

## Saving our precious old-growth forests

Staff Reports

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Seven western states and four Canadian provinces have joined forces in a plan to limit greenhouse- gas emissions. An entire new source of long-term revenue has become available to British Columbia's government, which will enable it to protect massive tracts of old- growth forests and freshwater supplies.

Participants in the plan, the Western Climate Initiative, include Arizona, California, Montana, New Mexico, Washington, British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario and Quebec, and all have agreed to cut the region's carbon emissions by 15 percent below 2005 levels by 2020.

The backbone of the plan relies on a system of cap and trade. It is a system that was successfully devised and implemented in the early 1990s to combat acid rain around the Great Lakes, which is caused by the pollution generated from coal-burning power plants.

The cap-and-trade system reduces pollution by requiring utility and other companies to meet tough emission standards. Under this system, businesses that cannot cut their emissions because of costs or technical hurdles would be allowed to buy emission credits from companies that have spent the money to clean up and lower their emissions.

Most large industrial polluters, automakers and coal-based utilities are scrambling to find companies to sell them offset credits.

In 1990, Professor Mark Harmon of Oregon State University and others found that the conversion of Pacific Northwest old-growth forests to young, fast-growing forests did not decrease atmospheric carbon as compared to old- growth forests, which capture and store vast amounts of carbon dioxide.

In fact, it took those low-elevation, second-growth forests at least 200 years to accumulate the carbon dioxide storage capacity of existing old-growth forests.

In other words, British Columbia's standing old growth forests are valuable, but not just as milled saw timber or pulp. British Columbia's old-growth is a gold mine for burgeoning worldwide offset markets, as well as its bountiful medicines and other

valuable nontimber forest products.

Marriott International, with more than 3,000 global properties, has partnered with Conservation International to become the first hotel company to calculate its carbon footprint and launched an aggressive worldwide campaign to lessen its impact.

Each year, Marriott International uses 3.2 million tons of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) or 66 pounds per available room. To offset this, Marriott is spending millions of dollars over a long-term period to protect 1.5 million acres of endangered rainforests (because forests absorb CO<sub>2</sub> and store it as wood) in the Juma Sustainable Development Reserve in partnership with the state of Amazonas in Brazil. If Brazil is renting its forests for millions of dollars, then why shouldn't the government of British Columbia consider its options?

In the late 1960s, a young assistant professor (now emeritus) Peter Dooling at the Faculty of Forestry, University of British Columbia taught a nascent discipline of forest recreation. Dooling predicted that forest recreation and tourism would become a major industry in British Columbia.

Today, British Columbia tourism is a multibillion-dollar industry rivaling that of forestry. The 2010 Whistler/Vancouver Olympics easily tipped the scale and now tourism revenue exceeds that of forestry.

As the world recession deepens and the mighty U.S. housing market continues to sputter and stall, tens of thousands of British Columbia forestry workers have lost their jobs.

It is perplexing and frustrating that North Americans buying furniture must settle for Scots pine grown and manufactured in Lapland when millions of acres of British Columbia's lodgepole pine are salvage-logged and pulped rather than manufactured and sold throughout the continent (and elsewhere) as distressed cottage pine furniture.

With more than 60 British Columbia glaciers receding, securing freshwater supplies is of paramount importance and maintaining exquisite high elevation old-growth forests — which capture, retain and slowly release billions of gallons of snow melt in the springtime — is priceless.

While maintaining the integrity of the Brazilian forests is important so, too, are the Northern Hemisphere's last contiguous great temperate rainforests located in British Columbia.

Why not rent some of the old-growth forests, take advantage of their potent ability to absorb enormous amounts of CO<sub>2</sub> and provide a buffer against climate change.

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