**MEDIA RELEASE**

**October 29, 2019**

**BC Timber Sales logging of Schmidt Creek old-growth imperils orca habitat**

On July 4, 2019, BC Timber Sales responded to an April 12th letter written by Victoria based environmental lawyer Mr. Matthew Nefstead, alleging that a timber sale approved in the Schmidt Creek Watershed on Vancouver Island, did not consider the full spectrum of environmental concerns raised by his client. The research behind the challenge was undertaken in part by Elphinstone Logging Focus (ELF) with funding by West Coast Environmental Law for Mr. Nefstead’s legal work.

In March 2017, when ELF first identified the Schmidt Creek cutblocks, a background report was prepared outlining the issues of this extensive logging operation, including: roadbuilding on steep slopes to access mid elevation old-growth, risks of sediment transport into Schmidt Creek and the delivery of sediment to affected orca rubbing beaches lying at the mouth of the creek. Central to the issues raised by ELF was a little known but critical March 2003 report ‘Schmidt Creek Sediment Sources and the Johnstone Strait Killer Whale Rubbing Beach’ by Thomas Millard, Research Geomorphologist. The report was shared with environmental organizations on Vancouver Island.

BCTS’ reply to Mr. Nefstead’s concerns took over 3 months to be received. In the meantime, roadbuilding and logging proceeded in the Schmidt. A fall 2018 Wilderness Committee and Sierra Club site investigation documented early phases of logging of rare old-growth stands, including an undercut failure on a road section above Schmidt Creek. The Schmidt is adjacent to the Robson Bight (Michael Briggs) Ecological Reserve that was established to protect vital orca habitat. It contains rare orca rubbing beaches used by orcas for thousands of years, but sediment deposits from upstream logging and roadbuilding put that at risk.

“A major shortcoming of the BCTS response by Don Hudson (Timber Sales Manager), was not addressing the 2003 Millard recommendation for continued monitoring of the Schmidt’s sediment sources.” states Ross Muirhead, Forest Campaigner for ELF. “From 1992 until 1997 a moratorium was placed restricting further industrial activity in the Schmidt due to concerns that past logging activities were having on the hydrology of the watershed and the subsequent likelihood of negative consequences of sediment input to the 3 shoreline orca rubbing beaches.”

Muirhead continues, “The moratorium could only be lifted on condition that a monitoring program be in place to better understand the long-term hydrology of this watershed and its effects on highly sensitive rubbing beaches and on orca behaviour. That program was stopped in 2000 due to funding cuts, thus large knowledge gaps exist in the study area. The above mentioned 2003 Technical Report’s Conclusions and Recommendations should have been the guiding document that would have restricted BCTS’ plans for the Schmidt, but was ignored. In the meantime, Mr. Hudson states that BC Parks has asked Mr. Millard to have another look at the rubbing beaches, but that report was only in draft form when the BCTS logging and roadbuilding was approved and logging was fully underway. By not first reinstating a sediment monitoring station as a condition for renewed logging activity as stipulated by the Vancouver Forest Region, and then not waiting for the Millard report to be completed (projected end of 2019), BCTS was opportunistic in getting at and logging old-growth stands in the Schmidt. Any remaining unlogged blocks should be canceled until a review is undertaken by an independent panel.”

Enclosed are the three supporting documents referred to:

* Forest Research Technical Report ‘Schmidt Creek Sediment Sources and the Johnstone Strait Killer Whales Rubbing Beach.’ By Thomas Millard, Research Geomorphologist. March 2003
* Letter from Matthew Nefstead, Barrister & Solicitor to BC Timber Sales, Strait of Georgia Business Area. Attention: Don Hudson, Timber Sales Manager and Norm Kempe, Senior Forest Planner. April 12, 2019
* Letter from Don Hudson, BCTS Timber Sales Manager to Matthew Nefstead. July 4, 2019

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