



Timber Queensland Growth Scholarships

First Nations Forestry in British Columbia, Canada

A Study Tour to Understand the Journey, the Challenges, the Support and the Opportunities.

Author

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A Timber Queensland Growth Scholarship offers funding to Queensland based forest and timber industry professionals and workers who are in their early or mid career years. Growth Scholarships facilitate access to learning experiences and opportunities that will foster a passion for working in the forest and timber industry and enhance career pathways. This report was completed post learning project activities.

In the spirit of reconciliation, the author acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia, the care and custodianship for Country including our forests. I pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

I also acknowledge that this report was prepared on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of Indigenous peoples in British Columbia, Canada, who have cared for their land since time immemorial. It was a true honour to learn from First Nations peoples, about their deep connection to the land, waters, and skies.

Introduction



(Photo: 'Our Future is Rooted in Our Traditions' Gateway Adjacent to the Forest Sciences Centre at the University, British Columbia, Vancouver).

Like Queensland, the First Nations of British Columbia, Canada (BC) have an ancient, spiritual connection to the land. For thousands of years, they sustainably managed their forests including the use of forest products with a deep respect for the land. Their traditional ecological knowledge and cultural practices have played a significant role in maintaining the health and diversity of forest ecosystems.

The BC journey, particularly since the 1980's, has seen steadily expanding, policy frameworks for First Nations forestry including initiatives to drive and support advancement with many First Nations successful forestry and forest products businesses today. This is a vastly complex and diverse area given there are 204 First Nations in BC alone, representing different bands, tribes, values, landscapes, traditional language and culture, and therefore, 204 different stories!

In Northern Australia, comprising northern Western Australia, north Queensland and the Northern Territory, 70 per cent of native forests and woodlands are either owned or co-managed by First Nations. This represents a significant opportunity for partnerships with industry regarding their interests in forest enterprises, including wood processing / timber production and environmental markets (e.g. carbon, biodiversity).

Similar First Nations opportunities exist in other parts of Queensland and Australia with existing forest or land with scope for new plantations and forest regeneration.

As has been the case in BC, further development of industry partnerships regarding First Nations forestry opportunities in Queensland requires meaningful engagement models between industry, investors and First Nations.

Focus of Learning Project

The scope of this study tour and subsequent report is to understand the journey of First Nations forestry in British Columbia, Canada.

BC was selected given over half of the land base, 55 million hectares, is forested, 22 million hectares of which are part of the BC Provincial Government's Timber Harvesting Land Base (THLB) with only a small fraction of this actually harvested. One in 17 people work in the forestry sector in BC.

Many First Nations are involved in some way, from participating in forest management and stewardship to owning and operating forestry businesses. BC is also a pioneering Canadian Province being the first to legislate the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

This report will firstly look at the traditional management of forests and the use of forest products by First Nations, followed by documenting Canadian Government initiatives, BC Government initiatives, non-government organisations, the University of British Columbia, the role of certification schemes and concluding with some First Nations forestry business case studies.

Significant Learnings & Outcomes

In undertaking this study report and acknowledging the diverse cultures of First Nations worldwide, parallels cannot and should not be readily drawn between BC and Queensland. However, there are potentially some frameworks and principles which could be considered in consultation with First Nations, to advance First Nations forestry in Queensland.

A key learning was the value of a First Nations Forestry Conference, bringing together all key stakeholders to share developments, challenges, opportunities and initiatives already underway. In other words, a forum for knowledge sharing that can lead to beneficial economic, social and environmental outcomes from First Nations forestry activities. Such a conference hosted in Queensland could also benefit from engaging with key stakeholders of First Nations forestry in BC.

From a personal perspective, this opportunity enabled me to meet with several First Nations forestry company leaders, First Nations youth engaged in forestry as well as Indigenous liaison professionals from leading timber manufacturers. Their willingness to share their experiences with me - a total stranger - in respect of the fact I had travelled from Australia to listen and learn, was hugely appreciated. There is significant appetite to collaborate on a global level, to improve the opportunities for First Nations peoples generally, but specifically in terms of forestry.

This opportunity has given me a significantly greater knowledge and appreciation of Canada's BC First Nations Forestry including governance and support models. Through my extensive forestry networks and collaboration opportunities across Queensland and Australia, I hope to be able to bring some of the learnings documented in this report, to support Australia's First Nations to ensure Indigenous knowledge is prioritised for the future of our industry. At the very least, we need to embed First Nations engagement into all our forestry strategies to increase opportunities for First Nations production forestry and the many benefits including reconciliation, more forests, better forest management, social licence, reduced fire impacts and more forest products produced here.

As we lead into the Olympics 2032, there is increased focus on the 2042 games legacy. In addition to infrastructure, imagine a 2042 legacy that includes more trees in the ground through First Nations engagement and the many benefits of First Nations forestry for Queensland!

PART 1

TRADITIONAL FOREST MANAGEMENT AND USE OF FOREST PRODUCTS in BC

Traditional forest management practices in BC included:

- Selective harvesting, only taking what was needed while ensuring the forest could regenerate.
- Cultural burning to manage undergrowth, reducing the risk of wildfires, enhancing habitat while promoting the growth of certain plants such as berries for food / trade.
- Agroforestry, integrating the cultivation of crops with forest management.
- Forest gardens were used to cultivate specific plant species for food, medicine, and materials.

Traditional use of forest products included:

- Food including berries, nuts, and edible plants as well as providing a home to game animals for hunting their meat supply. Such game included deer, elk, moose, bears, mountain goats and smaller animals such as beavers, rabbits, porcupines, squirrels and marmots. Birds were also a food source such as grouse, duck and geese amongst the forested wetlands.
- Medicinal plants.
- Construction material for building such as traditional pit homes and long houses, canoes, and tools (for hunting and fishing). Western Cedar was highly valued for its durability (naturally rot resistant).

- Cultural artifacts such as totem poles (coastal BC only), masks, and ceremonial items. These artifacts held significant cultural and spiritual meaning.
- Bark and plant fibre was used to make clothing, baskets, mats, and ropes. Thin strips of Cedar bark could provide waterproof clothing and could be left to dry for up to a year before being used. The process of harvesting and weaving these materials was an important cultural practice amongst young girls and women.
- Fuel for cooking / heating fires.

Any BC First Nations cultural centre as well as the BC Forest Discovery Centre in the town of Duncan on Vancouver Island, showcases the connection and rich history of First Nations and their forests. In many cultures, finding the right tree for specific use involved a spiritual connection, fasting and prayer to the spirit of the tree. Cedar bark rope would be used to transport logs, often involving up to 200 people working together, moving logs to water where they could be further transported by canoe's.

The Squamish Lil'wat Cultural Centre in Whistler is well worth a visit and shares the proud history of the Squamish Nation and Lil'wat Nation who have coexisted respectfully as neighbours since time immemorial. The building itself is an awe-inspiring use of local timber and provides an education on the traditional use of timber with many artifacts including canoes, baskets, a 'pit home' and community 'long house' to walk through.

The Squamish Nation rightly boasts that through its forestry company, they have the best wildlife management plan in BC. They are the original foresters, conservationists and environmentalists with a land use plan negotiated with the BC Government to protect 50,000 hectares from deforestation / development.

In BC coast Salish language:

Ta na wa yuus ta stituýntsam: The person who protects the land.

Skel7awlh: Stewards of the land.

Kulstam: Take only what food you need.

Kulantsut: Take only what material you need.

PART 2

CANADIAN GOVERNMENT HISTORY AND INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT FIRST NATIONS FORESTRY

Colonisation: The colony of New France was claimed in 1534 with permanent settlements beginning in 1608. This was ceded to the British in 1763. The British North America Act in 1867 formed the Dominion of Canada. The Indian Act of 1876 imposed strict control over First Nations including governance, land use, and a ban on cultural practices.

I. Section 35 of the Canadian Constitution

It wasn't until 1982 that the Government of Canada enshrined Aboriginal rights in Section 35 of the Canadian Constitution.

II. Supreme Court of Canada Decisions

The Supreme Court of Canada has made several landmark rulings interpreting Section 35, providing clarity on the nature and scope of Aboriginal rights. Some key cases include:

- **R. v. Sparrow (1990):** This case established the "Sparrow test," which is used to determine whether a government action that infringes on an Aboriginal right can be justified. The court ruled that the Government must justify any infringement on Aboriginal rights and that such infringements must be minimal, for a valid purpose, and consistent with the Crown's fiduciary duty to Indigenous Peoples.
- **Delgamuukw v. British Columbia (1997):** This case provided a comprehensive analysis of Aboriginal title, affirming that it is a communal right to land that includes the right to use the land for a variety of purposes.
- **R. v. Van der Peet (1996):** This case established a test for identifying Aboriginal rights, emphasizing that the right must be an integral part of the distinctive culture of the Indigenous group claiming the right.
- **Tsilhqot'in Nation v. British Columbia (2014):** This case was the first to grant a declaration of Aboriginal title to a specific area of land, affirming the Tsilhqot'in Nation's title to their traditional territory.

III. The Haida Nation

The *Haida Nation v. British Columbia (Minister of Forests)*, (2004), commonly referred to as the 'Haida Nation case', was a landmark decision by the Supreme Court of Canada that significantly shaped the legal landscape regarding the duty to consult and accommodate Indigenous Peoples.

The case arose from the Haida Nation's opposition to the transfer of a (Crown) Tree Farm Licence on the Haida Gwaii archipelago from MacMillan Bloedel to Weyerhaeuser Company. The Haida Nation claimed that the logging activities and the transfer of the licence infringed on their Aboriginal rights and title, which had not yet been legally recognised or settled.

The matter which the Supreme Court of Canada needed to resolve, was whether the BC Government had a duty to consult with the Haida Nation and accommodate their interests before making decisions that could affect their claimed Aboriginal rights and title.

The Supreme Court of Canada unanimously held that the Crown (federal and provincial governments) has a legal duty to consult with Indigenous Peoples when it contemplates actions or decisions that might affect their claimed but not yet proven Aboriginal rights or title. This decision set a legal precedent affirming the Crown's duty to consult and accommodate Indigenous Peoples.

In summary, the Haida Nation case has had a transformational impact on natural resource development projects in Canada. Governments and companies must now engage in meaningful consultations with Indigenous communities before proceeding with projects that could affect their rights.

According to the BC First Nations Forestry Council, 'Honouring our Lands: A Toolkit for First Nations Ecosystem-Based Stewardship Planning', there has been over a hundred cases challenging the Crown's failure to consult and accommodate since 2004, and First Nations have been successful in the majority of these cases.

IV. Canadian Government, United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)

Canada initially voted against UNDRIP when it was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2007. However, in 2010, Canada endorsed the declaration as an aspirational document and further announced that Canada was a full supporter without qualification in May 2016.

It wasn't until June 2021 that the Canadian government passed Bill C-15, also known as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act. This legislation aims to align Canadian laws with the principles of UNDRIP. It requires the government to develop an action plan to achieve the declaration's objectives and to report annually on progress.

Importantly, the Government of Canada developed the [UNDRIPA](#) through engagement with representatives of National Indigenous Organisations, modern treaty partners and self-governing nations, rights-holders, Indigenous youth, Indigenous women, gender-diverse and two-spirit (see Acronyms and Definitions) people, regional and other Indigenous organisations.

References to “free, prior and informed consent” (FPIC) are found throughout the Declaration. They emphasise the importance of recognising and upholding the rights of Indigenous Peoples and ensuring that there is effective and meaningful participation of Indigenous Peoples in decisions that affect them, their communities and territories.

More specifically, FPIC describes processes that are:

- **free** from manipulation or coercion,
- occur sufficiently **prior** to a decision so that Indigenous rights and interests can be incorporated or addressed effectively as part of the decision-making process,
- **informed** by adequate and timely information, and
- all as part of meaningfully aiming to secure the **consent** of affected Indigenous Peoples.

In summary, the Government of Canada has a constitutional duty to consult Indigenous Peoples when it considers matters that might adversely impact their potential or established Aboriginal or treaty rights.

V. Canadian Government, Natural Resources Canada

Arguably, much of the support services, advocacy efforts and forestry partnerships are at a provincial level but there are some Canadian Government initiatives such as the '[2 Billion Trees - Indigenous Funding Stream](#)' (IFS) coordinated by Natural Resources Canada. The mandate of IFS is, 'Use nature-based solutions to fight climate change and stop biodiversity loss through tree planting'.

The IFS will deliver (CAD) \$500 million of funding using a distinctions-based approach for First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and Unaffiliated and Cross-distinction Indigenous governments and organisations. Eligible activities include seed collection, nursery expansion, tree planting, capacity building (such as training) and survival surveys / monitoring. This program is currently open and ongoing.

The same department also ran the Indigenous Forestry Initiative (IFI), a program which is now closed with applications currently under review. The IFI aims to advance reconciliation in the forest sector by supporting Indigenous-identified priorities to accelerate Indigenous awareness, influence, inclusion, and leadership.

The IFI provides grants of up to (CAD) \$50,000 to inclusive, Indigenous-led activities in the forest sector, such as:

- gathering, developing, using, and protecting Indigenous knowledge and science;
- Indigenous leadership and participation in forest stewardship; and
- the identification, consideration, and pursuit of economic development opportunities.

At the time of writing this report, fifteen Indigenous organisations in British Columbia alone, are publicly listed as having benefited from the IFI ([IFI - funded projects \(canada.ca\)](https://www.canada.ca/en/indigenousaffairs/services/ifi/funded-projects.html)).

Some recipient summaries:

[Esk'etemc](#) First Nation

Location: Alkali Lake, British Columbia

Investment: \$148,000

From 2017 to 2018, this project supported the training of community members in forest management, environmental monitoring, business development, as well as safety and first aid. This training provided the knowledge to support the community's forest-based economic development.

[Homalco](#) First Nation

Location: Campbell River, British Columbia

Investment: \$245,000

This 2020 investment supported forest tenure management and contract logging operations.

This project included tasks related to communications, tenure management, harvesting, business planning, equipment purchases and GIS/referral capacity to strengthen business operations and increase community revenues.

[Skeetchestn](#) Natural Resources LLP

Location: Savona, British Columbia

Investment: \$30,000

This 2019 investment supported the investigation of innovative economic opportunities for Indigenous populations based on sustainable management and the use of traditional botanical resources or non-traditional forest resources. Project highlights included the conceptualisation and planning of the Secwepemc Understory Resources Innovation Hub.

[Gitxsan](#) Development Corporation

Location: Hazelton, British Columbia

Investment: \$1,165,000

This multi-year investment, which started in 2013 and ended in 2018, laid the foundation for the Gitxsan to participate in and benefit from major forest resource projects occurring within and near their territory.

Nupqu Development Corporation

Location: Cranbrook, British Columbia

Investment: \$54,575

This 2018 investment involved collaboration between the four Ktunaxa Nation communities to maximize value from their collective forestry assets and to investigate the feasibility of purchasing a sawmill.

Although a third party purchased the mill, this project initiated negotiations about equity participation in ownership of land assets, future investments in value-added wood manufacturing and a possible joint venture in timber manufacturing.

VI. Canadian Council for Indigenous Business

On speaking with a number of non-Indigenous forest and forest product businesses in British Columbia, the [CCIB](#) is often referred to as a resource to assist with Indigenous engagement, negotiation, building trust and establishing partnerships.

The CCIB builds bridges between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples, businesses, and communities by working to improve economic self-reliance of Indigenous communities.

It provides an array of business development offerings, including certification for Indigenous-owned businesses (CAB) and companies with Progressive Aboriginal Relations (PAR). Tools for Indigenous Business (TIB) connects Indigenous entrepreneurs with tools, training and networks to strengthen and scale their businesses.

Interestingly, its origins date back to 1982 (the same year that the Government of Canada enshrined Aboriginal rights in Section 35 of the Canadian Constitution) with a non-Indigenous businessman, Murray B. Koffler, who determined that business could be an important avenue to build skills and develop capacity for Indigenous Peoples.

VII. Canadian Council of Forest Ministers (CCFM)

Established in 1985, the [CCFM](#) is a forum for federal, provincial and territorial governments to come together to discuss and exchange information, provide leadership and promote action on common forest and forestry-related issues of Canadian public and international concern.

Membership includes fourteen federal, provincial and territorial ministers and it is currently chaired by BC's representative.

In their publication, '[A Shared Vision for Canada's Forests Towards 2030](#)', forests are recognised from the onset as being intertwined with Indigenous cultural identity, providing land based diverse values. It is acknowledged that sustainable forest management is stronger when done so in collaboration and meaningful participation from First Nations.

VIII. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada

According to the BC First Nations Forestry Council, 'Honouring our Lands: A Toolkit for First Nations Ecosystem-Based Stewardship Planning (2020)', since the formation of the '[TRC Calls to Action](#)' in 2015, there have been 33 strategic forestry-related contractual agreements between Indigenous Peoples and the BC Government. This reflects collaborative co-governance models for

land use planning, inventories, protected areas, and natural resource consultation agreements and forest-based business opportunities.

PART 3

BC GOVERNMENT HISTORY AND INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT FIRST NATIONS FORESTRY

I. British Columbia – Unceded Territory

The term ‘unceded’ in the context of BC refers to lands that Indigenous Peoples have never legally surrendered or ‘ceded’ through treaties or other formal agreements, unlike other parts of Canada for example. This recognition is increasingly reflected in formal statements and land acknowledgements at public events such as the BC First Nations Forestry Conference held in Penticton, May 2024. However, First Nations continue to negotiate land claims and agreements with the provincial government to resolve issues related to unceded territories, and to address historical injustices in order to move towards meaningful reconciliation.

II. British Columbia – First and Only Provincial UNDRIP Act

Of huge significance in the journey to meaningful reconciliation, BC is the first and only province to pass legislation specifically to implement UNDRIP in 2019 known as DRIPA.

So, what does this mean? In summary:

- In terms of First Nations forestry, the BC Government’s implementation of DRIPA has significant implications for land and resource management. It requires the government to engage with Indigenous communities in decision-making processes affecting their traditional territories and resources.
- DRIPA promotes Indigenous rights holders to participate in and benefit from economic activities on their lands. This includes ensuring fair and equitable resource sharing.
- The BC Government must ensure that provincial laws are consistent with UNDRIP. This involves reviewing existing laws and developing new laws in collaboration with Indigenous Peoples.
- The Act mandates the development of an action plan, in consultation and cooperation with Indigenous Peoples.
- The BC Government must report annually on progress made in implementing the action plan and aligning laws with UNDRIP. These reports are submitted to the BC Legislative Assembly to ensure transparency and accountability.
- DRIPA supports the recognition of Indigenous governance systems and encourages the development of agreements that respect Indigenous laws and traditions.
- The Act supports the protection and revitalisation of Indigenous cultures, languages, and traditions.

III. BC Chief Forester

British Columbia now has its 18th Chief Forester, an independent statutory decision-maker, responsible under the Forest Act for determining the allowable annual cut (AAC) for each of BC's 71 timber supply areas and tree farm licences. Under the Forest and Range Practices Act, the Chief Forester also sets seed, seedling and stocking standards for the reforestation of BC's forests. The Office of the Chief Forester delivers independent, professional judgement based on

information ranging from technical forestry reports, First Nations and public input and the government's social and economic goals.

IV. BC Forest Practices Board

The BC Forest Practices Board is an independent watchdog for sound forest practices in British Columbia. Although not a requirement in its constituted Board make-up, the Board includes two First Nations representatives including the Chair, Keith Atkinson (Registered Professional Forester or RPF) who was one of the founding members of the First Nations Forestry Council.

Given the ongoing and historic trust issues between Governments and First Nations, the Board is independent of Government and acts like an Ombudsman. Matters as they apply to forestry could be, for example, claims that areas of cultural significance are being overlooked by logging companies/licences.

The Board is focussed on proactive and meaningful engagement with Indigenous Peoples to support implementation of the recommendations of the TRC and DRIPA.

V. The Modern Treaty Process

The modern treaty process in BC is arguably, a critical framework for addressing historical injustice claims and advancing reconciliation between Indigenous Peoples and the Crown.

By providing a structured approach to negotiating land ownership, governance, and economic development, the process aims to create a more equitable and sustainable future for First Nations in BC. The BC Treaty Commission plays a central role in facilitating these negotiations, ensuring that the process is fair, transparent, and effective.

The process came about from a BC Claims Taskforce established in 1991 which recommended the creation of a treaty negotiation framework, leading to the establishment of the BC Treaty Commission (BCTC) in 1992. The BCTC is an independent body that facilitates the negotiation of modern treaties between Indigenous Nations, the provincial government, and the federal government. It provides guidance, funding, and oversight throughout the process.

The BC treaty process consists of six stages:

Statement of Intent to Negotiate: Indigenous Nations submit a statement of intent to negotiate a treaty, outlining their traditional territories and the main issues they wish to address.

Readiness to Negotiate: The BCTC assesses whether all parties are ready to begin negotiations. This involves determining that each party has the necessary mandates and resources.

Negotiation of a Framework Agreement: The parties negotiate a framework agreement that outlines the topics to be discussed and the timeline for negotiations.

Negotiation of an Agreement-in-Principle (AIP): This stage involves detailed negotiations on substantive issues, such as land ownership, governance, resource management, and financial arrangements. The AIP serves as a foundation for the final treaty.

Negotiation to Finalise a Treaty: The parties work out the final details of the treaty based on the AIP. This includes drafting the legal text of the treaty and resolving any outstanding issues.

Approval and Implementation: The final treaty is ratified by the Indigenous Nation, the provincial government, and the federal government. Following ratification, the treaty is implemented, which may involve legislative changes and the establishment of new governance structures.

Key Elements of Modern Treaties:

Land Ownership: Modern treaties typically involve the transfer of land to Indigenous Nations, providing them with ownership and control over their traditional territories.

Governance: Treaties establish self-governance arrangements, allowing Indigenous Nations to make laws and manage their own affairs in areas such as natural resources including forest management.

Financial Arrangements: Treaties include financial components, such as capital transfers, resource revenue sharing, and funding for programs and services.

Cultural and Social Provisions: Modern treaties often include measures to protect and promote Indigenous languages, cultures, and heritage.

Economic Development: Treaties provide opportunities for economic development through land ownership, resource management, and business partnerships.

Examples of Modern Treaties in BC:

Nisga'a Final Agreement (2000): The Nisga'a Nation signed the first modern treaty in BC, which included land ownership, self-governance, and financial provisions.

Tsawwassen Final Agreement (2009): The Tsawwassen First Nation's treaty provided land, self-governance, and economic development opportunities.

Maa-nulth First Nations Final Agreement (2011): This treaty involved five Nuu-chah-nulth First Nations on Vancouver Island, providing land, governance, and resource management rights.

Tla'amin Final Agreement (2016): The Tla'amin Nation's treaty included land ownership, self-governance, and provisions for cultural and economic development.

The modern treaty process has been criticised for being slow in restoring lands and resources back to Indigenous Peoples, and offering only a fraction of Indigenous Peoples' territory, with many Indigenous Peoples opting out and pursuing other strategies for reclaiming their lands, such as declarations of Aboriginal title.

VI. Nikolakis 2022 ['Reconciliation In The Woods? Three Pathways Towards Forest Justice'](#)

When considering the 204 First Nations of BC, it becomes quickly apparent that there are various models, frameworks, history and rights, and therefore, little consistency, especially as it applies to First Nations forestry. This inconsistency can also be attributed to various First Nations capacity in their government-to-government relations.

The fact is, there are various forms of Indigenous forest rights recognised by the Crown. These are summarised succinctly by Nikolakis as follows:

Treaty	Typically providing for ownership rights to forest lands and supports timber harvesting on these lands.
Title	Tsilhqot'in Nation title lands, which covers almost 1900km ² , with rights to create forest laws and regulations.
Volumetric Licences	The most common volumetric licences in BC are 'non-replaceable Forest Licences, a non-exclusive access and harvest right for 5 years.
Area-based Licences	Typically provide long-term and exclusive access to a forest area for timber harvesting. In BC, Tree Farm licence (TFL) is the most secure area-based licence (sometimes covering thousands of hectares, and First Nations control 7 of 36 TFL's (as at 2022). BC has community forest licences, held, or co-held by First Nations. These are typically long-term and area-based licences with management and harvesting responsibilities.
First Nations Specific Area-based Licence	BC has issued 22 First Nation Woodland Licences (FNWL): 25 year tenures that protect traditional uses (non-timber forest products) as well as supporting forest harvesting and management. These licences cover almost 700,000 ha, with an Annual Allowable Cut (AAC) of around 850,000m ³ (as at 2022).

In acknowledging the balance of First Nations forestry versus fibre supply requirements / agreements with log processors, First Nations must typically sign Forest & Range Consultation and Revenue Sharing Agreements. These agreements establish frameworks for consultation between the Crown and First Nations, revenue sharing and planning arrangements for forestry activity.

During the First Nations Forestry Conference 2024, Garry Merkel (nadi' denezā), Co-Chair, Old Growth Review Panel, BC Ministry of Forests was critical of such impositions accusing some of the timber industry [processors] as seeing First Nations as an opportunity to access more forest resources, wanting First Nations to think and operate in processors interests. Mr Merkel is largely pro forestry, promoting that land is meant to be used with the requirement to understand its limits. He is not supportive of some forestry, especially some areas of old growth within the Timber Harvesting Land Base, but potentially supportive of other areas of land being used which is reserved as 'conservation', stating the need for conservation is in response to a lack of trust to manage land responsibly and sustainably.

The Nikolakis 2022 paper concludes that Reconciliation has been a guiding principle for "forest justice" in Canada. Forest Justice is based on:

- Recognising Indigenous People's forest rights.
- Improved participation in forest governance.
- Returning of forest lands and the allocation of timber harvesting rights to Indigenous governments.

Successful collaboration can only be achieved where goals align and has been the case in BC, noting there are both winners and losers at times.

VII. BC Ministry of Forests

The [Ministry of Forests](#) is responsible for supporting a sustainable and competitive future for BC's forest sector, while taking action to keep forests healthy and protect communities in the face of climate change and extreme weather events.

In addition to oversight of the varied forest licences including the [First Nations Woodland Licence](#) there are several initiatives underway to support First Nations Forestry and First Nations generally although from interviews and presentations with First Nations, anecdotally, this isn't without frustration and angst over complicated and time-consuming processes. Building trust remains key.

The Indigenous Forest Bioeconomy Program collaborates with Indigenous partners across the province to promote community resilience within an increasingly competitive global forest sector.

The [program](#) offers funding that supports Indigenous partners to lead the development of a forest bioeconomy to achieve economic, social and environmental benefits. Projects must utilise forest biomass and have community support.

[The Collaborative Stewardship Framework](#) (CSF) was initiated in 2018 as a pilot to test how information reflecting Western and Indigenous knowledge can enhance natural resource decision-making through a collaborative land stewardship approach between the province and more than 30 First Nations in five CSF forums.

The projects show how Indigenous knowledge can be incorporated into and improve natural-resource management. [CSF](#) is designed and implemented collaboratively.

An example of one of the five forums is the S'ólh Téméxw Stewardship Alliance (STSA) which consists of 15 member Nations united under the Stó:lō Strategic Engagement Agreement (SSEA): Cheam First Nation, Kwaw'Kwaw'Apilt First Nation, Scowlitz First Nation, Skawahlook First Nation, Skwah First Nation, Sumas First Nation, Yale First Nation And Aitchelitz First Nation, Shxwhà:y Village, Skowkale First Nation, Soowahlie First Nation, Squiala First Nation, Tzeachten First Nation, Yakweakwioose First Nation.

Through the forum, the STSA and the province aim to develop a common stewardship vision based upon Stó:lō values and the S'ólh Téméxw Use Plan as well as provincial interests and objectives.

[Old Growth Deferral](#) is a partnership between the province, First Nations and industry to temporarily defer the logging of some of BC's old growth forests which exist within the Timber Harvesting Land Base.

As of February 2024, coordination between First Nations and forest/forest products companies has resulted in over 2.42 million hectares of old growth being deferred or protected since November 2021.

Deferrals will remain in place until the forest management approach being informed by the old growth strategic review is implemented and local discussions on long-term management of old growth values are concluded through initiatives such as Land Use Plans, Forest Landscape Plans and Integrated Resource Management Plans.

Anecdotally, speaking with impacted processors, this deferral is challenging economic viability and fibre security as such trees were planned for harvest and factored into production volumes, yield and profitability.

BC Timber Sales (BCTS) manages about 20% of BC's allowable annual cut (AAC) for Crown/public timber, operating across 33 communities and directly supporting over 8,000 jobs. It is publicly committed to "true and lasting reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples in BC".

Data from BCTS is used to help determine the market value of the timber harvested to ensure British Columbians receive fair value from their public timber resources.

BCTS facilitates supply of timber through competitive auctions of timber sales licences, making Crown timber available to loggers, wood processors and other forestry businesses. Increasingly, and in accordance with DRIPA, these auctions preference First Nations.

In addition to auctioning timber sales licences, BCTS builds and maintains Forest Service Roads, reforests harvested areas and manages the seed inventory (production, storage and distribution of seedlings) for the reforestation of Crown lands administered by BCTS. BCTS further supplies seedlings to reforestation programs such as Forests for Tomorrow and projects funded through the Forest Carbon Initiative.

BCTS also sponsors or directly facilitates a range of training and employment opportunities for First Nations forestry including,

- [Outland Youth Employment Program](#) for Indigenous high school students to gain field work experience in Northern BC;
- Study and Work Forestry Scholarship – First Nations Forestry Training Program (FNFTP): a partnership between the BCTS, the BC First Nations Forestry Council and the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy of the Canadian Government. The program helps create forestry sector employment and increase Indigenous Peoples participation in BC's forest industry. It is aimed at students applying to, or enrolled in, Forestry, Natural Resources, Environmental Technology or Management studies at an accredited academic institution – see further information in Part 4, First Nations Forestry Council.
- [Aboriginal Youth Internship Program](#) with the BC Public Sector: A BC Government sponsored program that provides a range of opportunities for youth aged 19 to 29. The 12-month paid internship includes nine months internship with the BC Government plus three months internship with an Indigenous organisation. Grade 12 graduation is mandatory.

The [Forest for Tomorrow \(FFT\) Program](#) was established in 2005 to respond to the catastrophic wildfires and mountain pine beetle epidemic. The program is working to restore healthy forests and to mitigate the impacts wildfire and insect outbreaks while also creating economic opportunities for forestry and bioenergy production.

The [Ministry of Forests Research Program](#) recently celebrated their 100-year anniversary of ongoing scientific research supporting the sustainable management and stewardship of BC's forests. The program leads more than 180 government research projects on an annual basis. Its scientists work with government, First Nations, academic and research institutions and industry to deepen scientific knowledge.

Recent examples of First Nations collaborations include 'Developing Biogeoclimatic Ecosystem Classifications with Tāltān and Taku River Tlingit First Nations'. This addresses the gaps in BC's framework for ecosystem management, the Biogeoclimatic Ecosystem Classifications (BEC) system, as it applies to the most northwest corner of British Columbia which does not have a field guide for ecosystem identification. The Research Program developed relationships with the Tāltān (Tahltan) and Taku River Tlingit First Nations to collect data for ecosystem classification in their territories.

Together with Land Guardians from both nations, researchers completed two weeks of remote field work in both 2021 and 2022. Technical staff from all three governments are building shared

concepts of typical plant communities and their associated soils, forest productivity, and wildlife. Spending time together on the land is also building shared understanding across cultures and shared experiences. The field guide resulting from this project will reflect the knowledge and input from the ecosystems First Nations.

VIII. Ministry of Jobs, Economic Development and Innovation

The Ministry of Jobs, Economic Development and Innovation is currently facilitating a BC [Manufacturing Jobs Fund](#), and while not specific to First Nations Forestry, the fund does prioritise Indigenous led projects, or projects which benefit Indigenous Peoples including the sector of forestry.

Accordingly, (CAD) \$180 million is available to assist manufacturing companies modernise, innovate and grow funding capital projects across BC.

PART 4

BC NGO HISTORY AND INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT FIRST NATIONS FORESTRY

I. BC First Nations Forestry Council

The [BC First Nations Forestry Council](#) (FNFC) is an advocacy organisation, established in 2006, that works to support First Nations in their efforts to increase their role as the rightful owners of forest lands and resources, including access to an equitable share of the benefits derived from forestry activities within their traditional territories.

With well renowned and passionate Lennard Joe at the helm, the organisation has a large footprint and covers a diverse range of issues and challenges with a team of 10 people.

Now in its fifth year, the FNFC hosts the annual First Nations Forestry conference which, in 2024, ran over two days and prioritises the registration of First Nations participants. The theme of the 2024 conference held in Penticton, was 'Meaningful Collaboration for Sustainable Change'. This theme recognises the current, rapidly evolving forest sector in BC where the land is recognised (through reconciliation, court orders and/or legislation) as being integral to the cultural, spiritual, environmental, economic and social lives of its caretakers. The conference is well attended and sells out each year with highly regarded speakers.

The FNFC BC First Nations Forestry Strategy identifies six goals as follows:

- Goal 1: Shared governance and joint decision making;
- Goal 2: A strong forest economy that supports meaningful sharing of revenues with First Nations;
- Goal 3: Legislation and policy development and reform;
- Goal 4: Tenure reform that recognises UNDRIP and supports a healthy and strong forest sector;
- Goal 5: Collaborative stewardship and land use planning; and
- Goal 6: Maximise First Nations involvement in the forest sector.

The FNFC also produces the (previously referred to), 'Honouring our Lands: A Toolkit for First Nations Ecosystem-Based Stewardship Planning', a 111 page guide to assist First Nations in

developing planning goals, harmonising First Nation plans with provincial plans, and standardising Indigenous planning in BC.

It is understood, both the FNFC Strategy and the 'Honouring our Lands: A Toolkit for First Nations Ecosystem-Based Stewardship Planning' documents are available to FNFC members only. Membership can be obtained through the website.

The FNFC also works to support sustainable and meaningful career, employment, and business outcomes for First Nations in the BC forest sector. One such initiative is the Indigenous Forestry Scholarship Program (IFSP). This provides an opportunity for forest industries to partner with Indigenous communities and to develop workforce initiatives that include training and employment opportunities. Indigenous students can attend full-time studies in a forestry related post-secondary program and have their tuition, supplies and living expenses funded plus paid summer work experience with an internship mentor.

The FNFC is accountable to the First Nations Leadership Council and the First Nations of BC. It is governed by a Board of Directors composed of representatives from the First Nations Summit (FNS), the Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC), and the BC Assembly of First Nations (BCAFN).

CASE STUDY

The author had the opportunity to interview a current FNFC Indigenous Forest Scholarship Program student, Mr Dallas George, who is a full-time student in Environmental Resources Technology (Diploma) at the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology in Merrit, BC.

Having originally had no interest in further education, it was following the 2015 fires that Dallas became more interested in forestry and its cultural significance to Indigenous Peoples. He enrolled himself before becoming aware of the scholarship program which he was successfully referred onto.

In addition to his studies, Dallas has valued the work placement opportunities including with the Ministry of Forestry, out in the field with the silviculture team. His current work placement is with Akali Resource Management Ltd located approximately 40 minutes from Williams Lake BC, managing resources on behalf of the Esk'etemc First Nation. He is involved in fire management (fuel mitigation, thinning, fire breaks, prescribed burning), logging, planting and re-establishing native grassland to reintroduce long-horn native sheep to the region.

Dallas certainly values the opportunity he has been supported with including a meaningful and fulfilling career ahead.

II. First Nations Leadership Council

The [First Nations Leadership Council](#) is comprised of the political executives of the BC Assembly of First Nations, First Nations Summit, and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs. This group works together to develop coordinated approaches to issues relevant to First Nations communities throughout the province and can include but is not specific to forestry.

III. BC Assembly of First Nations

The BC [Assembly of First Nations](#) (BCAFN) is a 'Provincial Territorial Organisation' representing and advocating for BC First Nations in British Columbia. BCAFN representation and advocacy is inclusive and extends to First Nations currently engaged in the treaty process, those who have signed modern treaties, and those who fall under historic treaty agreements. The BCAFN also represents and advocates for First Nations in BC that are not in treaty negotiations. This can include but is not specific to forestry.

IV. Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs

The [Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs](#) brings together the First Nations Chiefs for their fight for the recognition of Aboriginal rights and respect for cultures and societies. This can include but is not specific to forestry.

V. First Nations Summit

In October 1990, leaders of First Nations met with the Prime Minister of Canada and then with the Premier and Cabinet of British Columbia urging the appointment of a tripartite task force to develop a process for modern treaty negotiations in BC. The federal and provincial governments agreed and the BC Claims Task Force was established by agreement of the Government of Canada, the Government of British Columbia, and representative leadership of the First Nations – See Modern Treaty Process in Part 3 of this report.

Leaders from First Nations across British Columbia appointed three members to the BC Claims Task Force at a meeting called the First Nations Summit. Two members were appointed by the Government of Canada, and two by the Province of British Columbia. Following more than five and half months of deliberations, the 1991 Report of the BC Claims Task Force recommended that First Nations, Canada and British Columbia establish a new relationship based on mutual trust, respect and understanding – through political negotiations.

VI. BC Community Forest Association

The BC Community Forest Association (BCCFA) was established in 2004 as a member driven, not for profit, advocacy organisation, for community forestry in BC. They provide input on forest policy to facilitate the success of community forest initiatives and work with government to expand community forestry in BC.

According to the BCCFA, a community forest is a forestry operation managed by a local government, First Nation, or community-held organisation for the benefit of the entire community. At its core, community forestry is about local control over the benefits offered by local forests.

The BCCFA collaborates closely with the BC Government to support wildfire risk reduction funding with over (CAD) \$5 million allocated to 15 Community Forest Agreement holders between 2021 and 2024. The funding itself is allocated through the Crown Land Wildfire Risk Reduction (CLWRR) stream of the Community Resiliency Investment (CRI) program, and coordinated by the BCCFA in partnership with the BC Wildfire Service (BCWS).

Indeed, the then Minister of Forests, Katrine Conroy stated: "Managed by local communities and First Nations for the benefit of the entire community, community forests are key partners in our work to reduce wildfire risks across the province." (Full [media release](#)).

VII. Forest Enhancement Society of BC

The [Forest Enhancement Society](#) of BC, among many focuses, includes increasing First Nations participation in the forest economy. Projects which are supported include those which minimise wildfire risk, enhance wildlife habitat, improve low-value forests, re-plant damaged forests, and utilise fibre that would otherwise be burned.

The Society has supported 263 such projects across BC including 63 of them led by First Nations, generating (CAD) \$363 million in economic activity. This includes 4.8 million cubic metres of forest fibre utilised that would otherwise have been burned.

Case Study:

Project OLIVER aims to find ways to enable the full utilisation and delivery of pulp fibre in line with the traditional values and harvesting practices of the Osoyoos Indian Band (Southern Interior). According to Dan MacMaster, Forest Manager NK'Mip Forestry of the Osoyoos Indian Band, FESBC funding enables sustainable uses of forest fibre which would historically be left behind and burned due to uneconomic viability. In addition to the economic benefit, diverting to use also resulted in cleaner air and waterways, reduced wildfire risk, climate change adaptations and mitigated insect infestation.

In total, 3,284 truck loads of fibre was diverted to use. This avoided emissions equivalent to taking 14,381 cars off the road.

VIII. BC Wood – Bridging the Gap

[BC Wood](#) is a not-for-profit, members based and funded association, established in 1989 as a partnership between industry and government. It has a strong focus on supporting members with value adding, export markets and as such, has specialists located in BC, USA, China, South Korea and Japan.

In accordance with DRIPA and societal goals of reconciliation, in April 2024, it released its report, 'Bridging the Gap – Bridging the Gap Between Indigenous Communities and Value-Added Wood Manufacturers in British Columbia'. This report is the culmination of a project to foster understanding, provide a platform for dialogue, identify barriers and explore opportunities for collaboration.

The project, through a series of workshops, identified several challenges faced by both Indigenous communities and value-added wood manufacturers, including financial pressure, capacity issues, trust issues and understanding the political landscape. However, the project also highlighted the successes encountered by both sides that have spent the time to build relationships, become acquainted with cultural and industry practices, leading to good relationships and connections.

Feedback from Indigenous community participants included:

- Indigenous communities feeling overwhelmed handling ever-increasing business opportunities and filtering through relationships which are not genuine.
- A sense that non-Indigenous businesses are 'box ticking' to say they have engaged with First Nations.
- First Nations getting increased access to [forest] tenures but no access to mills.
- A sense that First Nations are not getting an appropriate appreciation of value on their wood. The mills are not sharing their profit.

- Sentiment that industry could improve engagement with First Nations within their fibre region.

Feedback from Industry (non-Indigenous) participants included:

- Not knowing who to speak with when engaging with Indigenous communities.
- Business moves at the speed of trust.
- The industry's future relies on integration with Indigenous partners.

This project with the open dialogue through workshops was considered helpful and essential moving forward, especially with the focus on building trust and relationships.

IX. National Aboriginal Forestry Association

The goal of [NAFA](#) is to promote and support increased Aboriginal involvement in forest management and related commercial opportunities on a national level. Its focus is far broader than production forests and includes a focus on the protection of wildlife and traditional food stuff habitat, protection of fur bearers, protection of clean and adequate supplies of water, establishment of forested areas for recreation and tourism attractions, and traditional cultural and spiritual use.

The creation of NAFA was called for at the 'National Native Forestry Symposium - Ethic To Reality' held in Vancouver, November 1989. There was a consensus of support from the delegates in favour of establishing a national organisation to promote forestry for Aboriginal economic development, the repair of environment degradation, and the restoration of cultural and community spiritual health for Aboriginal people across Canada.

The BC representative on the Canadian National Aboriginal Forestry Association Board of Directors is Lennard (Lenny) Joe, (Sux wsx wwels, meaning Grizzly Man), RPF, CEO, BC First Nations Forestry Council.

Amongst other key areas of focus, support and initiatives, periodically, NAFA undertakes a study, and releases a report on '[Indigenous-Held Forest Tenures in Canada](#)' with the latest report being published in 2020. According to this latest report, BC has 49,183,000 hectares of forested lands with a wood supply of 71,479,655m³ of which 8,710,908m³ is Indigenous-held, representing 12.2%. This is a 2% increase compared to the previous report dated 2018.

However, it should also be noted that despite this increase, overall wood supply has decreased from 78,300,000 m³ as a result of wildfire and pests.

In 2014, only two First Nations had negotiated and secured a First Nations Woodland Licence which provides a longer term, substantive tenure for a combined allocation of 90,000 m³. As at the 2020 report, nineteen First Nations held the First Nations Woodland Licence with a combined allocation of 797,734 m³. These allocations range in size from 4,973 to 100,000 m³ for an average size of 41,986 m³. While they are much smaller in size compared to the Tshimshian-held Tree Farm Licence of 378,059 m³, the Haida-held tenure Tree Farm Licence of 340,000 m³ and the Squamish held Tree Farm Licence of 250,500 m³, the specially designed First Nations Woodlands Licence importantly represents a significant expansion of Indigenous held tenure in British Columbia, both in terms of volume but also in terms of Indigenous controlled forest management responsibilities.

PART 5

UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA LAUNCHES BACHELOR OF INDIGENOUS LAND STEWARDSHIP

I. UBC Bachelor of Indigenous Land Stewardship

Commencing in September 2024, the UBC Forest Sciences Centre at the Vancouver campus, will be home to the new and unique [Bachelor of Indigenous Land Stewardship](#) 4 year program.

Land-based, culturally appropriate learning approaches are central to the program, which will be guided and instructed by Indigenous leaders, scholars, Elders and knowledge keepers.

Entrance requirements are reflective of honouring and valuing knowledge and experience of Indigenous Peoples while the course itself aims to foster Indigenous-led land healing and action-oriented reconciliation.

Upon successful completion of the course, career opportunities are expected to include government forestry related roles, resource sector business, private consulting and ENGO's involved with Indigenous land stewardship. Roles including policy, public administration, lands and research managers and field technicians who are able to bring together Indigenous and Western knowledge systems.

From concept to launch, this course was 12 years in the making, commenced by passionate Professor John Innes, the then Dean of the Faculty of Forestry (who coincidentally is an Australian qualified forester).

At this stage, the course won't be accredited under the Canadian Registered Professional Forester (RPF) but it is still four years until the first round of graduates so watch this space. Perhaps a new, unique accredited scheme is warranted!



(Photo: The Author at the Entrance to the First Nations Longhouse on the UBC Campus, Vancouver)

PART 6

THE ROLE OF CERTIFICATION IN FIRST NATIONS FORESTRY

I. Sustainable Forestry Initiative

[SFI](#) is North America's largest, independent, third party forest certification standard. As an organisation, it can be likened to Responsible Wood in Australia and also delivers programs similar to some of those of Forest and Wood Products Australia (FWPA) such as their [Project Learning Tree Canada](#). SFI is endorsed by the international Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) although the organisation and its certification standards pre-date PEFC.

Its Board of Directors includes Lennard (Lenny) Joe, CEO, BC First Nations Forestry Council. With his many contacts and respected/trusted position as a First Nations leader, Lenny is claimed to have been instrumental in providing opportunities for Indigenous representation throughout the SFI standards revision process, and successfully enshrining Respect for Indigenous Rights and Traditional Knowledge as a standalone objective in SFI's Forest Management Standard.

In 2021, the Board approved the SFI [Indigenous Relations Commitment: Advancing Respectful Forest-Focused Collaboration](#). This public statement of commitment references Indigenous Peoples as essential partners in any forest-focused collaboration, but also the commitment to invest in Indigenous youth as well as delivering training on Indigenous Peoples rights and respectful relationship building.

There are four such SFI e-learning programs known as 'Bundles' for the various units they are made up of.

BUNDLE 1: Respecting Aboriginal and treaty rights in sustainable forest management.
BUNDLE 2: Community engagement and communication.
BUNDLE 3: Indigenous employment and workforce development.
BUNDLE 4: Advancing economic reconciliation through business collaborations.

SFI has a dedicated Indigenous relations team made up of four First Nations team members who are focused on Indigenous certification, Indigenous relations and Indigenous relations forest-based community development.

There are over 50 Indigenous communities / businesses certified to either the SFI Standard or the [SFI Indigenous Peoples and Families Module](#) across North America. This latter module provides a pathway for small Indigenous community and family forests to obtain forest certification using requirements that are tailored to their unique needs. To be eligible, a forest must be smaller than 20,000 hectares under active, professional management for timber production and be independently audited.

Examples of BC based Indigenous forest certification include Capacity Forest Management (345,398 hectares), K'omoks and Qualicum (12,993 hectares) and Stuwix Resources Joint Venture (80,000 hectares).

II. Forest Stewardship Council

[FSC](#) is North America's second largest, independent, third party forest certification standard.

In Canada, FSC is made up of four chambers, not three as is the case internationally. In addition to their Environmental, Social and Economic chambers, since 1993, they have also had their 'Indigenous Peoples' chamber.

To support their certificate holders in addressing the Canadian National Forest Management Standard requirement of recognising the rights of Indigenous Peoples, FSC Canada have developed a [Free, Prior and Informed Consent Guidance Document](#). The document opens with the disclaimer that by definition, FPIC is a locally and culturally specific process with affected communities determining the steps. Therefore it is not possible to have a universal 'how to' guideline.

Principle 3 of their 10 global, guiding principles and criteria, specifically addresses the rights of Indigenous Peoples. This includes the need to respect Indigenous rights, ensure their participation in decision-making, and protect their cultural values and livelihoods.

There are currently two First Nations' managed forests in BC who have adopted FSC certification, including the Haida Nations' Taan Forest (193,113 hectares) on Haida Gwaii and the Burns Lake Community Forest (92,311 hectares), which is a partnership with the Ts'il Kaz Koh First Nation, Wet'suwet'en First Nation, and the Office of the Hereditary Chiefs of the Wet'suwet'en.

The Harrop-Procter Community Forest (11,300 hectares) and Canadian Forest Products' Kootenay Division (1,310,719 hectares) are also certified under FSC in BC and follow FSC's Principle 3 requirements with respect to First Nations, that have traditional territory, in their respective forest management areas.

Of note, by comparison, Australia's Responsible Wood and Forest Stewardship Council do not directly certify any First Nations forestry or chain of custody businesses.

PART 7 CASE STUDIES - FIRST NATIONS FORESTRY

I. Stewix Resources Joint Venture

Established in 2004, [Stuwix Resource](#) is a First Nations owned and operated logging company that is uniquely structured by eight First Nations Bands located in the southern interior of British Columbia.

These joint venture First Nations Bands have representatives on the management committee and are made up of:

- Lower Nicola Indian Band
- Coldwater Indian Band
- Nooaitch Indian Band
- Shackan Indian Band
- Upper Nicola Indian Band
- Cooks Ferry Indian Band

- Siska Indian Band
- Upper Similkameen Indian Band

Stuwix manages non-replaceable forest licences (NRFL) including resource planning, developing, permitting, marketing, timber harvesting, road building and silviculture. Their harvestable area covers 80,000 hectares of Crown land, with an annual cut of 194,653 m3.

The primary species harvested is lodgepole pine. The logs are sold to local area mills for use in producing timber, chips, and by-products. The top diameter log is salvaged and used for post, rails and pulp, with the remaining 'waste' harvested for biofuels.

Headed up by Lindsay Tighe who is also the Chief of the Shackan Indian Band, Stuwix prioritises recruitment of First Nations to work in their company and prides itself on creating more than just economic opportunity. Through Stuwix Resources, First Nation's individuals, companies, and communities are participating in and helping care for all that the forest has to offer. Stuwix has developed a Forest Stewardship plan for its operating area, which goes beyond the expectations with respect to First Nations consultation and protective measures dealing with water management, protection of wildlife habitat and biological diversity, soil conservation, visual resource management and protection of ecological, geographical, historical and culturally special sites.

In an interview with Lindsay Tighe, if there was one thing he could improve for First Nations tenure, it would be to eliminate annual cut control which forces harvest volume despite poor markets.

His advice for Australian First Nations is to "use their collective voice with their culture and knowledge. The management of the land is more important than the value of logs. Stick to who they are and where they come from."

II. Tlowitsis, We Wai Kai, Wei Wai Kum And K'ómoks First Nations Partner With Western Forest Products

In April 2024, a community celebration took place in Campbell River, Vancouver Island to mark the beginning of a newly formed forestry partnership between the Tlowitsis, We Wai Kai, Wei Wai Kum and K'ómoks First Nations and Western Forest Products.

Following a 10 year negotiation and at a cost of \$35.9million, the North Island First Nations group has now officially acquired a 34% interest from Western Forest Products in a partnership known as La-kwa sa muqw Forestry (pronounced la-KWAH-sa-mook), which means 'the wood of four' in the Kwak'wala language. It will enable a cut of 904,540m3 of timber per annum.

According to Western Forest Products CEO, Steven Hofer (as quoted in the Campbell River Mirror, 7 April 2024), "It's really a new approach to how the land base is going to be managed. It's not Western saying to the Nations that this is how it's going to be managed. It's a collaborative process through an Integrated Resource management plan that looks at this land base for the next 150 to 200 years. That has never been done before in this province."

Western Forest Products has a dedicated Vice President, Indigenous Partnerships, Seanna McConnell and an [Indigenous Relations Policy](#). Operating across more than 50 First Nations on Vancouver Island and the coast of British Columbia, Indigenous relations will be increasingly imperative for their viable operations moving forward. The company has received its share of legal challenges, negative publicity and criticism for its logging practices in old growth forests as well as export of logs without value adding the local economy.

III. Westbank First Nation

The [Westbank First Nation](#) (WFN) is part of the larger Okanagan (Syilx) Nation, in the Okanagan Valley, BC. Their forestry operation is by WFN's corporate division, 'Ntityix Resources LP' which manages their own harvesting operations paying stumpage to the Crown while ensuring all harvested areas are fully restocked with ecologically suitable trees.

Their motto is, 'Harvest, Growth, Protect. We strive to be the leading British Columbia forestry enterprise in its scope and ability to provide a range of forestry benefits to the Westbank First Nation membership and broader community.'

Today (since 2009), WFN has two forest licences: a 'Community Forest Agreement' and a 'Replaceable Forest Licence' (soon to be a First Nation Woodland Licence), with a combined annual cut of 85,000m³ over 60,000 hectares of land.

In 2024, the company will be planting 322,000 trees (sourced from external nursery) including Douglas-fir, Spruce, Lodgepole Pine, Larch, Western White pine and Ponderosa Pine. Pest management, wildfire salvage and wildfire mitigation are a top priority with much thinning, pruning and removing surface fuels underway as well as 'beetle trapping'.

Planning for harvest, like all good, sustainable forestry practices, includes consideration of block size, forest health, adjacency to private land / other licences, wildlife values, fish habitat, water quality, visuals, recreation use, wildlife tree retention and species at risk.

They sell the logs to Non-First Nations processing companies including [Tolko Industries](#) Ltd and Gorman Brothers Ltd.

IV. Great Bear Rainforest Agreement – Carbon Project

The [Great Bear Rainforest](#) comprises of 6.4 million hectares, almost the size of Tasmania, which were officially recognised in 2016 by the BC Government through an agreement to protect 85% of the old-growth (and some second-growth) forested area from harvesting.

The area is home to 26 First Nations who overlap the region.

The agreement saw 295,000 hectares, previously identified for harvest, now protected. 550,000 hectares remain harvestable utilising a selective logging approach.

Interestingly, the Coastal First Nations, Nanwakolas Council and other First Nations have an increased allocation of carbon credits which can be sold to provide economic benefit to their respective communities. They are generated through activities including the protection of old growth, sustainable forestry and reforestation. The Great Bear Rainforest Carbon Project is one of the largest forest carbon projects in North America.

Carbon credits from the Great Bear Rainforest are sold on various carbon markets to buyers, including corporations, governments, and individuals seeking to offset their carbon emissions. These buyers purchase credits to meet regulatory requirements, achieve sustainability goals, or voluntarily reduce their carbon footprint.

The millions of dollars in revenue from carbon credits is reinvested into conservation efforts, including habitat restoration, wildlife protection, and sustainable land management practices as well as economically benefitting First Nations communities more broadly.

V. DUZ CHO Logging

The Duz Cho group of companies in North BC is entirely owned by the McLeod Lake Indian Band and includes [DC Logging](#). In its fourth generation, Duz Cho Logging (logging and haulage) was established in 1988 and today, is one of the largest Indigenous owned logging companies in Canada, harvesting in excess of 600,000m³ logs annually with a massive fleet of trucks and logging equipment.

While ideally, employment would be predominantly their own First Nations, the community is too small for the volume of personnel required and therefore recruitment is a constant campaign, with approximately 150 people required at any one time.

They also operate a mobile chipper, supplying companies like Canfor Energy North, where 35,000m³ wood fibre was chipped to be used in the [Canfor pellet plant](#).

In 2020, Duz Cho Construction purchased [Lone Pine Forest Products](#), an Alberta based company specialising in the manufacture of Rig Mats and Access Mats which are used predominantly in energy, mining and construction.

You can see Duz Cho Logging in action on the premier [Timber Titans show](#).

Duz Cho Logging recently purchased a TFL off Canfor, one of Canada's largest forest products companies.

VI. Canfor Closes Sawmill

Canfor is one of Canada's largest sawmilling companies with a history in BC dating back to the 1930's. In 2024, it announced the permanent closure of its Polar Sawmill and suspension of planned reinvestment in its Houston operations in BC.

While not specifically stated in its media statements, it is commonly discussed that the reason for this closure is following a lack of confidence in timber supply with increasing harvesting tenures moving to First Nations with potentially non-consistent agenda's.

In a statement by company President and CEO, Don Kayne, he said:

"The ability to reliably access enough economic timber to run our manufacturing facilities is critical for our business. Unfortunately, while our province has a sufficient supply of timber available for harvest as confirmed by the Allowable Annual Cut set by BC's Chief Forester, the actual harvest level has declined dramatically in recent years. In 2023 the actual harvest was 42 percent lower than the allowable cut, a level not seen since the 1960s.

*While this decline is partly the result of natural disturbances – beetle infestations and wildfire particularly - **it is also the result of the cumulative impact of policy changes and increased regulatory complexity.** These choices and changes have hampered our ability to consistently access enough economic fibre to support our manufacturing facilities and forced the closure or curtailment of many forest sector operations, including our Polar sawmill.*

***With the policy and regulatory landscape in BC continuing to shift, it's difficult to predict the operating conditions that we will face going forward.** As such, we have made the difficult decision to suspend our plan to build a new state-of-the-art sawmill in Houston, as we are not confident that an investment of this magnitude can be successful at this time."*

VII. Paper Excellence

[Paper Excellence](#), a non-Indigenous company with six manufacturing facilities across Canada, is headquartered in BC. With sawmilling volumes down and therefore reduced by-product feedstock for the paper mills, Paper Excellence increasingly needs to source pulp log directly from the forestry licence holders.

Therefore, building relations and supply agreements with First Nations forestry companies is simply part of business.

As such, in 2021, they appointed a dedicated Manager of Indigenous Fibre Partnerships, Kim Lefebvre, RPF. The same year, they publicly released their [Indigenous Relations Policy](#) and [Indigenous Procurement Policy](#). The company is demonstrating leadership in meaningful Indigenous engagement, recognising that doing business right, means building business together.

They have and continue to develop business partnerships, community sponsorships and established a scholarship program for First Nations, post-secondary school youth.

Also, in 2021, the company announced a joint venture with Atli Chip Limited which is majority owned by Atli Resources LP. Atli Resources LP is a forest company owned by the BC Namgis First Nation.

SUMMARY TIMELINE

1534	Colonisation - New France
1867	The British North America Act
1876	The Indian Act
1982	Section 35 Canadian Constitution
1982	Establishment of the Canadian Council for Indigenous Business
1985	Establishment of the Canadian Council of Forest Ministers
1988	McLeod Lake Indian Band Established the Duz Cho Group
1992	Establishment of the BC Treaty Commission
1993	Establishment of the FSC Fourth Chamber, 'Indigenous Peoples
2000	Nisga'a First Modern Treaty Agreement in BC
2004	The Haida Nation Case
2004	Establishment of the Stewix Resources Joint Venture
2006	Establishment of the BC First Nations Forestry Council

2010	Canada Endorses UNDRIP
2015	Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action
2019	BC Passes DRIPA
2021	Canadian Government Passes Bill C-15
2024	UBC Launches Bachelor of Indigenous Land Stewardship

Conclusion

It was apparent that in terms of forestry, with an ancient, spiritual connection to land while living in a modern world, First Nations have been progressively acknowledged over the past few decades.

Canadian constitutional changes in 1982, marked a new era for First Nations in terms of rights, recognition, and reconciliation. It was, and unfortunately continues to be in many cases, 'forced reconciliation' through Court orders.

The BC United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (DRIPA) is one of the most significant advancements in the rights of First Nations in Canada since colonisation. Any matters which have significant implications for land and resource management must engage First Nations in decision making. DRIPA promotes Indigenous rights to participate in and benefit from economic activities on their lands.

Since the passing of DRIPA in 2019, all other laws are now under review to ensure consistency. As a consequence, forestry licences are increasingly given (by the Crown) to First Nations forestry companies.

The BC Ministry of Forests initiated the 'Collaborative Stewardship Framework' in 2018 to test how information reflecting both Western and Indigenous knowledge can enhance resource decision making. Following five forums representing 30 First Nations, common stewardship visions are now being developed based on First Nations Values and provincial interests and objectives.

Sustainable production forestry today will not be identical to traditional land stewardship of pre-colonisation. This is why support mechanisms such as the Indigenous Forestry Scholarship and the recently launched Bachelor of Indigenous Land Stewardship course at the University of British Columbia have been critical initiatives. This is where traditional management practices including cultural burning, traditional silviculture, protecting cultural significance comes together with modern science, equipment, and technology.

Forestry in BC is clearly recognised for its value to the economy and the essential products produced as demonstrated by the very existence of roles such as the Chief Forester and Ministry of Forestry as well as organisations such as the National Aboriginal Forestry Association and the BC First Nations Forestry Council. Arguably, there are many layers, possibly too many, adding complexity and frustration but organisations like the BC First Nations Forestry Council provide an important link between First Nations and Government / Non-Indigenous businesses.

Both the Canadian and BC Governments have a range of initiatives to financially support the advancement of First Nations forestry through grants which support research, economic and social growth and advancement.

Both SFI and FSC sustainable forest management certification schemes in Canada have recognised the significance of First Nations forestry for many years. SFI has a dedicated First

Nations team focused on Indigenous certification and relations. There are over 50 Indigenous communities / businesses certified to either the SFI Standard or the SFI Indigenous Peoples and Families Module. Since 1993, FSC has had a unique, fourth chamber in Canada known as 'Indigenous Peoples'.

The broader, largely non-Indigenous forest products industry is aware that genuine, trusted relations with First Nations are essential for the future of the industry which requires respectful, meaningful collaboration and ultimately, reconciliation. Increasingly such companies are employing dedicated First Nations relations personnel to build partnerships and drive the companies' commitments to their Indigenous engagement policies.

On attending the First Nations Forestry conference held in Penticton, BC in May 2024, there were presentations to showcase businesses and partnerships, share challenges and frustrations, launch the University Indigenous Land Stewardship course and hear from young recipients of the Indigenous Forestry Scholarships. This was clearly a leading forum for listening and collaboration and was very well attended by First Nations forestry business owners.

First Nations forestry engagement in Australia is increasingly being included in strategies and action plans, research & development and board representation.

As stated at the beginning of this report, we are heading into Olympics 2032 including a focus on the 2042 games legacy. Legacy is more than [ideally timber] infrastructure such as affordable housing. Let's work together for a 2042 legacy that includes more trees in the ground through First Nations engagement and the many benefits of First Nations forestry for Queensland and beyond!

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