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Subject: Media Release: Old-Growth Logging in the McKelvie Valley, One of Vancouver Island's Last Intact Watersheds, Opposed by Tahsis Village Council and Community Members

For Immediate Release

August 1, 2018

Old-Growth Logging in the McKelvie Valley, One of Vancouver Island's Last Intact Watersheds, Opposed by Tahsis Village Council and Community Members

Tahsis Village Council and members of the Tahsis community are joining forces with conservationists to oppose planned logging by Western Forest Products in the McKelvie Watershed, the last unlogged watershed in the Tahsis region, located in Nuuchahnulth territory.

The McKelvie Valley, which extends from the village of Tahsis on the northwest coast of Vancouver Island to the base of Mount McKelvie, features endangered ancient forest, rich wildlife habitat, and McKelvie Creek, a salmon spawning ground and the community's source of drinking water.

"The McKelvie is an exceptionally significant ancient forest given that it is an entire intact valley in a region where virtually all valleys have now been fragmented and tattered by logging" stated Ancient Forest Alliance campaigner Andrea Inness. "As such, its value for wildlife, water, fisheries, tourism, recreation, and the climate are exceptional. Most controversies over old-growth logging today involve significant patches and groves of ancient forest, but we're talking about an entire intact watershed here. The McKelvie also feeds into Tahsis' drinking aquifer and the watershed itself is the town's back-up drinking water supply. As such, it is a first-rate conservation priority and an old-growth 'hotspot' area that needs an immediate government moratorium on any logging plans"

The McKelvie Creek watershed falls within Western Forest Products' (WFP) Tree Farm Licence (TFL) 19, which encompasses 190,000 hectares in the vicinity of Nootka Sound, in the territory of the Mowachaht/Muchalaht First Nation. The company plans to begin road-building into the McKelvie valley next year with the aim to commence logging operations in 2020. Western Forest Products also plans to log some of the remaining ancient groves nearby Tahsis and Leiner river valleys over the next 15 years.

Since WFP revealed its plans publicly last year, locals have grown increasingly concerned about the impacts of the proposed logging on Tahsis' burgeoning tourism industry, increased flood risks, possible sediment run-off into McKelvie Creek, and the loss of rare, intact old-growth forests.

In response, Tahsis Village Council unanimously passed a resolution in June opposing all forms of resource extraction and development in the McKelvie watershed, including all logging activity.

"The Council's resolution called on Minister Donaldson to remove the McKelvie Creek community watershed from TFL 19 in order to preserve one of the few remaining intact old-growth valleys on Vancouver Island," stated Randy Taylor, Acting Mayor of the Village of Tahsis.

Concerned Tahsis residents also formed the “McKelvie Matters” advocacy group earlier this year to oppose logging in the watershed. Conservationists with the Ancient Forest Alliance, Sierra Club BC, and Wilderness Committee are working to support both groups to help ensure their pleas are heard by the BC NDP government.

“The plan by Western Forest Products to log our drinking watershed and the steep, unstable hillside above Tahsis puts the health and safety of the people of Tahsis at risk,” stated Martin Davis, biologist, bat caver, and co-founder of the McKelvie Matters advocacy group. “It will destroy groves of huge Douglas-fir, remove much of our remaining regional Marbled Murrelet habitat, damage our premiere hiking trail, and will leave scars directly over town that will take generations to heal.”

“Residents of this community are passionate about protecting their community watershed. Not only is McKelvie Creek the source of our drinking water, it’s also important habitat for bear, elk, deer, cougars, and many bird species,” stated Acting Mayor Taylor.

“Logging the old-growth in the McKelvie Creek watershed is environmentally short-sighted, threatens our community’s drinking water supply, and undermines our economic recovery, which is based on eco-tourism.”

Since Western Forest Products closed the town’s sawmill in 2001, the village of Tahsis has been working to transition to a tourism-based economy by capitalizing on its stunning coastal scenery. Today, the area is renowned for sport fishing, kayaking, diving, hiking, caving, trail bike riding, and wildlife viewing tours.

The town is also adjacent to Nootka Island, home of the 35-kilometre-long Nootka trail, one of BC’s most spectacular trails, featuring old-growth temperate rainforest and a rich history as the site of the first contact between Europeans and First Nations people on Canada’s west coast. The village of Tahsis itself, located in Mowachaht/Muchalaht First Nations territory, holds historical and cultural importance as the winter home of Chief Maquinna and as a former gateway to a trade route spanning the entire width of Vancouver Island.

The area’s unique natural and cultural heritage is what led Tahsis resident and former New Brunswick NDP MLA and MP candidate, Shawna Gagné, to begin lobbying the BC government earlier this year to protect the McKelvie watershed as a heritage site.

“Heritage is something worth keeping, preserving, and protecting,” stated Gagné. “If heritage buildings, ruins, and pyramids are important to protect, why not our remaining endangered old-growth forests? Once they are logged, they’re gone forever. If we allow this area to be degraded by logging, we not only risk ecological damage, but also the area’s tourism appeal, the historic trails once used by Indigenous peoples, and the over 177 archeological sites already identified in this region.”

This time last year, conservationists with the Ancient Forest Alliance, Sierra Club of BC, and Wilderness Committee presented the BC Forests Minister with a suite of recommendations to protect endangered ancient forests while ensuring a sustainable, value-added, second-growth forest industry. The recommendations included a halt on logging in old-growth forest ‘hotspots’ (endangered, intact valleys like the McKelvie watershed with high conservation and recreational value) and a science-based plan to protect old-growth forests across the province. Despite promising in their 2017 election platform to use the science-based, ecosystem-based management approach of the Great Bear Rainforest as a model for sustainably managing old-growth forests, the NDP government has yet to take any meaningful steps to

prevent endangered forest ecosystems from being logged in BC.

“The BC government needs to break from the destructive and unsustainable status quo of old-growth forest liquidation, mill closures, and raw log exports, and start moving towards sustainable solutions,” stated Ken Wu, Ancient Forest Alliance executive director. “This starts by putting an immediate halt on logging in large, intact old-growth areas like the McKelvie Valley and in other old-growth forest hotspots in order to start negotiating solutions while there are still significant tracts remaining. So far, the BC government has not been following through on its promise to sustainably manage old-growth forests based on the Ecosystem-Based Management model used in the Great Bear Rainforest agreement, where most of the forests were protected based on science. It’s time for this government to be a sustainable, progressive, and forward-thinking government in terms of forestry.”

More background information

The McKelvie watershed is 2,170 hectares in size and is the last regional stronghold for the threatened Marbled Murrelet sea bird population, which depend on low elevation old-growth forests for nesting habitat. McKelvie Creek also provides fish habitat for chum and coho salmon, cutthroat trout, and Dolly Varden. The region’s heavy rainfall and intense storms cause rapid runoff from the valley slopes, debris slides, and flooding of the McKelvie Creek. Conservationists anticipate the proposed road building and logging on the steep mountainside above the valley will increase the severity of these natural occurrences, putting drinking water quality; Tahsis residents, including their school and homes; and wildlife and fish habitat at risk.

Old-growth rainforests are vital to sustaining unique endangered species, climate stability, tourism, clean water, wild salmon, and the cultures of many First Nations. Old-growth forests – with trees that can be 2,000 years old – are a non-renewable resource under BC’s system of forestry, where second-growth forests are re-logged every 50 to 100 years, never to become old-growth again.

On BC’s southern coast (Vancouver Island and the southwest mainland), satellite photos show that at least 75% of the original, productive old-growth forests have already been logged, including well over 90% of the valley bottoms where the largest trees grow. 3.3 million hectares of productive old-growth forests once stood on the southern coast (with an additional 2.2 million hectares of bog, subalpine forests, and other low productivity old-growth forests of low to no commercial value with stunted trees), and today only 860,000 hectares remain, while only 260,000 hectares (or 8%) are protected in parks and Old-Growth Management Areas. Second-growth forests now dominate 75% of the southern coast’s productive forest lands, including 90% of southern Vancouver Island, and can be sustainably logged to support the forest industry. See “before and after” maps and stats of the southern coast’s old-growth forests at: www.ancientforestalliance.org/old-growth-maps.php

In recent months, pressure has been mounting on the BC government to take action to protect endangered forests in BC. Last month, 223 scientists representing nine countries called on the NDP government to take urgent action to protect BC’s endangered temperate rainforests.

Support for increased old-growth protection has broadened in recent years to include unions, chambers of commerce, and municipalities. For example, the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM), representing mayors, city and town councils, and regional districts across BC, has passed a resolution calling for an end to old-growth logging on Vancouver Island; the BC Chamber of Commerce, representing 36,000 BC businesses, has called for expanded old-growth forest protection in BC in order to benefit the economy;

and two major forestry unions - the Private and Public Workers of Canada (PPWC) and Unifor, which represent thousands of BC forestry workers - have been working closely with environmental groups to upgrade environmental standards and forestry employment.

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