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# The Forestry–Climate Link

**Why BC can't meet its climate goals without forestry reform - and the legislative shift needed to get there**

## The Missing Piece in BC's Climate Strategy

When most people think about climate action, they think about cutting fossil fuels: electric buses, solar panels, wind farms. What they rarely think about - and what BC's climate plan barely mentions - is forests.

That's a dangerous blind spot. BC's primary forests are one of the most powerful climate solutions we have. They store vast amounts of carbon, regulate water, cool the land, and shield communities from floods, fires, and droughts. And unlike global emissions or overseas oil tankers, BC's forests are entirely within provincial control.

But industrial logging is turning that solution into a problem - releasing more greenhouse gases each year than the oil sands, and making BC's communities less safe, less resilient, and more expensive to protect.

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## 1. What Climate Change Is Already Doing to BC's Forests

Climate change is already reshaping BC's forests.

- Hotter average temperatures
- Longer droughts
- More extreme weather
- Insect outbreaks and disease
- More frequent, more intense wildfires

These changes don't just hit trees. They hit everything forests protect - water quality, fish and wildlife, biodiversity, recreation, local economies, even our mental health. The loss of green, living forests affects people's sense of place and security.

The damage ripples through BC's economy in disaster costs, lost tourism, reduced water quality, and destroyed habitat.

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## 2. The Logging–Climate Feedback Loop

Here's the cycle we're stuck in:

**Logging drives climate change and climate change makes forests more vulnerable.**

- In 2022, industrial logging in Canada released **147 million tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>e** (Nature Canada) - making it the country's third-largest emitter, after oil & gas and transport.
- In BC, clearcutting a mature forest releases decades or centuries of stored carbon almost immediately, both from the trees and from the forest soils (Pojar 2019, 2024).
- Logged areas flip from climate buffers to climate hazards: hotter, drier, more flammable, more prone to flooding.

**Examples:**

- The 2018 Grand Forks flood caused \$165M in damage. A major driver? Clearcutting in the 8,000 km<sup>2</sup> watershed upstream (Houghton 2020).
  - In 2023, wildfires cost BC \$720M - the most expensive disaster in provincial history.
  - In his [2021 investigation](#), David Broadland described clearcuts and plantations as creating fuel conditions that make fires easier to ignite and harder to control - a key factor in many of BC's recent, large-scale wildfires.
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## 3. Why BC's Climate Plan Doesn't Add Up

BC's CleanBC plan invests in electric bikes, heat pumps, and wind power - but at the same time allows industrial logging to erase those gains.

Two major problems:

### 1. The carbon accounting shell game

- Canada *excludes* wildfire emissions from official climate totals, calling them "natural" - even when they're worsened by logging.
- When a forest is logged, the immediate carbon spike is downplayed by assuming future regrowth will repay the debt - even if that repayment will take 70–200 years or more *if*

the natural forests grow back (Pojar 2019). During those decades, that extra carbon in the air is actively heating the planet.

**The “don’t worry, the trees will grow back” argument ignores the fact that climate deadlines demand cuts in emissions within the next 10–20 years, not centuries from now.**

## 2. Logging emissions are bigger than many think

- Logging in Canada produces more climate pollution than agriculture or electricity generation - yet is almost invisible in climate policy (Nature Canada).
- In BC, plantation forests are typically re-logged every 40–80 years, meaning they *never* repay the carbon debt from the first cut. Even if the young stand has begun storing carbon again, it’s cut down before it can fully rebuild the massive stocks lost in the original harvest. Instead of becoming a stable carbon store like an old forest, the land stays in a constant boom-and-bust cycle - always emitting more than it can store over time. **Bottom line: Plantations can’t pay back the debt on time.**

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## 4. How Industrial Logging Makes BC More Vulnerable

When a primary forest is clearcut, the change is instant:

- **Carbon:** Huge release of CO<sub>2</sub> within years, not decades.
- **Water:** Streams warm, flood risk rises, drought risk rises.
- **Fire:** Cool, damp forest becomes sun-baked clearcuts, with dry debris fueling fires. Clearcuts are replaced with dense tree farms that dry out faster, burn hotter, and spread flames farther - turning former fire breaks into fire highways.

### Wood pellets - a hidden driver

- Industry claims wood pellets are made from sawmill residue.
- In 2021, BC exported 2.4M tonnes of wood pellets. At least 28% - **672,000 tonnes** - came from whole logs, not mill waste (Nature Canada).
- Sawmill residues are declining due to mill closures, smaller logs, efficiency upgrades, and raw log exports - so pellet plants are taking more whole trees, including rare old growth near Prince George (Conservation North).

#### Wood Pellets - A False Climate Solution

Burning wood pellets releases more CO<sub>2</sub> per unit of energy than coal does. In fact, studies show that biomass plants can emit 50–150% more CO<sub>2</sub> than coal per unit of electricity generated (NRDC). When whole trees are cut down for pellets, the climate hit is immediate and severe.

Even if there’s a plan to regrow trees, the carbon debt created by burning whole trees for pellets can take decades to over a century to repay through regrowth - far too long when climate action demands results in the next few decades.

## 5. What Works - and We Can Do It Now

The science is clear: **The fastest, most effective climate solution in BC's forests is to protect and restore them.**

**Proforestation:** Let existing forests grow to their full ecological potential.

- Stores the most carbon
- Provides the most climate buffering
- Costs nothing but political will

**Nature-Directed Stewardship (NDS):** Manage forests based on natural patterns, not industrial quotas.

- Protects the most important areas first
  - Uses small-scale, selection/partial cut logging where ecologically possible
  - Keeps forests connected and functioning while providing jobs in restoration and long-term care
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## 6. The Policy Pathway: The New Forest Act

BC doesn't have to wait for new tech or global agreements. It already has the legal power to protect forests - and the [New Forest Act \(NFA\)](#) is the blueprint.

The NFA's three pillars:

1. **Protect:** Safeguard remaining primary and old forests.
2. **Restore:** Heal damaged forests using the best science.
3. **Employ:** Create good jobs in restoration, monitoring, and low-impact forestry.

By adopting the NFA, BC could cut one of its biggest climate pollution sources, make communities safer, and keep more carbon in the bank - all with a policy shift the province controls.

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## 7. The Bottom Line

If BC is serious about climate leadership, it must connect climate policy to land-use policy.

Protecting forests is:

- **Climate mitigation:** Locks in centuries of stored carbon.
- **Climate adaptation:** Reduces fire, flood, and drought risk.
- **Disaster prevention:** Cheaper than cleaning up after the fact.

We already have the forests, the science, and the policy solution. The only missing piece is political will.

**BC can't meet its climate goals without forestry reform. Legislative change via the [New Forest Act](#) makes it possible.**

**For more information about the New Forest Act proposal, please visit:**  
[www.boundaryforest.org](http://www.boundaryforest.org)

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