around the quality and volume of our second and third growth plantations is high. In short, conditions for the forest industry over the long run are only going to get more difficult, not less.

In 1998, MacMillan Bloedel "announced it will phase out clear cutting in all parts of its BC operations and pursue a new stewardship strategy which focuses on old-growth and habitat conservation."

What happened?

We need to get back to this type of philosophy ASAP in BC. Since 2003, forestry practices have been slipping backward, and are now completely motivated by short term greed and, increasingly, desperation. Quite simply, the ecosystems have been pushed to the brink, and the productivity of our regenerating cut blocks is too low. Industry is responding by doubling down on ecosystem destruction by applying herbicides en masse across the landscape.

Who are we trying to fool? This is insanity.

That is why we need public management of our ecosystems that accounts for the cumulative impacts of resource harvesting decisions. Forestry, for example, should be managed in a manner that does not disturb watershed level processes. And by watershed, I mean from the smallest tributary through to the primary watercourse - everything flows from our forests, and water and fisheries health should be considered a primary indicator of forest ecosystem productivity and resilience.

The dismantling of the BC Forest Service in 2003, and the tenure reform that gave tenure holders the power of self regulation, is one of the greatest mistakes a provincial government has committed against the province. Pre-2003 we had social forest industry. Today we have a feudal forest industry.

How do we get on track?

In short, we need to derive more value from less volume and we need to diversify our stands by species, age, and seral stage. We need to embrace non-conifer species and ignite the entrepreneurial spirit of our citizens by committing to supplying open, robust, freely trading log markets with as many product sorts and grades as possible.

We also need to bring certainty to the landbase by moving quickly on reconciliation and integrate First Nations into the industry as owners and managers of the ecosystems.

I reside in the Cowichan Valley, and below is a plan that can circumvent the pain of a hard crash on the Coast. It can open the doors to a new economy on the island, and position forestry and ecosystem restoration as the fulcrum of economic change on Vancouver Island and the BC Coast. The ideas can be adapted to suit other regions of BC.

1) The first step on that path is for the BC government to take full, direct ownership of Timberwest and Island Timberlands ("Mosaic"), as soon as possible. The government must buy the companies from the pension plans that currently own them. The government needs to be in the driver's seat right now on the BC Coast. The recent federal acquisition of the Trans Mountain pipeline, and the call by BC Greens to invest in retooling coastal mills, is evidence that large scale government intervention in the economy is cool again. The government does not have to fear the cat calls of "socialism" any longer. By taking ownership of one of the primary tenure holders on the coast, the government can leverage change across the entire coastal sector without fear of corporate blackmail or capital strikes.

2) Immediately upon acquisition, the government combines the BC Timber Sales annual volume and Mosaic's volume and initiates open, free, and robust regional log markets in Campbell River, Port Alberni, and Cowichan Valley. The surplus test gets tossed in the dustbin and the regional log markets are used to assess surplus. This step is vital to allow the industrial logging supply chain to remain functional at a high level while further policy changes are developed and phased in. The regional log markets may also help alleviate the issues of the softwood lumber dispute.

3) Next, the government embarks on nation to nation negotiations with all affected First Nations, with the goal of integrating First Nations as full partners in the management of the coastal forest industry. The degree of business risk due to unsettled land claims is a fundamental reason the coastal forest industry is in decline and why companies are logging so aggressively – they are trying to extract as much profit with as little risk as possible while they still can. This paradigm must be broken as soon as possible by integrating First Nations as true co-managers of the resource. As context, WFP 2018 annual report lists 12 active First Nations land claims or court proceedings that pose material risks to its

business. Further, the E&N land grant that forms the bulk of Mosaic's land tenure is increasingly at risk to land claim or litigation.

4) As part of the transition, implement ecosystem based management for the entire coastal industry within 5 years, and achieve FSC certification for Mosaic, BCTS, and any other interested tenure holders. Together with local log markets, this will enable any interested value added producer on the coast to apply the globally recognized FSC certification to its products. Visibility of timber supply will increase as transparent multi stakeholder management is rolled out across the coast. This will lead to increases in tertiary investment and entrepreneurial innovation in the forest products sector, cementing forestry as a keystone industry in a restorative coastal economy.

5) Implement an old growth preservation strategy, indigenous managed conservation zones, and embark on an aggressive ecological restoration program. With the tertiary industry well supplied with high value, FSC certified fibre, forest management can expand to prioritize habitat and watershed restoration. By incorporating indigenous knowledge and traditional practices to restore habitat and indigenous culture, reconciliation and restoration can be combined to advance the coast in a new direction.

6) Create a new "Ecological Restoration Technician" trade, in partnership with Industry Training Authority, First Nations, and interested silviculture contractors. By incorporating indigenous knowledge and current science in ecological restoration, BC can become a leader in training the next generation of forestry workers who can restore forests, wildlife habitat, waterways, and practice prescribed burns and conventional silviculture treatments like planting, brushing, pruning, thinning. This will increase employment in the woods, and get people working with the land in new ways. It will also elevate the job of silviculture from seasonal grunt work to that of a true career, and increase the resilience and productivity of our coastal ecosystems.

7) Expand the formal recreation opportunities in the Vancouver Island back country by improving access across Mosaic lands. Designate motorized and non motorized zones, and open campgrounds for year round camping access across the island. This will blow the doors off the tourism industry and also improve the quality of life for islanders. Currently access to recreation is highly restricted across Mosaic's lands. With provincial ownership, recreational access could be vastly improved and properly managed.

What I have put forth here is a viable vision of how we can shape our forest industry, and our ecosystems, for the better. Now is a time for true courage and leadership. There are very selfish, cynical agents operating in our region who would like to see the NDP government fail. Now is a time to forge a new paradigm, and do it on terms that help working families and First Nations work together to chart a future that is beyond sustainable – it is regenerative and entrepreneurial. I am confident that people on the ground along the coast know full well the problems facing the industry. People know full well drastic change is coming. The question is: what kind of change, and who benefits?

Please consider my ideas carefully, and I hope to see extraordinary action by our provincial government soon.

Sincerely,
Christopher Crowther
North Cowichan, BC
June 7th, 2019