

VIEWPOINT

Season open on unprotected lands

By David Moore

British Columbia's auditor general (AG) issued a report recently on the removal by the provincial government of private forest lands from provincially regulated Tree Farm Licences (TFL). The report is a full-scale condemnation of the procedures used by then-forest minister Rich Coleman to delete lands from long-standing land use restrictions and free them for Western Forest Products Inc. to sell off to developers—essentially a gift from the BC government to a private corporation of over \$100 million.

The report registered a 10 on the political Richter scale generating headlines like "Auditor general rips government over land deal" (*Vancouver Sun*), "Report slams BC for freeing up forests" (*Globe and Mail*), and "BC too quick to approve land deals: AG" (*Victoria*

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Times Colonist).

Under review by Auditor General John Doyle were 28,000 hectares of productive forest on southern Vancouver Island. Critics of this great land giveaway are asking the government to rescind the scandalous removal, or at least

come up with a compensation deal that's fair to all stakeholders including the voiceless trees, animals and resources like water which may be lost when the land is cleared and/or subdivided for big profits.

It's important for people here to know that Doyle's assessment is significant for Powell River. Although his report focused specifically on a TFL deletion of 28,000 hectares on Vancouver Island, a total of 120,000 hectares of private lands over BC have been similarly deleted since the Liberal government changed forest policies in 2004. This includes forest land in the Powell River Regional District.

It's shocking but true that our government has given away the potential equivalent of hundreds of millions of dollars in public assets to corporations, including

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companies doing business here in Powell River such as Western Forest Products and Island Timberlands Partnership Ltd.

The parent owner of these companies is Brookfield Asset Management Inc., a multi-national investment firm which brags on its website of worldwide assets over \$90 billion. When forests are clear cut here, spoiling sites such as the Powell Forest Canoe Route or endangering the salmon habitat of Myrtle Creek, some of the profits flow to New York, Toronto, London, Brazil and Bermuda where Brookfield has corporate offices.

People here should know that some of our local wild landmarks and ecologically sensitive areas have been lost and others are threatened because private lands formerly owned by Weyerhaeuser were deleted from TFLs in recent years. It's been done without adequate consultation and consideration of environmental and recreational values (including tourism). But please recognize that it could get worse if local citizens don't voice their opposition and take action to reverse the injustice.

When corporate planners look ahead they act

to protect current and future profits. The auditor general's report could spark a hurried increase in industrial logging by opportunistic companies which aren't committed to the long-term well being of the forest or the citizens of Powell River. It's more important than ever to write Premier Gordon Campbell, ministry of forests and range minister Pat Bell (with a copy to MLA Nicholas Simons) and keep up pressure on our local governments to enact regulations to protect and retain our natural heritage where it is threatened.

David Moore lives in Electoral Area C.