
NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
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Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations
and Rural Development

Government takes action on old growth, protects 54 groves with iconic trees

VICTORIA – The B.C. government is protecting some of the province’s largest trees as the first step in a new approach to old-growth management.

“This province is fortunate to have trees that have been standing in place for hundreds of years – some for more than a thousand,” said Doug Donaldson, Minister of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development. “We want to protect these majestic giants so today’s families and future generations can enjoy them, just like our parents and grandparents did.”

Donaldson made the announcement at Francis/King Regional Park, beside some of the largest Douglas fir trees in the Capital Regional District — trees that are already protected as part of the park.

Under a Forest Act protection measure, 54 known big trees from the Big Tree Registry at the University of British Columbia that could have been harvested will now remain standing. There are 347 trees within the registry, and the 54 trees meet the criteria for being protected as big trees. Further opportunities to add to this list will be made available as additional trees are identified and verified.

“We are protecting 54 exceptionally large and old trees, each surrounded by a one-hectare grove to act as a buffer zone,” said Donaldson. “These trees represent an important part of B.C.’s natural heritage, and British Columbians have said they want them preserved. What we are announcing today is the start of a broader conversation about the future of old-growth management in this province.”

The old-growth plan will include permanent regulation changes to protect big trees. Beginning in fall 2019, an independent two-person panel will engage with First Nations, industry, stakeholders and communities on old-growth management.

Garry Merkel, a forester and natural resource expert, and member of the Tahltan Nation, and Al Gorley, a professional forester and former chair of the Forest Practices Board, will hear perspectives on the ecological, economic and cultural importance of old-growth trees and forests. They will report back to government in spring 2020 with recommendations that are expected to inform a new approach to old-growth management for British Columbia.

Currently, 55% of old-growth forests on Crown land in B.C.’s coastal region are already protected from logging.

A backgrounder follows.

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BACKGROUND

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Protecting big trees – eligibility

Protecting big trees required analysis of the University of British Columbia Big Tree Registry in order to identify which trees were appropriate for protection.

To be considered, a tree needed to meet a set of criteria, including still being alive, not being already protected in a park or protected area, on provincial Crown land (excluding private property or federal land), having verified geographical co-ordinates for accurate location and meeting the diameter requirements by species type.

Size thresholds for protection were determined using a percentage of the largest tree by species in the registry. Minimum diameter threshold for Douglas fir, Sitka spruce, western red cedar and yellow cedar were set at 50% of the largest tree on record for those species. The minimum diameter threshold for all other species was set at 75% of the largest tree on record for those species. For example, the largest known coastal Douglas fir has a diameter of 4.23 metres measured at diameter breast height (DBH). The protection threshold for coastal Douglas fir is 50% of this size – at least 2.12 meters DBH.

A permanent approach to protecting big trees will occur later this year when regulation changes under the Forest and Range Practices Act are amended. This will protect big trees that meet the thresholds, as they are discovered.

A list of the 54 trees being protected is available:
https://news.gov.bc.ca/files/BG_Big_tree_list.pdf

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