

## Counterpunch

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### Going, Going, Almost Gone.... Compromise with a Chainsaw in the Rainforests of British Columbia

By INGMAR LEE

In December 2002, British Columbia Premier Gordon Campbell wrote the New York Times to tell Americans that all was well in the BC Forests. A negative article about ancient forest destruction and the impending extinction of the Spotted Owl had appeared in the newspaper, and Campbell wished to set the record straight with American consumers. He wrote that "habitat decisions are made with the best available understanding of scientific and socioeconomic factors affecting species sustainability, not with lumber interests solely in mind." His final statement in that letter sums up the esurient hypocrisy that has characterized the biggest ramp-up of ancient forest destruction in 150 years of industrial logging in BC under his watch: "There is more old-growth in British Columbia than 100 years ago, amounting to 62 million acres. That total is projected to increase in the century ahead."

In British Columbia, forestry science is specifically bought and controlled to prove that black is white. It's no wonder that the fanaticism of scientism has garnered such unquestioned support amongst those whose primary religion involves nothing other than the making of money. Seven of Campbell's top-ten 'corporate contributions' (a euphemism for quasi-legal bribery) for his 2001 election campaign were from giant logging interests, and British Columbians know that it's the Weyerhaeusers, CANFOR's and Interfors who call the tune on BC forest policies. The transnational logging industry simply bought themselves a BC government for the shameful pittance of around a million bucks over 10 years. But having bought the science, as well as the government to proselytize it, this still couldn't placate an increasingly sceptical and alarmed public that isn't buying the bull.

Campbell took a beating in the 2005 election over his George Bush style "green-as-an-oil-slick" environmental policies. His was a government that axed the entire Ministry of the Environment and tried to privatise the entire British Columbia public landbase for the logging industry. The electors of BC sent a powerful message to the industry/government consortium that environment is a priority on a planet facing ever more disturbing ecological catastrophe. The Premier's spin-stories about increasing amounts of old-growth in a province with an annual 70 million cubic metre cut, the scam of 'variable retention' logging, and the biggest lie of all, ~that voracious industrial destruction of forests was in any way sustainable were wearing thin. Yet the avalanche of regressive anti-environmental legislation and the onslaught of destruction on the ground during 4 years of Campbell was so sweeping, it completely overwhelmed any voices pleading for sanity in the beleaguered BC forests.

Such a trashing of BC's magnificent forested landbase is having severe negative consequences for the economy and ecology of the province, and the spin-meisters know that the seething undercurrent of outrage and despair are bound to develop traction, sooner, rather than later. Progressive customers around the world are demanding ethically-produced forest products, especially products which are not derived from the destruction of ancient forests. While the big companies log like there's no tomorrow, forest-dependent communities, forest workers and First Nations have been atrociously abused and they are getting more and more agitated.

Logging has never approached sustainability in BC, contrary to decades of propaganda, and today, more than 80% of the BC timber harvest continues to be derived from primeval frontier forests. Big Logging and the global-warming-induced Mountain Pine beetle epidemic are now locked in a flat out race to exterminate the provinces interior forests, and with all easily accessible coastal forests on Vancouver Island and the mainland inlets now exhausted, including second-growth forests mowed down to the 30-40-year-old age class, the insatiable eye of industrial logging has now set its sights onto that most lucrative final frontier forest on the continent: the 20 million acre tract of endangered temperate rainforest which has become known as the "Great Bear Rainforest" (GBR).

To acquire unfettered access to the timber, the government/industry consortium required further buy-in from its most troublesome critics, namely BC's largest environmental organizations, who had once positioned themselves in the preceding decade as a major threat to the global market for BC forest products. Highly successful international market campaigns identified the grossest destroyers of wilderness, and by staging effective protests at retail outlets, consumers around the world began to shun BC forest products. People are recognizing the impending ecological disaster, and with the loss of ancient forests as one of its most prominent features, the logging interests liquidation scheme for the Great Bear Rainforest needed some big-name Greenwash. That's when Weyerhaeuser, Interfor, Canfor, Western Forest Products and Norske Skog decided to sit down with Greenpeace, the BC Sierra Club, Forest Ethics and the Rainforest Action Network, known collectively as the Rainforest Solutions Project (RSP), to see how they might legitimize their rapacious scheme.

To get things rolling, 17 independent scientists were appointed by government, industry and the environmental groups to study the GBR area for 3 years. But when the results of the study finally came in, it threw a big wrench into the logging company's hopes for the area. The scientists analysis concluded that between 44% and 60% of the GBR was essential for preservation in order to guarantee species survival. Even so, the team found that this amount of protection from logging, mining and hunting would only ensure that 30% of the most important habitat of all focal species of the area would be protected. Well that just wasn't going to cut it for the companies which were slathering at a vastly larger cut, so the wheeling and dealing began in earnest. Astoundingly, in January 2004, without any discussion, consultation, democratic process or mandate from the people of BC, or even from the larger BC environmental community, the RSP negotiators emerged with a compromise consensus deal with industry, and agreed to shelve the independent scientific conclusion. Now the pressure is on Gordon Campbell to finally endorse the deal. There's little doubt that this will happen, and the industry is already sharpening its saws.

These American-foundation-funded environmental groups had inexplicably sold out the GBR forest and cut up the pie accordingly: industrial logging: about 80%, protected areas: 20%. Immediately, in December 2003, before news of the 'consensus' even went public, and years prior to Campbell's official sign-on, the BC government was sending out faxes to its lumber customers all around the world, announcing that "Peace in the Woods" had been achieved, and all ethical obstacles to the purchase of BC forest products had been resolved. Meanwhile, during the period of 'talk-and-log' negotiations, full-on destructive clearcutting continued apace in the GBR, and under the deal, will continue until 2009. According to a David Suzuki Foundation study, since 2001, when the GBR discussions first began, 74% of all logging which has occurred on more than 600 cutblocks in the GBR forest has been by clearcutting, with 46% of it in the regions most productive salmon-bearing watersheds. Only 8% of salmon creeks which flowed through these cutblocks were properly protected. More than 65% of the most critical areas of the GBR will be available for logging and other development.

The Ecosystem Based Management (EBM) Handbook which is being hailed by the RSP as the primary excuse for the embarrassingly small amount of protected areas offers no legally binding changes to the status quo described above. In fact, the EBM version being put forward as groundbreaking for the GBR is nothing more than a recommendation which will allow the massive industrial exploitation of these forests to continue. From the Suzuki website: "[Our] analysis concludes that few elements of the Coast Information Team (CIT) recommended prescription for EBM remain in proposed land-use agreements, thereby seriously reducing the effectiveness of the landuse plans in protecting biodiversity on the landscape outside of proposed protected areas...To date, the BC government and forest industry have not demonstrated the slightest willingness to ratify even a small number of important EBM principles and have proposed that consideration of the full suite of EBM recommendations proposed by the CIT could take another four years to complete, thereby providing the forest industry with an open playing field and no requirements to improve logging standards to meet EBM requirements. Essentially, this means more 'talk and log.'"

Nobody, neither the industry, nor the RSP has much of an idea what EBM as slated for the GBR will look like, and there is zero regulatory enactment to define it. From the RSP's own website: "Ultimately, a shallow application of EBM based on a wavering commitment will not cut it. The implementation of EBM must be stringent and entrenched, or otherwise, the long-term health of Great Bear Rainforest will remain in jeopardy." Bill Bourgeois, spokesperson for the Coast Forest Conservation Initiative, a coalition of Canadian Forest Products, Western Forest Products, International Forest Products, Weyerhaeuser and Norske Canada, the parties which want to log the GBR, states that "Work has already begun, but [foresters] need further clarification on how to implement EBM. It's one thing to have it written down on paper and another when you are standing on the edge of a creek deciding which to cut and not cut and why," he says. He adds that "government must act, not only to ensure certainty for the forest companies, but in order for them to fully implement this new way of doing forestry on the ground." Bourgeois said it has taken longer to bring about on-the-ground changes than anticipated but logging companies are voluntarily moving towards ecosystem-based management without the actual plan and guidelines in place. There are still examples of clear-cut logging, he said, as roads and cutting plans are developed years in advance.

Voluntarily, eh? Indeed.

It's clear that Gordon Campbell will sign the deal, all the current "Stand-Tall for the GBR ~write the Premier Now" RSP hype notwithstanding. Obviously, if Weyerhaeuser etc. think this is a great deal, Gordo will certainly sign. He wavered on signing it just before the recent election, but wimped out at the eleventh hour. I doubt if that was a politically expedient calculation for him, as his tardiness in appearing to "turn over a new leaf" cost him the re-election of most of his obviously pro-logging MLA's. His imminent endorsement of the deal will perpetuate his use of 'pseudo-science' to justify the sustainability of BC's forest practices, proving the outright lie of his NYT article . But what about the "socioeconomic" considerations he promised? According to Will Horter of the Dogwood Initiative, a BC Environmental think-tank, "in the North Coast Forest District, home to a big portion of the yet unprotected Great Bear Rainforest, over 85% of the logging produces only 25 cents a cubic metre." Horter asks, "Would you allow someone to log a tree the size of the average Canadian telephone pole from your backyard and pay you only a quarter?..." This is exactly the kind of BC tax-payer subsidy that Campbell has lavished on his logging industry friends which has brought about the disastrous US Softwood Lumber tariffs, which have so devastated revenues

derived from the BC forests. The American lumber industry quite rightly argues that Campbell virtually gives away the public forest to the companies. This enormous giveaway of irreplaceable ancient forests exposes the other lie in his NYT statement, and makes it clear that forest policy BC-style is completely framed "with lumber interests solely in mind."

Finally, why, oh why are BC's largest environmental organizations agreeing to this unprecedented giveaway of one of the Earth's most precious final tracts of wilderness? How is it that our society's so-believed primary defenders of the environment have compromised so much with those who will destroy it so utterly? Even the Rainforest Action Network admits that the deal has terrible consequences for forests far beyond the GBR. From their "BuyGoodWood" website: "RAN also acknowledges that the consensus failed to live up to the recommendations of the Coast Information Team and the balance of scientific opinion stating that the plan leaves these fragile ecosystems and the life that they support at risk. Specifically, the concensus only protects 22% of the Central Coast landbase with a further 11% off-limits to logging and hydro-electric development, but open to mining and road building that could substantially erode forest habitat. Moreover, RAN is deeply concerned that the central coast recommendations are being used to validate habitat destruction on Vancouver Island and elsewhere in the province. Already, companies like Weyerhaeuser are using the concensus in the media as a green-ticket for their old-growth logging operations throughout Canada."

This deal cannot be based on any sense of "trust" that the Weyerhaeuser's and ilk will finally live up to the hallucinatory pipe-dream of an as-yet un-defined "EBM" standard in their logging practices. Weyerhaeuser, the company that invaded, occupied and massacred Vancouver Island for 7 years and then 'cut and ran' is the world's largest forest destroyer. There is not a single precedent in all of BC's sorry logging history which demonstrates any semblance of ethical practices by a single one of these players. Tragically, there appears to be only one single rationale which has made such quisling compromise possible, ~it's all about the money Heather Ramsay quotes Merran Smith in a recent article which appears on "The Tyee" website, "Landmark Great Bear Agreement Is Down to the Wire." Smith, one of the RSP negotiators, argues that "one of their biggest concerns is the potential for \$200 million in pledged conservation financing to fall apart, [should Campbell fail to endorse the deal] leaving a myriad of First Nations and coastal community projects, like shellfish aquaculture, tourism, non-timber forest products and sustainable logging to fail. Smith says the money, raised from private industry, government and foundations, became an important piece of the complicated Great Bear Rainforest Agreement, because communities demanded it. Environmental groups helped to secure \$110 million dollars intended to help First Nations implement the land-use plans in their territories, Smith says. Some of the money will become seed capital for business ventures and some will be set aside to help First Nations go about the physical task of managing and monitoring the streams, forest and ocean. She sees it as one way to help First Nations build capacity and control in their territories. An additional \$80 million in socially responsible investment dollars may be available to larger communities like Prince Rupert for sound business projects."

Indeed. So the funding lined up by the RSP for the so-called benefit of coastal First Nations is only contingent on the giant logging companies having their way with the place.

At 25 cents a cubic metre in stumpage revenue to the taxpayer for the logging of 80% the GBR, the logging industry cut will totally dwarf that measely \$200 million. We're talking a trade-off of the equivalent value of 200 Victoria waterfront homes, ~in exchange for the Earth's largest, contiguous remaining tract of intact temperate rainforest! That forest is simply

priceless, -irreplaceable. The entirely unceded forested lands of the GBR already belong entirely to the First Nations of that coast . Why not follow the example of the Haida who have recently so ably demonstrated what it really takes to rid their forests of the rapacious scourge of Weyerhaeuser and ilk? There is no need to negotiate, nor is there any moral justification for environmentalists to cut big, ugly compromise deals with those who would destroy the final forests of the planet. Working together with First Nations AGAINST these destroyers, we could seriously damage the current BC forest industry for the benefit of all. We should have stayed the course with the market campaigns, and only by working together with First Nations to rid the province of the scourge of Big Logging and its lying Gordon Campbell lackies.

Compromise collaborationism with a voracious industrial menace will never protect the final forests of the world. British Columbian's should quit supporting any environmental organization which does not have NO MORE ANCIENT FOREST LOGGING, as its primary, uncompromising stance. As Paul Watson of the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society says: "Greenpeace protests, we intervene." Greenpeace has removed that kind of active interference from its arsenal. Greenpeace is a corporation now,"

We are rapidly losing all of the Earth's final, irreplaceable primaeval forests. The loss of these forests is a global emergency!! Massive extinctions of intricate biodiversity accompany the destruction. When will people finally act to protect wilderness?? When there's 15% left? 10%? 5%? It's going, going and so nearly almost gone.

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