



**Skeena Watershed
Conservation Coalition**

Forestry Survey Summary Report

October 2022

Report by
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Hlimoo Sustainable Solutions is a Gitksan owned sole proprietorship based out of New Hazelton in the Gitksan Lax'yip who works to operationalize free, prior and informed consent for sustainable development on Indigenous lands. Proprietor Tara Marsden/Naxginkw has worked on similar community-based and Indigenous-led surveys and research in the Lax'yip and beyond in Dakelh and other Indigenous territories. Past work is available on her website, www.hlimoo.ca.

Limitations and Disclaimers

The survey was accessed online, and while most residents have some form of access to the internet and use email and social media, it cannot be assumed that there is equal access across the region. The survey took approximately 15 minutes to complete, on average, and so those who completed it would have been people with some time to dedicate to reading and responding to the questions. The survey was provided in English, and so may have posed challenges to those whose second language is English, or who have literacy challenges.

As is indicated in the survey results below, the majority of respondents were from Kispiox Valley. There is no suggestion here as to why that is, but it does provide a slightly disproportionate view of forestry issues, as some communities did not have many or any responses. Thus, it is not the intention to make statements that the results speak for all residents of the Upper Skeena, but only those who took an interest and completed the survey. Finally, some survey respondents skipped some of the questions, and so some of the summaries below may be incomplete as not every respondent answered every question.

Graphic design and layout by Marci Janecek of Marsupial Design.



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Introduction and Background

In May 2021, the Skeena Watershed Conservation Coalition conducted an online survey for residents of the Upper Skeena region regarding forestry operations in the area. The intent was to gather community voices to help inform strategies and approaches to the on-going Timber Supply Review process for the Kispiox Timber Supply Area. The survey includes 14 questions and was completed by 165 individuals. The communities reached with the survey included:

Kispiox Valley	New Hazelton	Gitanmaax	Gitwangak
Anspayaxw (Kispiox)	South Hazelton	Suskwa	Gitanyow
Sik-e-Dakh (Glen Vowell)	Two-Mile	Kitwanga	Other Rural
Hazelton	Hagwilget	Gitsegukla	

The [survey link](#) was distributed to residents via email, social media, various networks and contacts known to Skeena Watershed Conservation Coalition. People were invited to share it with their contacts, and it was an open survey that did not have a firm deadline for completion.

The data summary provided by Survey Monkey was reviewed, analyzed and summarized by the author of this report using quantitative accounting and qualitative coding. For open ended questions, the author coded for themes, and then tallied total references in each theme. Where a theme only has one or two beside it, that indicates a lower amount of people mentioned this, but it was still included to ensure all voices were captured equally. The author has extensive experience in community-based research, data gathering, analysis, and coding and has worked for both the provincial and Indigenous governments throughout the region.

This survey provided an anonymous platform for members of all communities in the Upper Skeena region to share their thoughts, concerns, and potential solutions for changes in the forestry industry. This survey and report build on the previous years of work of Skeena Watershed Conservation Coalition convening concerned community members in a group called Talkin' Loggin' which met and developed recommendations for forestry reform which have since been submitted to the provincial government. In addition to letters submitted to government, it was decided that an anonymous survey was also needed to ensure voices of those who are active in the forest industry had a safe venue to voice their concerns, without fear of risk to business and other relationships.

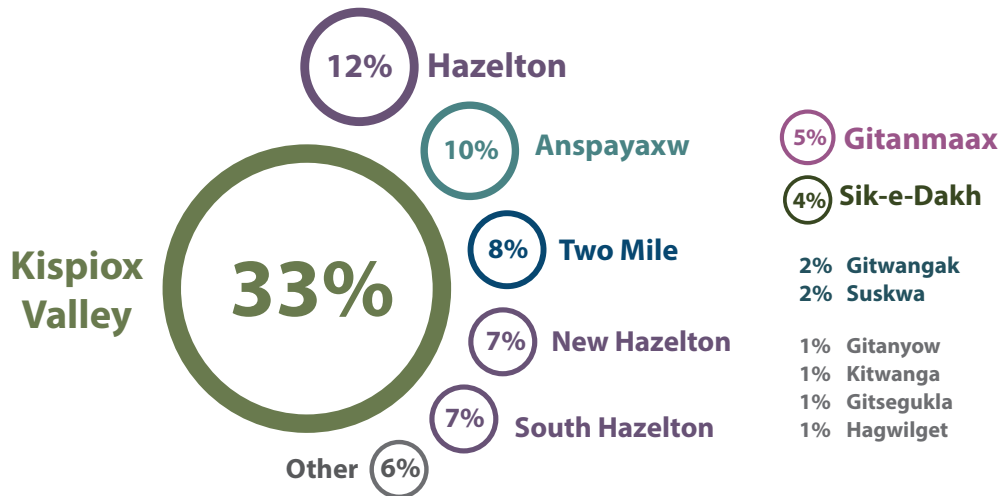


Summary of Results

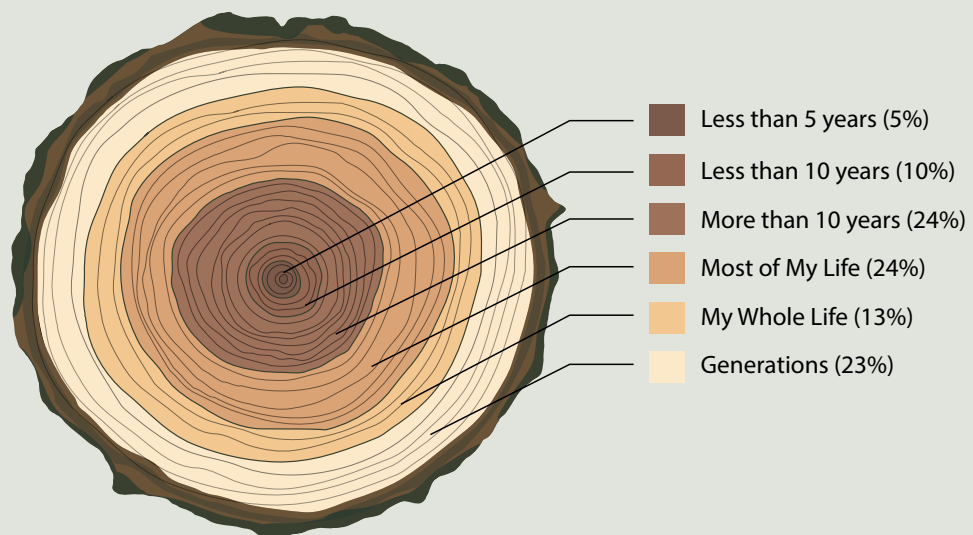
The survey results painted a fairly clear picture of the current perspectives on the forest industry in the Upper Skeena region and how forest practices and management are currently affecting communities and the environment. The survey results are also indicative of the cultures from which these perspectives are formed. The following are key take-away points of analysis:

- ▷ The Upper Skeena region is home to diverse people, but who have common values of kinship with one another and connection to the land.
- ▷ While the majority of respondents were non-Indigenous, there were numerous instances of knowledge of and reverence to Gitksan Ayookxw (laws), rights, culture, and ethics of care for the environment.
- ▷ In one form or another, the majority of people rely on forests for some type of livelihood, whether sustenance harvesting, accessing firewood, or making a living logging or in silviculture, healthy forests are essential to everyone.
- ▷ The majority of people surveyed are not satisfied with the current management of forestry in the region. Calls for slowed pace of logging, reducing waste of non-target species, and ending the export of raw log exports were prominent in the results.
- ▷ Forests hold multiple interconnected values, beyond timber for economic revenue generation. Survey respondents provided numerous values that range from mental health and well-being to knowledge transfer, to other economic development such as tourism.
- ▷ While a small amount of people would like to see an end to all logging, most want to see a continued forest industry, but with moderate to significant changes.
- ▷ A good number of people indicated some lack of knowledge or understanding about who is making decisions on forestry in the region. With the majority believing it is not the right people making those decisions, it appears some public education and awareness raising may be needed on decision-making processes to empower local people.

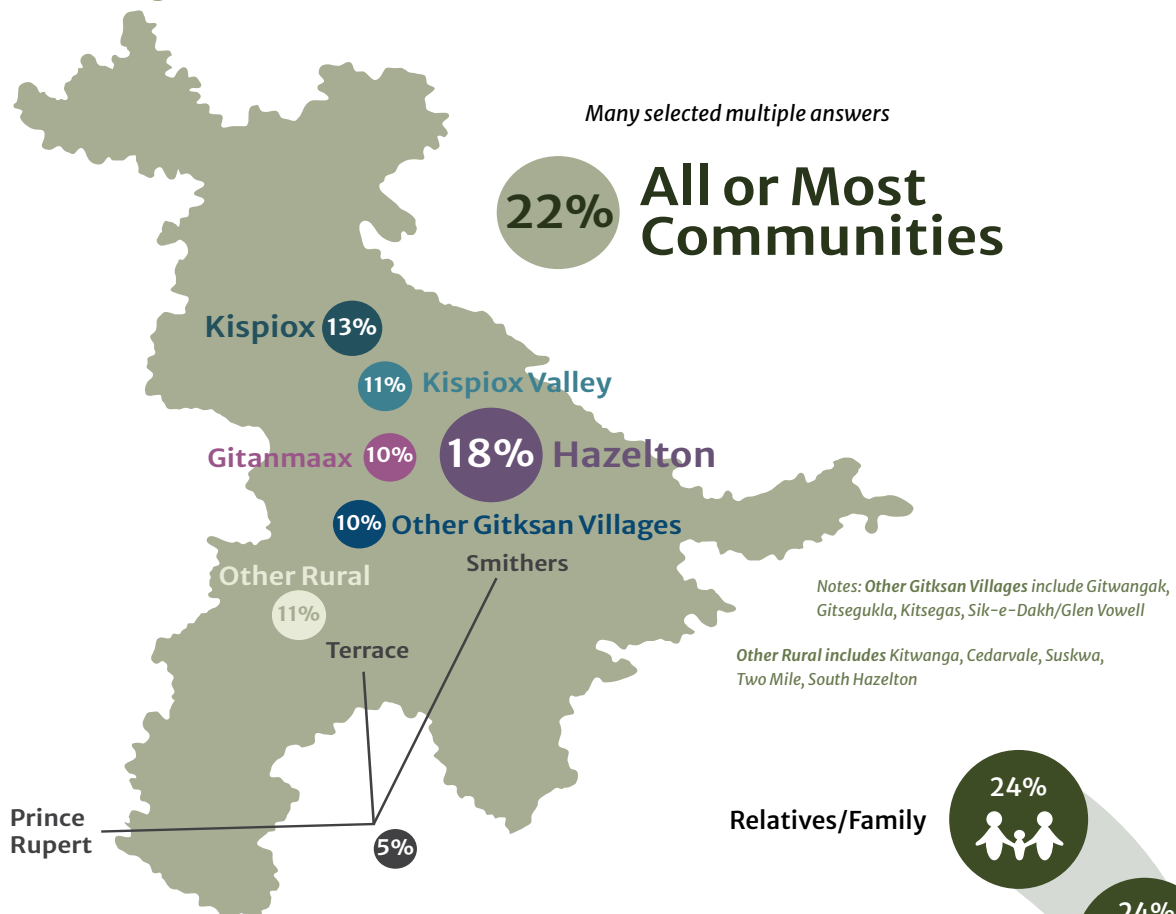
What community do you live in?



How long have you lived in this region?



What communities are you connected to?



In what ways are you connected to these places?

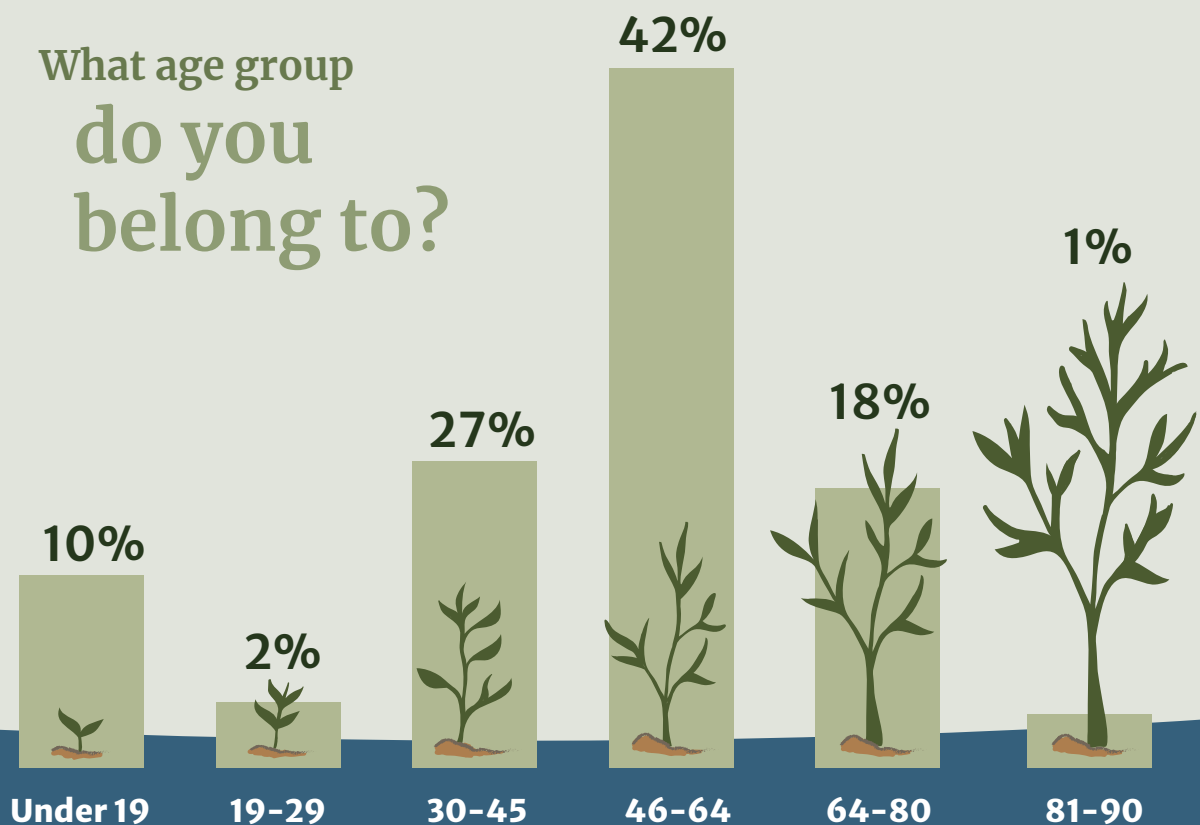
Notes: Many identified multiple points of connection. These are most common references identified through coding of open-ended question responses.



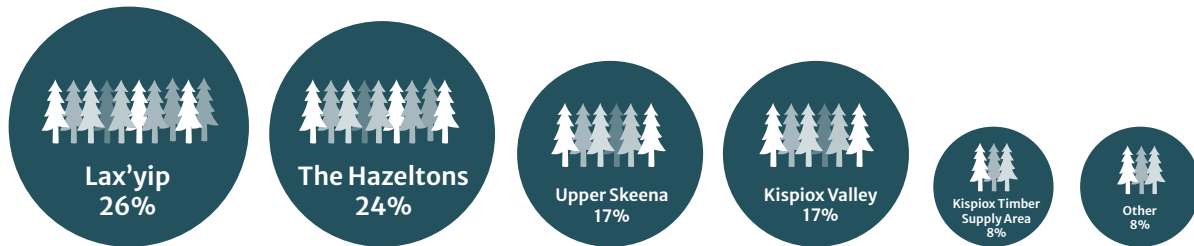
Do you identify as Indigenous?



What age group do you belong to?



What area are your local forests within?



Lax'yip is the simalgyax word for land or territory. Each gitksan wilp has a defined lax'yip. Simalgyax is the language of the gitksan, nisga'a, tsimshian and gitanyow. Each nation has their own distinct dialects.

What do you value about your local forests?

By number of responses:



Notes: Many identified multiple values. These are most common references identified through coding of open-ended question responses

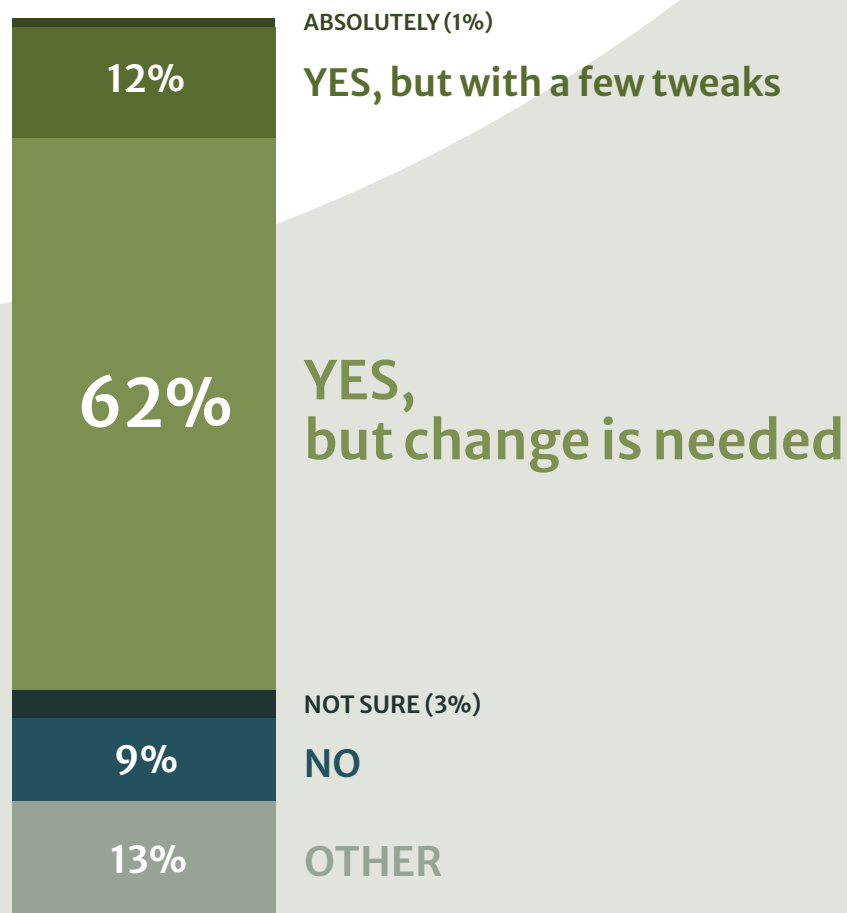
What is your connection with your local forests?

By number of responses:



Notes: Many identified multiple values. These are most common references identified through coding of open-ended question responses.

Do you support the logging industry?



Those who selected "Other" include some who did not feel they had enough information to make an informed opinion, they weren't sure, and some who responded with specific changes they would like to see in the forest industry. These specific changes are captured in quotes and other question responses.

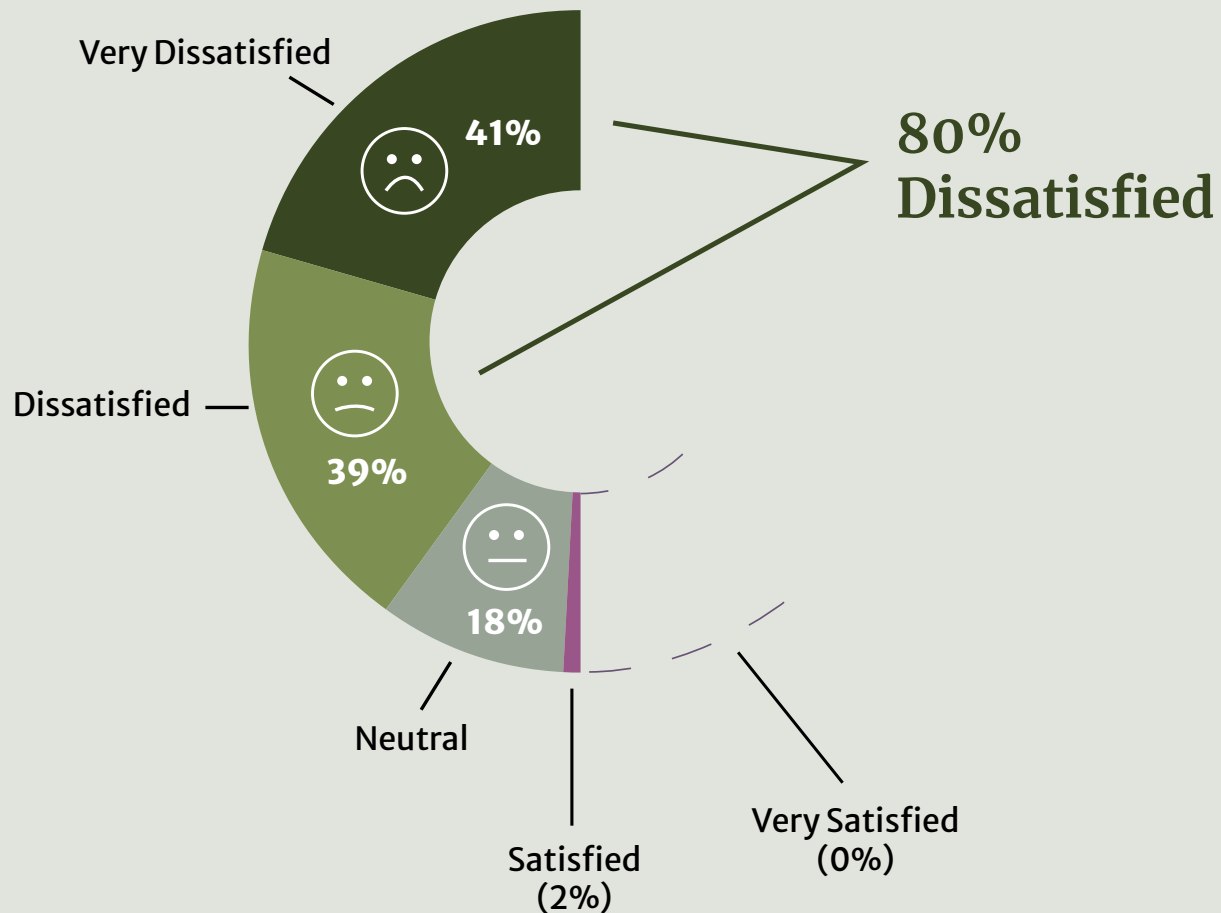
What would a healthy and vibrant future for local forests look like to you?

By number of responses:

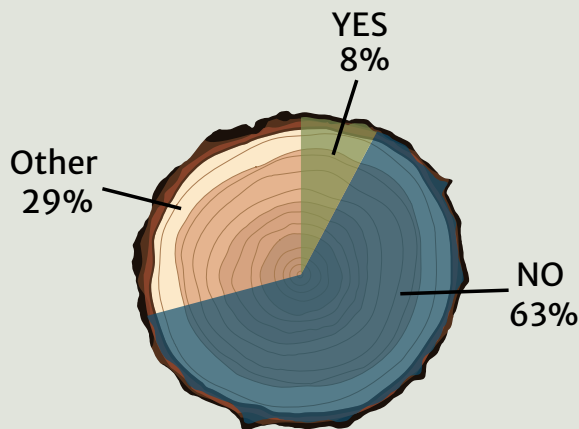
- 67 – Selective logging, reduced waste, no clearcuts, protect old growth**
- 53 – More local benefits, employment, contracts, woodlots**
- 40 – Slow pace of logging, reduce Annual Allowable Cut, support smaller scale operators**
- 39 – Respect for Gitksan Wilp decisions, Indigenous-led planning, Indigenous-led forestry**
- 38 – More local processing, value-added jobs, no raw log exports**
- 18 – Support for local decision making, more involvement of local communities**
- 17 – Regrowth of logged areas, natural regeneration, diverse species not mono-species**
- 16 – Managing for values other than timber**
- 11 – Responsible management and stewardship**
- 10 – Protection of watersheds/riparian**
- 10 – Forests that can sustain all life forms**
- 8 – Minimum of maintaining what we have left today**
- 5 – Improved monitoring and enforcement of forest practices**
- 5 – Forests that are climate change resilient**
- 4 – Reduced conflict among users, people**
- 5 – Moratorium on logging until better process in place**
- 4 – Visual quality improvements, access for recreation**
- 2 – Fire resilient**
- 2 – Stable lumber prices and stumpage**
- 2 – No herbicide or pesticide use**
- 1 – More logging**
- 1 – No BC Timber Sales**

Notes: Many identified multiple points. These are most common references identified through coding of open-ended question responses.

How do you feel about
**what is happening to the
local forests today?**



Are the right people making the decisions about local forests?



Those who selected "Other" included some who did not understand the question, and some that did not have enough information to know who is currently making forestry decisions.

Why do you feel this way?

By number of responses:



Need more localized decisions, those who deal with impacts should be involved in decisions, those who know area/industry, local knowledge



Gitksan decisions on Gitksan Lax'yip, involve Wilp members, respect Ayookxw



Seeing impact of current decision-makers on the ground, need better processes, more science, less bureaucracy (Victoria)



Current decisions prioritize profits/economics above all else



Unsure, do not understand current decision-making process



Need shared jurisdiction, Indigenous, local settler, government, consensus



Some Gitksan Chiefs and their representative organizations do not represent or involve their Wilp

Would you like to share anything else regarding decision-making about local forests?

By number of responses:



Sample Quotes

Many survey respondents spoke eloquently and passionately about the importance of healthy forests, and the need for change in the forestry industry. Here are some example quotes:

“I value the life forms they [forests] support. I value what it does for my and others mental health. I value the biodiversity and the ecological strength a forest offers. I value it allows local people to carve out a living on local lands. I value the connection that forests allow us.”

“[A healthy vibrant future for local forests] would be recognized beyond timber supply for global/capital wants. It would continue to sustain life forms including us humans. It would support local employment in sustainable ways. It would be a cause for harmony among people rather than dispute. What needs to change is more local decision making about what happens in local forests. Joined decision making between Gitksan Wilps and colonial forms of government and governance from local to federal. I think the attitudes of non-Gitksan might need to shift for this to happen, in the recognition of rights and title. And the rate and scale of extraction would have to slow down immensely.”

“We live here. My whole family. We make our living off of healthy forests. We’ve logged, guided hunters and fishermen, farmed, camped, built trails and cabins, harvested food, hunted and fished for ourselves. Every member of my family has an income that is dependent on healthy forests and rivers. I go to the land when I am sad or depressed and need to get right in my head. Its also where I go to recreate. Its where I feel the most peace — the most content. The rivers and land are like a family member.”

“We manage forests for volume and not for health, culture or genuine sustainability. Too much is being taken. Or more accurately, too much is being cut down, very little is being used and the “waste” is being burned up as either slash or pellets. A vibrant future for local forests should be more localized. Local loggers, local mills, local contractors, local builders and local wood to build homes and infrastructure. It should be selectively logged instead of clearcut and if replanting is needed, it should be a diversity of trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants to better mimic how nature would heal that landscape.”

"I've seen cutblocks where the vast majority of what has been cut, just gets piled up and burned. I'm talking about perfectly viable cedar trees, just thrown into a burn pile."

"I'm actually terrified, climate change is impacting our forests and the overactive logging is removing healthy trees and damaging the environment in ways it may not be able to recover from. I want my children to have forests and their and theirs."

"I support employment in the forests, mining and fisheries sector but they all need to find ways of adding value to finite resources."

"Poor utilization, [of forests] need to give financial incentives to use more of the fibre, not enough consideration given to wildlife old growth needs, not enough consideration given to rare plants and ecosystems."

"Everything relies on each other on our lax yips. Each lax yip is protected by Huwilp since time immemorial. All logging since settlers came is theft."

"I get time to recharge my oot'sin. I harvest things like berries, cedar, and other medicines [in the forests]."

"Shared sustainability. More value-added uses, a lot less logs leaving the country as raw logs. More opportunities for local businesses eg woodlots, small mills. Stability in local lumber prices."

"[We need] increased protection of critical watersheds and proactive steps towards protection of habitat under future climate change scenarios, better riparian protection and erosion prevention. Select harvest and diversified economic opportunities and uses."

"We must make decisions based upon knowledge from local loggers, First Nations, tourism and local land owners. A sustainable future for logging in this area is possible, but not if forestry keeps giving contracts to foreign countries, or to giant logging contracting companies who are here for a short, profitable time, leaving devastation."

"The value of wilderness for mental well-being is now documented. I have the privilege of living where wildlife walks past my home. This is important to me as I enjoy feeling close to nature."

"I managed a woodlot for about twenty years to supplement my income. I hunt for my food in these forests. These forests help regulate rain and snow runoff helping to stabilize river levels which is crucial to the angler tourism industry. The deciduous forest has been an important source of grazing for my cattle in the past. Intact forest cover is crucial to regulating the water temperatures of small spawning streams resulting in higher survival rates in all species of salmon and steelhead trout, which in turn helps feed my Indigenous family members and friends."

"I don't know enough. But I do know several friends that run small logging operations, they are not big companies from somewhere else. And I don't see them getting rich."

"Forestry should not be managed by BC Timber Sales which has the primary purpose of creating revenue for the province. Forestry must be managed by a Gitksan guardian and protection committee that is made up of knowledgeable members from every Gitksan house."

"This area has some of the highest unemployment rates in the province. This was not the case in the past. Locals worked in logging or sawmills. There were few people on social or income assistance. Now workers must move or go to camp to work. High levels of families on social or income assistance then leads to high levels of substance abuses with an increase in crime. The current system is not providing local jobs, it is not working for any local person, Gitksan or not."

"Benefit to local communities from commercial harvest has steadily declined in the last 30 years. Environmental impacts seems less of a priority than monetary benefits to the BC government. Lack of government oversight in favour of self-monitoring by corporations and spot audits creates unacceptable risks. Role of forest harvest practices on provincial climate change strategies has not been clearly defined for the public by the province."

"We coexist with the forests and supplement one another in so many ways. I get my medicine from the forest. The forests provide everything we need for physical, emotional and spiritual health in a holistic manner. I need the forest to maintain my connection and resonance with my ancestors."

"Decentralizing power is what is needed so people can work and solve their own problems collectively on a community level."

“Every day I see logging trucks hauling large amounts of our trees being taken off the laxyip, being sold to others and then to see the eye sore that comes after this. The cycle that keeps this going is: logging and clearcut, hire band members to tree plant, go on EI. That system serves no purpose except to exploit the nation’s forests and keep Gitksan in a scarcity mindset.”

“I suspect that, as in any other sector, industry/corporate lobbying holds a far greater share of public policy and decision-making power than it should. I’m for greater transparency, more public consultation, aggressive public regulation and strict accountability for forestry practices.”

“Basic science is being ignored for quick profit, leaving the watershed, the forests, the people, and eventually industry poorer in the long-run. Colonial extraction is not about long-term survival or functioning, interconnected systems—its about short-term, exported gain only. There are a lot smarter and better ways we could be interacting with our forests, even with profit as a goal.”

“There needs to be a locally developed management authority that recognizes the Gitksan existence, ownership of the lax yip, local resident indigenous and non-indigenous are attached and love this area. Local residents have a long-term vision of sustainability and sustainable economy, a new management model that has a holistic approach is urgently required not the fragmented one currently in place. With real partnerships with title and rights holders, its 2021, this should be the new normal.”

“Uplift Indigenous voices and allies, move the forestry sector into the 21st century and make it sustainable.”

“Respect the land and it will provide for generations to come. Take only what is needed.”

“It’s our forest, we are the keepers. Our children, our future will have nothing — what is there to grab after all is exhausted. Doing peaceful protests does nothing. Need good leaders that will strategize how to get the message across.”

“It would be nice to see all sides working together.”

Conclusions and Recommendations

The information and perspectives shared by survey respondents is a useful resource for any organization, First Nation government, or provincial government wanting to incorporate community voices into forestry planning, management and decision-making.

▷ Recommendations for Sharing This Report

- 1. Community Forums:** Skeena Watershed Conservation Coalition can either host or participate as presenters at community forums on land and resource management in the Skeena region and beyond. Sharing back the results in an open format is important to ground-truth results and analysis, and to provide the bigger picture so individuals may see where they align with other individuals, common concerns and recommended solutions.
- 2. Provincial Government:** It is recommended that this report be shared with local Members of the Legislative Assembly and District Managers, and other senior provincial representatives in Smithers and Terrace offices of the Ministry of Forests and the new Ministry of Fisheries, Land, Water and Resource Stewardship.
- 3. Gitksan Wilp:** It is recommended that the report be shared with all Gitksan Wilp and their respective governance organizations, and extend invitations to present the findings or engage in dialogue on what next steps might look like. It should be made clear that this report and survey results are a useful resource, but do not represent or replace any form of Crown “consultation” with the Gitksan Huwilp or peoples.
- 4. Specific Forestry Decision-Making Processes or Forums:** The provincial government is currently undertaking a Timber Supply Review process for the Kispiox Timber Supply Area and this is led by the office of the Chief Forester. This report can be used in consultation for that process. The provincial government also convenes a Steering Committee for the Kispiox Timber Supply Area that meets regularly and invites all forest licensees to come together and discuss areas of common interest regarding management. This report could also be shared with that forum as a way to initiate dialogue on meaningful change.

Finally, it is recommended that Skeena Watershed Conservation Coalition continue the work of community outreach by engaging those interested in learning more about the current decision-making process for forestry. This should include key components such as:

- Timber Supply Review
- Forest Stewardship Plans
- Cutting Permits
- BC Timber Sales
- Tenure Management
- Land Use Planning
- Indigenous/Aboriginal consultation – the legal duty to consult
- Gitksan Ayookxw
- Government-to-government shared decision-making (Reconciliation Agreements)

It is further recommended that the provincial government and Gitksan Huwilp be invited to join in this exercise.

▷ Recommendations to the Provincial Government

Finally, recommendations are shared with the following provincial ministries and offices:

- Ministry of Forests
- Ministry of Lands, Waters, & Resource Stewardship
- Ministry of Indigenous Relations & Reconciliation
- Office of the Chief Forester
- BC Forest Practices Board

These recommendations range from the operational level to the more strategic, and thus can and should inform the following statutory and strategic-level decisions and initiatives:

- Timber Supply Review for the Kispiox Timber Supply Area
- Forest Stewardship Plans within the Kispiox Timber Supply Area
- Individual Cutting Permits within the Kispiox Timber Supply Area
- Tenure Management and Reform
- Modernized Land Use Planning
- Other Strategic Decisions/Initiatives Affecting Forestry Practices and Planning

- 1. Utilize this report as a contribution to understanding public perspectives on forestry in the Upper Skeena region**, including recognition of significant dissatisfaction generally with the current pace and scale of forestry harvesting;
- 2. Work with communities in the Upper Skeena to develop common solutions to reducing wood waste in the forestry industry** including but not limited to: value-added wood products, local milling and salvage, and selective harvest methods;
- 3. Broaden and deepen the provincial understanding of non-timber values in forests**, including but not limited to mental health and well-being, recreation and physical fitness, community identity, Indigenous rights including title, tourism and guiding, old growth and carbon sequestration and ecosystem function;
- 4. Enhance and support local decision-making processes**, respecting Indigenous peoples as rights and title holders and consent-granting nations, and supported by local non-Indigenous communities and forestry operators, include public education and awareness efforts on how forestry decisions are actually currently made;
- 5. Support and receive data and direction from local monitoring initiatives** including but not limited to Indigenous Guardians, citizen-science, and other non-governmental and independent scientific monitoring of forestry practices to inform continual improvement in forestry management;
- 6. Recognize strong regional non-Indigenous support for the Indigenous (Gitksan)-led management in the forest sector**, avoid pitting local communities against one another and focus on common values while still upholding constitutional rights of the Gitksan;
- 7. Restore and regrow logged areas with forests that mirror natural forests in the region**, move away from mono-species second growth areas that only support timber values to the detriment of other forest values identified in this report.



"You Let it Happen" (1996) by 'Wii Muk'wiiixw (Art Wilson).

This was painted during the trial of Delgamuukw v. British Columbia and depicts the sense of loss felt by many Gitksan as excessive and unsustainable logging practices occurred while the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en were in the Supreme Court of Canada seeking recognition of Aboriginal title and jurisdiction to the Lax'yip. More recently, his son Kolin Sutherland-Wilson reflects on his father's artwork:

"First Nations people live by a philosophy of being part of the land. Looking at the present damage hurts. Visible in the clouds are the spirits of our ancestors, whose unrest haunts us daily. If we deem the disconnected management system wrong, then why do we let it happen?"



@kolinsutherlandwilson



The Skeena Watershed Conservation Coalition is located in Hazelton, BC on unceded Gitksan Territory. The organization was founded by local community members from the watershed representing a broad, cross section of people from various industries, sectors and backgrounds. SWCC has earned a North American Conservation Leadership award and has been recognized as one of the top ten most effective and innovative organizations in Canada—twice

www.skeenawatershed.com