

Port Renfrew chamber decries logging plan

Written by Joan Russow

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An aerial photo of the old-growth forests where B.C. Timber Sales has seven pending cutblocks totalling 109 hectares. Juan de Fuca Provincial Park is along the coast and the town of Port Renfrew in the background.

Photograph By TJ WATT

Port Renfrew Chamber of Commerce has joined a growing outcry against B.C. government plans to log old-growth forests near Juan de Fuca Provincial Park.

President Dan Hager said Friday that clearcutting the ancient trees will hurt tourism and damage a regional economy already hard hit by chinook fishing restrictions.

“I’m in the accommodation business in Renfrew. People ask about it. I’m the one that responds to all the inquiries that come in off the chamber email and people are asking about the trees.”

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Hager said that will be put in jeopardy if B.C. Timber Sales proceeds with plans to sell off 109 hectares of the region's old-growth forest in seven cutblocks — including two that come within 50 metres of Juan de Fuca Provincial Park.

“If I was an editor of a newspaper, I would say: ‘Canada’s tall tree capital is now Canada’s clearcut capital,’ ” Hager said.

“What kind of damage is that going to do our reputation in the long term?”

Forests Minister Doug Donaldson said this week that B.C. Timber Sales, which is a government agency, was not aware of any direct impacts from logging on ecotourism in the area.

But he said the timber auction has been delayed two weeks so officials can investigate concerns raised by conservationists and others.

Environmental groups have launched a campaign to protect the trees, arguing that they're more valuable as a tourist attraction and a buffer against climate change and the loss of endangered species.

The Port Renfrew chamber, meanwhile, has appealed directly to the office of Premier John Horgan, who represents the Langford-Juan de Fuca constituency.

“He’s familiar with Renfrew,” Hager said. “He knows that it’s a community recovering and that our economy revolves around trees and revolves around the fish.

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“So we’re optimistic that we’re going to get good results here.”

Horgan was unavailable for comment Friday, but Hager said the chamber was encouraged that the government has delayed the timber sale and hopes it eventually will decide to protect the ancient trees.

Hager said the main message the chamber hopes to get across is that the trees are worth more standing — as demonstrated by the global appeal of Avatar Grove about 20 minutes from Port Renfrew.

“We know from the Avatar experience that old-growth forests attract tourists — not just locally but from all over the world,” he said. “And those tourists have money. They bring money and the more of it that we have in the immediate driving area of Renfrew, the better it is for our local economy.

“It’s a lot better than cutting them down, because you cut them down once, you run them through the sawmill, they build somebody’s deck and that’s it. But, if you leave them standing, people come over and over again to look.”

Al Jones, one of the driving forces behind the creation of the Juan de Fuca Marine Trail in the 1990s, said he, too, contacted Horgan’s office to complain about the logging plans.

“Yesterday, I was on the phone all day, phoning people that I don’t even know to help us out and speak out against it,” he said Friday. “It’s just a beautiful spot. Renfrew’s a beautiful area and I just think the logging should be over with.”

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Jones said he'd like to see the old growth preserved for future generations, as opposed to clearcutting the trees to turn a quick profit.

"Mostly, that cedar is going to be sent to China," he said. "There's not going to be the jobs that they say that there is.

"I have been a logging superintendent and they could go in there for three or four months and log the whole thing and be in and out of there. So it's a short-term [gain] for a big expense on such a beautiful spot."

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