




BC Parks & Protected Areas

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British Columbia Forest Facts

MARCH 2011



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PROTECTING BRITISH COLUMBIA'S DIVERSE FORESTS

British Columbia is Canada's most ecologically diverse province, with everything from temperate rainforest to dry pine forests to alpine meadows. It is also the country's most biologically diverse province; home to more than half of the wildlife and fish species living in Canada.

Parks and other protected areas maintain this immense environmental diversity by conserving wilderness areas, wildlife habitat, recreation areas, cultural sites and much more. British Columbia has more than

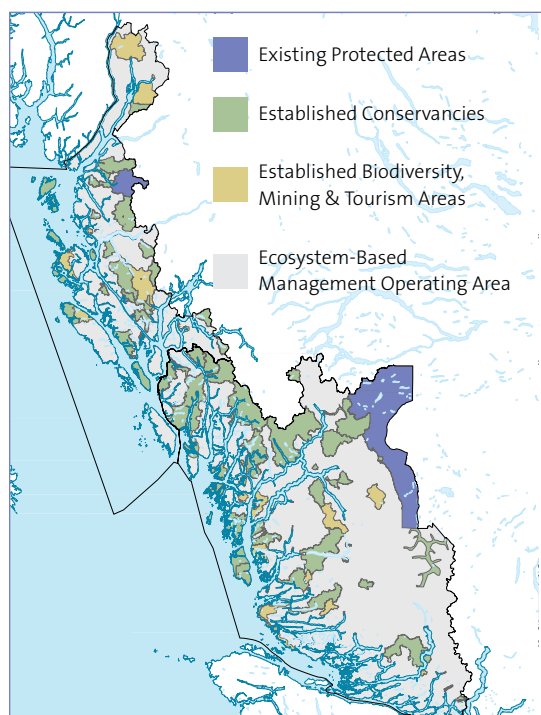
14.1 million hectares (34.8 million acres) of protected lands where no forestry, mining or industrial development is allowed – an area bigger than New York State.

In 1992, six per cent of British Columbia's land base was protected. Today, more than 14.8 per cent is fully protected, and much more of British Columbia's land base falls under some type of special management regime, where values such as wildlife habitat, biodiversity or recreation take precedence.





PROTECTING UNIQUE ECOSYSTEMS



Some of Canada's richest forest diversity is found along British Columbia's Pacific Coast. In 2006, as a result of community based land use planning, British Columbia announced it was protecting about 1.8 million hectares (4.4 million acres) in the sensitive North and Central Pacific Coast planning regions, also known as the Great Bear Rainforest. Where resource development is allowed, it will be guided by principles based on ecosystem-based management, an adaptive approach to managing human activities that seeks to ensure the coexistence of healthy, fully functioning ecosystems and human communities.

BRITISH COLUMBIA'S PARKS AND SPECIAL AREAS

British Columbia's parks system is the second largest in Canada – only the national parks system is bigger. More than 970 parks and protected areas in British Columbia contain some of the best representative elements and special features of the province's natural heritage. They range in size from less than one hectare to close to one million hectares.

Almost one half of British Columbia's protected areas are forested, representing every element of the province's rich forest diversity – from coastal temperate rainforests to the boreal region to interior pine forests. This includes about 4.5 million hectares (more than 11 million acres) of forests that meet British Columbia's definitions of old growth.



BRITISH COLUMBIA'S PARKS

British Columbia's Class A parks allow permits only for activities necessary to preserve or maintain the park's recreational values. In 2006, a new designation called conservancy was created to protect and maintain biological diversity, natural environments and recreation values, to preserve and maintain

traditional Aboriginal uses and to allow for low-impact, compatible economic activities such as shellfish aquaculture. Formal collaborative management agreements define the role of First Nations in planning, managing and operating conservancies, and can also apply to parks.

RESPECTING ALL FOREST VALUES

British Columbia's laws and policies protect land and forest values; its conservation strategies help protect habitat for at-risk species such as grizzly bears and mountain caribou. It constantly reviews and adjusts forest management rules so they reflect the latest scientific knowledge and offer the best protection for all forest and land values.

Forestry activities must meet the requirements of British Columbia's forest laws and environmental standards. This is backed by compliance inspections and enforcement involving various provincial and federal agencies.

Under the Forest and Range Practices Act, forest companies operating on public lands—which make up 95 per cent of the province—must show how they can best achieve government objectives for soils, timber, wildlife, water, fish, biodiversity and cultural heritage resources, and are held accountable

for on-the-ground performance. Land use objectives also guide the management of values such as cultural heritage resources, freshwater ecosystem habitats, landscape and stand level biodiversity and grizzly bears.

Among other things, the Act requires that companies:

- Identify areas near streams, lakes and wetlands where activities are restricted to conserve water quality, fish habitat, wildlife habitat and biodiversity.
- Plan harvesting and other silvicultural activities to protect scenic landscapes in areas identified by the Ministry of Forests and Range.
- Protect the drainage area for water used for human consumption – there are 461 designated community watersheds in the province.



BRITISH COLUMBIA'S CONSERVATION LANDS

British Columbia's comprehensive land and resource management planning has resulted in full protection for many of British Columbia's special areas, as well as supporting a variety of conservation land designations where resource development such as logging is allowed but other values take precedence.

Examples include:

Wildlife management areas conserve or manage important species and habitats while still allowing some development activities. The British Columbia government has designated 23 wildlife management areas and manages another 250 sites for fish and wildlife conservation purposes. Together, these conservation lands for fish and wildlife comprise more than 250,000 hectares (about 640,000 acres).

Wildlife habitat areas are designated by the Ministry of Environment under the Forest and Range Practices Act. These areas provide special management for species listed at risk or regionally important under the Act. British Columbia has more than 1,186 wildlife habitat areas, covering approximately one million hectares (2.5 million acres). Forest and range activities may be permitted if they are consistent with the special management identified for the area.

Ungulate winter ranges are designated by the Ministry of Environment under the Forest and Range Practices Act to manage winter habitat for ungulates, such as mountain goat or Stone sheep. British Columbia has approximately 6.2 million hectares (more than 15.3 million acres) designated as ungulate winter range. Forest and range activities may be permitted, if they are consistent with the special management identified for the area.



Photo courtesy BC Parks

WORLD'S LARGEST INTERNATIONAL HERITAGE SITE

Tatshenshini-Alsek Park, together with adjacent parks in Alaska and the Yukon, forms the largest international World Heritage Site at approximately 8.4 million hectares

(20.7 million acres). Scientists say the mixed spruce-willow-birch forest found along the lower stretch of the Tatshenshini River is unique in British Columbia.



Photo courtesy Jeremy Ayotte

CONSERVING WILDERNESS

As people gain access to wilderness areas, whether it is by road or on an all-terrain vehicle trail, tremendous impacts such as pollution, littering, fires, wildlife harassment and damage to sensitive habitat or ecosystems can occur. British Columbia has regulations to manage access to some remote areas, and protect the integrity of ecosystem and values such as watersheds, scenery, wildlife corridors, wildlife populations, cultural heritage and wilderness experience.

The Muskwa-Kechika Management Area (M-KMA) is one of North America's last true wilderness areas south of the 60th parallel, covering 6.4 million hectares (15.8 million acres). About 25 per cent is part of the provincial park system, and the rest is open to resource development, subject to the highest form of environmental standards. M-KMA is a model in consensus-based land use planning, demonstrating that resource development, wilderness, wildlife and cultural values can co-exist.

Large areas of natural wilderness set the M-KMA apart – and most of it is in an access management area established by law that maintains vehicular access on designated routes in order to protect its many values.

PROTECTING CULTURAL SITES

British Columbia laws provide protection for cultural and heritage resources, such as pre-1846 archaeological sites and artifacts, including culturally modified trees, Aboriginal rock art, and any burial places with historical or archaeological value. If these are encountered during resource development activities, companies must cease activities until the site's significance can be assessed. For example, as part of the Sea-to-Sky Land and Resource Management Planning process north of Vancouver, First Nations people identified three Squamish Nation Wild Spirit Places as special cultural management areas

where resource development must meet specific rules to conserve wildlife habitat and cultural features.

A culturally modified tree is a tree that has been altered by Aboriginal people as part of their traditional use of the forest. Examples include removing large slabs of outer bark from living trees for roofing materials, or carving a rectangular hole in the tree to test its soundness before cutting it for a canoe. If the modifications pre-date 1846, they are considered archaeological sites and are protected under the Heritage Conservation Act.

SOURCES

BC Parks

www.env.gov.bc.ca/bcparks

Forest and Range Practices Act

www.for.gov.bc.ca/code

Integrated Land Management Bureau

www.ilmb.gov.bc.ca

Muskwa-Kechika Management Area

www.muskwa-kechika.com

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