Dakota Bear Sanctuary Finally Protected

March 2, 2021

After an eight-year forest protection campaign to stop logging in an area nicknamed the Dakota Bear Sanctuary (DBS), our organization is pleased to announce that the primary decision makers, the Skwxwu7mesh (Squamish Nation) and the Province of BC, have agreed to not auction 77 ha of ancient forest in the Dakota Watershed on the Sunshine Coast, securing this forest for long-term protection.

A Squamish / Province joint statement sent to media yesterday reads, “In recognition of the ongoing cultural importance of the Dakota Bowl area, the Squamish Nation and the Province agreed to work together in assessing options that restrict future development or harvesting in this area. Land use designations under consideration, include, an Old Growth Management Area, a Wildlife Habitat Area or a Squamish Nation Area of Interest.”

ELF’s many efforts to protect this forest resulted in 5 separate logging deferrals over an 8 year period and included a six week blockade that prevented BC Timber Sales from building a logging road to the Dakota Bear Sanctuary at public expense. We also commissioned 2 separate archeological reports proving the existence of 77 and counting, historic First Nations culturally modified trees that qualified as Heritage Sites and off limits to logging. ELF also commissioned two biological reports by Wayne McCrory that revealed the Sanctuary’s high number of active and potential bear dens, critical habitat only found in old trees. The latest of these reports released February 2021, recommended a 450 ha area be protected to capture its high biodiversity values. There were other efforts too - ongoing lobbying of the Province, outreach to the Squamish Nation, 2 videos, a short film, a petition, letter writing campaign and more that we either helped sponsor or initiated.

In a cover note for his recently completed report Wayne McCrory states, “In all my long research career of coastal rainforests I have witnessed no other ancient forest like it.”

“After an eight-year campaign fighting the government’s own logging agency, BC Timber Sales, ELF is delighted to receive this news that the DBS’ ancient forest will continue standing for many more thousands of years.” states Ross Muirhead, ELF Forest Campaigner. “We never knew at the beginning of this effort what the outcome would be, but our team promised themselves that we’d throw everything we had into saving this remarkable area and today our efforts came to fruition.”

“The Dakota Bear Sanctuary represents an irreplaceable, unique cultural and natural heritage. The bears and future generations will be grateful that we managed to save it,” comments Hans Penner of ELF.

We would like to thank our many supporters and donors, who believed in our conservation vision, Wayne McCrory for his excellent science, the folks at Living Forest Institute, The Only Animal and the Artist Brigade for their collaborative efforts, passion and creativity, West Coast Environmental Law for their funding of the bear den study, Bob Brett of Snowline Research for his tree ring study, to Xwechtaal (Dennis Joseph – retired Squamish First Nation councillor) who took a personal interest in this campaign, and to the Skwxwu7mesh Nation for their foresight and good stewardship. We did it, and we did it together!
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