

Background: Save Puntledge Forest Campaign

Ownership of the Puntledge Forest

The Puntledge Forest is on land owned by BC Hydro, extending between the dam on Comox Lake and the diversion dam on the Puntledge River. Most trees on the property (outside of BC Hydro operational areas) are owned separately by way of a Timber Reservation registered on the land title. The Timber Reservation (the right to harvest timber) is owned by Manulife Investment Management. The Comox Valley Land Trust (CVLT) bought a portion of the reservation in 2023 and another portion in April 2024. The remaining 37 hectares of the Timber Reservation is still owned by Manulife.

Mining and logging history

Mining operations began in 1902, and a company town was built by 1911. The town, called Bevan, included 100 houses, a store, hotel and school. It had daily bus service to Cumberland. The Number 7 Mine closed in 1921, and the town was demolished in the 1950's. The Puntledge Forest was logged during the mining era, making it 100 to 120 years old.

Conservation values

The Puntledge Forest was allowed to regenerate naturally, which means it has much more biodiversity than a tree plantation. In a century this forest will be considered "old growth." As a mature forest it already serves many important functions. It includes up to 30 listed species (i.e. of conservation concern), and 22 plant communities that are listed as rare (i.e., endangered or threatened). As a low elevation coastal forest, it also has very high carbon capture and storage potential, making its preservation an important natural climate solution.

The Puntledge River is one of the most significant salmon producing rivers in the Strait of Georgia (Salish Sea). On average it is the second largest producer of Chinook, coho and pink salmon, and fourth largest producer for chum salmon. It has two Chinook runs: a fall run and a smaller, endangered and genetically distinct summer run. It also has a winter and summer run of Steelhead, and resident trout including Cutthroat, which is a listed species in BC.

The Forest connects to the Comox Lake Bluffs Ecological Reserve to the south and Nymph Falls Regional Park to the North, providing a biodiversity corridor along the Puntledge River.

Recreational Values

BC Hydro manages a picnic area and maintains a network of formal hiking, biking and multi-use trails. The trails extend to and are contiguous with those at Nymph Falls Regional Park. The Puntledge River itself offers canoeing, swimming, bird watching and fishing opportunities.

K'ómoks First Nation and Traditional Cultural Use

The Puntledge River was named in 1854 after the PE'ntlac people who lived along it. Today the Pentlatch tribe is part of the K'ómoks First Nation, and the Puntledge River is at the heart of the K'ómoks First Nation's traditional territory. Traditional uses continue here, including cedar bark harvesting for traditional clothing and baskets. The K'ómoks First Nation has expressed their full support for this project, as project success will protect Puntledge River fish habitat as well as help mitigate climate change.

Funding for earlier purchases of portions of the Timber Reservation

The CVLT was fortunate to receive \$3.5 Million from Environment and Climate Change Canada in 2023, to assist in the purchase of three separate conservation properties. \$1.8 Million of this amount went to the purchase of 29 hectares of Manulife's Timber Reservation, in the northwestern part of the Puntledge Forest. In March of 2024, the CVLT received \$2 Million from BC's Old Growth Nature Fund, which is financially supported by Environment and Climate Change Canada. These funds were used to purchase 32 hectares of the Timber Reservation in the southern half of the Forest.

About the Comox Valley Land Trust

The Comox Valley Land Trust promotes, protects, conserves, and restores the ecologically significant land, waters, and wildlife habitat of the Comox Valley. For more information, please visit our website at cvlandtrust.ca

