

## British Columbia Forest Policy

British Columbia's forests were heavily harvested in the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries. Little value was given to forests: timber cuts were expected to continue until the trees were gone and the land could be used for agriculture. The Forest Service first planted seedlings in 1930, and had planted three billion seedlings by 1993. By the 1940s, people began to realize that the provincial forests were not limitless, and timber companies began replanting areas that had been clearcut. The Forest Act of 1947 recognized the forests as economic resources and established the goal of ensuring a perpetual supply of timber and embraced the principles of "sustained yield" forestry. In some areas, called Tree Farm Licences, entire areas were leased to logging companies that were responsible for managing the forests sustainably. In other areas, called Timber Supply Areas, the government retained management responsibility. Centralized government agencies set policy from a distance. Large corporations acquired most of the logging rights. Sustained yield forestry meant that Allowable Annual Cuts (AACs) were established for the yearly harvest, based on the amount of mature timber, the annual growth of new timber, and the length of time the forest would be allowed to grow before being harvested.<sup>16</sup>

A recurrent threat was that timber cuts were not sustainable, resulting in loggers being laid off and mills shutdown. If all the old-growth trees are cut at the same time, the annual harvest is limited to the growth of new trees, called the Long Run Sustainable Yield, and the timber supply may be exhausted during some years. By the early 1970s, provincial officials began to recognize that logging rates were not sustainable, but logging rates continued to climb as the pursuit of immediate jobs and profits overwhelmed projections of unsustainability. Modernization of logging technology resulted in job losses as timber harvests levelled off. Increasing international competition also impinged on profits. Preservationists lobbied successfully for the creation parks that also reduced the potential supply of timber.<sup>17</sup>

For twenty years, however, industry and government officials ignored the unsustainability of timber policy. Allowable annual cuts were kept higher than conditions permitted. The logging industry demanded that remote or uneconomical areas be included in the base used for calculating the AACs in order to keep them high. The province began requiring all public lands that are logged to be reforested. The survival rate was 87 percent in 1993, up from 60 percent a decade before. Natural regeneration is used in half of the areas being reforested; it usually takes natural seedlings about three years longer than planted seedlings to become free of competing vegetation and take hold.<sup>18</sup> A dozen provincial laws enacted in 1979 regulated provincial forests, including the Assessment Act (amended in 1986), the Ecological Reserve Act, the Fisheries Act, the Forest Act, the Heritage Conservation Act, The Land Act, the Ministry of Forests Act, the Park Act, the Range Act, the Social Service Tax Act, the Taxation (Rural Area) Act, and the Water Act. Other provincial laws affecting forests are the 1982 Wildlife Act and the 1987 Motor Fuel Tax Act, and Regulation. Two federal laws, the 1979 Fisheries Act and the 1985 Indian Act also affect forests.<sup>19</sup>