



Cut logging, gain jobs

report: Saving a third of coastal lands from logging could yield a \$200-million economic boost, study claims

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British Columbia could gain \$200 million in economic investment in its coastal rainforests if it focuses on sustainable activities such as recreation and tourism, and adopts less-intrusive logging methods, says a new report commissioned by environmental groups.

Economic development and employment prospects in the north and central coast regions, and the Queen Charlotte Islands, are limited under a "business-as-usual" scenario that relies on the forest industry, says the report.

It says that preserving about one third of the forested land in those regions -- a seven-million hectare area that is roughly the size of Switzerland -- would attract new investment in developments including wilderness tourism, value-added forestry, and shellfish aquaculture, and create hundreds of new jobs.

But it says those opportunities would be difficult to realize without a modification of forestry operations to reflect the sensitivity of adjacent, protected lands.

The report was produced by Pacific Analytics, a Victoria-based consulting firm that undertakes studies for a wide range of clients including the B.C. government.

"It's the first time a report has looked at using conservation to attract new investment and economic development -- and supporting the conservation of wild ecosystems at the same time," said Merran Smith, director of Forest Ethics' B.C. coast program.

"Normally in British Columbia we think of getting investment dollars from logging and mining. What we are learning from this report is that there is a real interest in investing in conservation. If we can learn from this, we can support conservation and create jobs at the same time.

"That's a huge opportunity for B.C. at a time when the forest industry is faltering."

The report says a new Conservation Investments and Incentives Initiative -- which already has support of government, industry, environmentalists and first nations -- could create up to \$120 million in economic development and jobs for aboriginals.

It says a further \$80 million in venture capital and loan funds would follow.

The report focuses on the shortage of jobs and opportunities facing coastal first nations, and says the adoption of a "sustainability scenario" would bring new jobs and opportunities to small communities that don't necessarily reap the benefits of coastal logging.

"While the sustainability scenario will displace some timber industry workers, more than an equivalent number of positions will be created as a result of pursuing logging under ecosystem based management.

"A high proportion of these jobs will go to first nations."

The B.C. government, first nations, coastal logging companies and environmental groups reached an

accord in 2001 that was intended to create a consensus about the size and scope of industrial activity in the coastal rainforest.

Since then, recommendations on the levels of Central and North Coast forest harvesting and preservation have been presented to government -- which must now gain the support of first nations.

Negotiations regarding the Queen Charlotte Islands (Haida Gwaii) continue.

"You have your environmental assets, the beauty of the place itself, the richness of the assets, and you can also bring in investment dollars that help to feed an economic transformation that places the highest value on those assets," said Lisa Matthaus, coast campaign coordinator for the B.C. chapter of the Sierra Club of Canada.

Rick Jeffrey, president and CEO of the Coast Forest Products Association, noted that his members support the coastal accord.

But he said several of the elaborations suggested by Pacific Analytics -- notably those that recommend value-added forestry operations -- have no practical application.

"I've just come back from China and I can tell you there is no way that small, value-added operations in the middle of coastal British Columbia have a chance of competing economically in the world market for value-added wood products," Jeffery said.

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