KNOTTY QUESTIONS:
Reflections on the Booms and Busts of Forestry Research in British Columbia

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Forests are back in the "public" consciousness in a big way, front and centre in the exercise of Indigenous Jurisdiction, Rights, and Title to land. The struggle over the last remaining stretches of old-growth forests, tensions between elected First Nations Councils and Hereditary Leadership, the legislative introduction of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, concerns over the sustainability of the sector, carbon sinks, and biodiversity – all these intersect with the peaks and troughs of lumber prices and an industry push for access to the last stands of old-growth forests. These issues are anything but new. In different respects they resonate with the "War in the Woods" of the 1980s and 1990s,[1] but they are also richly articulated in the early twentieth-century testimony of Indigenous Leadership offered at the McKenna-McBride Commission,[2] and in various submissions to the Sloan Commissions of 1945 and 1956.[3] Given the endurance of critical commentaries on all things forest related, why the current academic silence on forestry and forest-related research in the BC context?

* Thank you to the two anonymous referees who provided thoughtful commentaries that helped me sharpen some of the blunter arguments, to Paige Raibmon for careful editorial guidance, and to Leanne Coughlin for behind-the-scenes work. Conversations with Rosemary Collard, Jessica Dempsey, Ben Parfitt, and Brian Thom informed this piece in meaningful ways. Finally, my collaboration with Estair Van Wagner, Sarah Morales, and Robert Morales, and discussions with Brenda Sayers and Judith Sayers made this article what it is. All shortcomings are my own.

1 Nicholas Blomley, "'Shut the Province Down': First Nations Blockades in British Columbia, 1984–1995," *BC Studies* 111 (Autumn 1996): 121–41; Bruce Braun, *The Intemperate Rainforest: Nature, Culture, and Power on Canada's West Coast* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); Warren Magnusson and Karena Shaw, *A Political Space: Reading the Global through Clayoquot Sound* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

2 Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, Our Homes Are Bleeding – Digital Collection, https://ourhomesarebleeding.ubcic.bc.ca.

3 Gordon Sloan, *The Forest Resources of British Columbia: Public Inquiries Act of British Columbia* (Victoria, BC: Charles F. Banfield, Printer to the King's Most Excellent Majesty, 1945); Gordon Sloan, *The Forest Resources of British Columbia: Report of the Commissioner* (Victoria: Queen's Printer, 1956).

The research hush in British Columbia is curious given the incredibly rich vein of literature (some of which is published in this journal) centred on the political, economic, and cultural threads that are densely interwoven with the forests of the West Coast and interior of the province.[4] Alongside the booms and busts of the forestry sector, rounds of intense activism, and Indigenous mobilizations, critics of British Columbia's forestry sector cyclically dedicate themselves to careful studies of (de)forested landscapes and related industries, followed by periods of relative disinterest. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, BC forestry and forests garnered a huge amount of scholarly attention, and this undoubtedly tracked the struggle for Indigenous Rights and Title in the forests,[5] the organizing and protests in Clayoquot Sound,[6] and the jarring dislocations associated with the transition from a Fordist to a flexible, neoliberal management regime in the woods and the accompanying hollowing-out of the manufacturing landscape.[7] Since the early 2000s, far less academic attention has been dedicated to the province's forested landscapes and industry – though issues centred on Indigenous relations to land, environmental matters, settler livelihoods, and crisis after crisis in the political economy of forestry have rumbled on without pause.

This article revisits earlier debates on forests and forestry in British Columbia with a focus on scholarship that loosely falls under the umbrella of critical geography and political ecology. I focus on a community of researchers that developed in the 1980s through to the early 2000s and that was preoccupied with the interweaving of social and environmental change in the forests and the relations of power, subjectivities, and aspirations for justice and transformation therein. I point to the intellectual and political contours of the literature and ask

4 Patricia Marchak, "For Whom the Tree Falls: Restructuring of the Global Forest Industry," *BC Studies* 90 (Summer 1991): 3–24; Bruce Willems-Braun, "Colonial Vestiges: Representing Forest Landscapes on Canada's West Coast," *BC Studies* 112 (Winter 1996–97): 5–39; Trevor Barnes and Roger Hayter, "The Restructuring of British Columbia's Coastal Forest Sector: Flexibility Perspectives," *BC Studies* 113 (Spring 1997): 7–34; Brian Egan and Susanne Klausen, "Female in a Forest Town: The Marginalization of Women in Port Alberni's Economy," *BC Studies* 118 (Summer 1998): 5–40; Scott Prudham and Maureen Reed, "Looking to Oregon: Comparative Challenges to Forest Policy Reform and Sustainability in British Columbia and the US Pacific Northwest," *BC Studies* 130 (Summer 2001): 5–40; Margaret Low and Karena Shaw, "Indigenous Rights and Environmental Governance: Lessons from the Great Bear Rainforest," *BC Studies* 172 (Winter 2011): 9–33.

5 Blomley, "'Shut the Province Down.'"

6 Karena Shaw, "Mapping Clayoquot Sound," in *A Political Space: Reading the Global through Clayoquot Sound*, ed. Warren Magnusson and Karena Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 25–66.

7 Roger Hayter, *Flexible Crossroads: The Restructuring of British Columbia's Forest Economy* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000).

why researchers "lost the plot in the forests" over the last two decades. One answer is that conflicts in the forests went from a boil in the 1980s and 1990s to a simmer in the early 2000s. The other may be summed up in three words: oil and gas. Drawing on current debates around BC forests and an ongoing collaborative research project investigating the entanglements of so-called "private forest lands," finance capital, and Indigenous Rights and Title on Vancouver Island, this note points to a number of blind spots in earlier debates and flags new dynamics in the "intemperate rainforest" (used to describe the cultural and colonial politics of coastal forests) that have emerged since the last wave of critical attention.[8] I build on ongoing research initiated in 2016 in collaboration with Estair Van Wagner, Sarah Morales of Cowichan Tribes First Nation, and Robert Morales of Cowichan Tribes First Nation and Chief Negotiator of the Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group. This article has a dual purpose: (1) to understand how lineages of forestry research have been lost; and (2) to report on ongoing research to highlight new terrains of concern that have emerged since the quieting of debates two decades ago.

There are historical silences as well as continuity and change in British Columbia's forest politics. The continuity is witnessed in seemingly endless extraction, pronounced environmental concerns, and the persistence of colonial relations, which endure despite some key changes that I will note. While this list is hardly exhaustive and is informed by my collaborative research, the lacunae and changes are: (1) dynamics specific to "private forest land" that have been overlooked and poorly understood in the research; (2) increasing financialization and securitization of forest lands – specifically land held in fee-simple title; and (3) tightening linkages between First Nations and forestry companies through "memorandums of understanding" that increasingly structure the political terrain. These issues are rooted in the long political, economic, cultural, and ecological histories of forests and interwoven social worlds, yet they represent dynamics that will likely animate the wave of research surely to come on the heels of Indigenous and settler engagements and mobilizations across the province. Together, these issues complicate the mosaic of capital, settler-colonial, and Indigenous interests in BC forests and trouble assured political positions that, at times, were established in past rounds of research. While it is possible to establish a longer list (e.g., the conservation of forests for carbon credits, the chipping of wood for so-called "biofuels," and watershed health), the three areas of change I highlight are likely to shape the politics of the

[8] Braun, *The Intemperate Rainforest.*

sector and arise in the renewal of forestry research in British Columbia. Given that the forestry industry is one of the biggest drivers of landscape change in the province and the focus of heated political struggles, renewing the lineages of critical research on forestry matters is an urgent project that I hope to encourage in some small way.

CRISES + RESTRUCTURING + PROTESTS = RESEARCH BOOM

From the 1980s through to the early 2000s, a huge amount of research in British Columbia was centred on the ecological, political, economic, cultural, and Indigenous valences of forests. There should be nothing surprising about this as forest politics was one of the defining issues of those decades, with protracted local struggles and protests articulated alongside global environmental movements. The legacy is an incredibly rich body of literature that provides several lenses through which to view the broad social relations interlaced with forested landscapes. Mirroring the schisms between Marxist approaches and all things poststructuralist and postcolonial, which defined the social sciences from the 1970s through to the early 2000s, distinct positions were established between those steeped in more cultural and political readings of British Columbia's forest politics and those more disposed towards a political-economic interrogation of industrial restructuring, job losses, and resource decline. Characterizing a vast amount of impressive and diverse research risks losing sight of nuanced positions and the intricacies of projects, which in some cases spanned several decades, but the contrasts between several monographs illustrates the contours of the debates.

On the first side of the ledger is a rich vein of political-economic-inspired literature that, in many ways, started with Patricia Marchak's *Green Gold* (1981),[9] continued with Richard Rajala's *Clearcutting the Pacific Rim* (1998),[10] Trevor Barnes and Roger Hayter's *Trouble in the Rainforest* (1999),[11] Hayter's *Flexible Crossroads* (2000),[12] and Maureen Reed's (2003) *Taking Stands.*[13] Marchak's massive book deploys both "dependency" and Innis's "staples theory" to understand how British Columbia and, specifically, the "rural hinterlands" were maintained as peripheries in

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9 Patricia Marchak, *Green Gold: The Forestry Industry in British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1983).

10 Richard Rajala, *Clearcutting the Pacific Rain Forest* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1998).

11 Trevor Barnes and Roger Hayter, *Troubles in the Rainforest: British Columbia's Forest Economy in Transition* (Victoria, BC: Western Geographical Press, 1999).

12 Hayter, *Flexible Crossroads*.

13 Maureen Reed, *Taking Stands: Gender and the Sustainability of Rural Communities* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003).

relation to Victoria and Vancouver, and, more important, the heavily industrialized United States. She argues that the dependency on a single resource (timber), the vicissitudes of commodity markets, and the domination of metropolitan and foreign capital threw the industry into repeated crises of decline, unemployment, and resource exhaustion.[14] Rajala picks up many of these threads and extends them through an approach that is more explicitly Marxist and historical. He points to the ties that bound the exploitation of labour to the intensive and extensive extraction of timber resources. Through meticulous historical work, he details the class relations that structured the clear-cutting of the coast and the technological, managerial, and state policies that enabled the plundering of the forests while simultaneously eroding the stability of labour,[15] which, in its organized form was, and largely remains, committed to extractivism.[16]

Economic geographers Trevor Barnes and Roger Hayter continue the Innis lineage in a vast body of research. Their introduction to *Troubles in the Rainforest* points directly to the distressed "green gold" of Marchak, but their collection was published fourteen years later – on the heels of a protracted recession in the forestry sector and the organizing work of Indigenous Nations.[17] Their individual and collective project was to grapple with the restructuring of production, employment, and communities by marrying Innis's approach with debates on the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism. Intensified labour regimes, community upheaval, plant closures, and flexible and specialized production for niche markets defined the transformation of the forestry industry, which was struggling with broader processes of global restructuring, a declining resource base that was becoming increasingly comprised of

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[14] Marchak, *Green Gold*.

[15] Rajala, *Clearcutting*.

[16] The one key exception is the Public and Private Workers of Canada, which, in earlier iterations, was the Canadian Pulp and Paperworkers Union. This is one of the few union voices that hasn't been wedded to endless extraction and that has taken progressive positions in relation to labour and the environment. See Torrance Coste, Gary Fiege, Ben Parfitt, and Joie Warnock, "TimberWest Forestry Operations Destabilizing Vancouver Island Communities," Policy Note, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 17 January 2019, https://www.policynote.ca/timberwest-forestry-operations-destabilizing-vancouver-island-communities/.

[17] Roger Hayter and Trevor Barnes, "Trouble in Rainforest: British Columbia's Forest Economy in Transition," in *Trouble in the Rainforest: British Columbia's Forest Economy in Transition*, ed. Trevor Barnes and Roger Hayter (Victoria, BC: Western Geographical Press, 1999), 1–11.

second-growth forests, and increased competition from the southern United States.[18]

Many of these themes were rearticulated and extended in Hayter's encyclopaedic *Flexible Crossroads*. The text explores, in incredible empirical detail, the industrial, corporate, and employment restructuring of the BC forestry sector from the mid-1970s through to the end of the century. The transition from Fordist to flexible production animates the work, but it is channelled through a more institutional approach – largely focused on the state (respective BC governments), the firm (industrial giant MacMillan Bloedel), and markets (understood as a particular institution).[19] Hayter at times appears enthralled with his object – flexibility – and his work articulates a belief that, with the right institutional configuration, prosperity in the forestry sector would follow. The work's strength is the firm dynamics set in regional and global contexts, yet there is room for more consideration of Indigenous and environmental matters. For instance, the environmental activism that many see as crucial, even if limited in key respects, Hayter perceives as a threat. He writes: "environmentalism represents an authoritarian model that seeks to impose global imperatives on forest regulation, if necessary, regardless of [a] local consensus-building mechanism," which, he suggests, risks "degenerating into a highly politicized, uncertain and disruptive approach."[20]

Maureen Reed's *Taking Stands* refracts many of the themes discussed above through the lens of gender.[21] Most of the debates discussed above are pitched at the level of political-economic change, the firm, or government policy; yet, uniquely, Reed's feminist sensibility allows her to approach these concerns from the ground up through ethnographic research with women in forestry communities. While women on the environmentalist side of the blockades are celebrated as doing crucial political work, Reed suggests that the women on the pro-logging side of the protests are rendered either invisible or characterized as being blindly

18 Roger Hayter and Trevor Barnes, "The Restructuring of British Columbia's Coastal Forest Sector: Flexibility Perspectives," in *Trouble in the Rainforest: British Columbia's Forest Economy in Transition*, ed. Trevor Barnes and Roger Hayter (Victoria, BC: Western Geographical Press, 1999), 181–203.

19 Hayter, *Flexible Crossroads*.

20 Hayter, 322.

21 Two other pieces by Reed related to *Taking Stands* are important reference points with regard to the question of gender and forestry in British Columbia. See Maureen Reed, "Taking Stands: A Feminist Perspective on 'Other' Women's Activism in Forestry Communities of Northern Vancouver Island," *Gender, Place, and Culture* 7, no. 4 (2000): 363–87; Maureen Reed, "Marginality and Gender at Work in Forestry Communities of British Columbia," *Journal of Rural Studies* 19, no. 3 (2003): 373–89.

supportive of an extractive industry. In response, Reed tells a much more nuanced story of women's activism in forestry communities – a story that foregrounds the political complexity of their lives, which straddled employment and care work in the context of the forestry communities. Women took public positions against environmentalists and the threats they posed to forest-based employment, yet many were also active in critiquing the "masculinist" culture of work and violence associated with the industry. It is Reed's grounded research practice in communities, and her feminist approach, that allows her to foreground how many of the macro-level changes in British Columbia's forestry were experienced and negotiated by women in complex and contradictory ways.[22]

On the second side of the debates are Braun's *Intemperate Rainforest*[23] and Warren Magnusson and Karena Shaw's *A Political Space*.[24] Both of these manuscripts, one written by Braun, the other an edited collection, offer culturally and politically inflected readings of British Columbia's War in the Woods. The point of departure is the protracted struggles over coastal rainforests, particularly in Clayoquot Sound and sites such as Meares Island (90 percent of which, prior to the protest movements, MacMillan Bloedel planned to harvest). The tensions stemmed from well over a century of intensive clear-cutting that left very few intact stands of old-growth forests; an industry in crisis desperately seeking access to those same forests; a provincial government that, for the most part, sided with industry; Indigenous Nations powerfully exercising their Rights and Title to land; and an effective environmental movement committed to protecting the "ancient forests." Pardon the pun, but this was a knotty affair, and not unlike the contemporary conjuncture. No single approach could ever do justice to the complicated dynamics at play.

Magnusson's approach was decidedly poststructuralist. He writes: "As Derrida would remind us, a site such as Clayoquot can only become

22 Some of my earlier work took on the question of gender, specifically the politics of masculinity, within the reforestation industry, and this work certainly builds on the path set by Reed. See Michael Ekers, "Constructing Hegemony in the Forestscape: Men, Masculinities, and Work in Depression-Era British Columbia," *Geoforum* 40, no. 3 (2009): 303–15; Michael Ekers, "'Pounding Dirt All Day'; Sexuality, Gender, and Labour in the British Columbia Reforestation Industry," *Gender, Place, and Culture* 20, no. 7 (2013): 876–95; Michael Ekers, "Labouring against the Grain of Progress: Women's Reforestation Work in British Columbia, 1960–1975," *Journal of Rural Studies* 34 (April 2014): 345–55. For a much more recent and nuanced reading of gender and gender-based violence in the tree-planting industry adequate to the current political moment, see Jennie Long, Karena Shaw, and James Rowe, "Not So Clear Cut: Transforming Gender-Based Violence in British Columbia's Tree-Planting Industry," *BC Studies* 215 (Autumn 2022): 27–49.

23 Braun, *The Intemperate Rainforest*.

24 Magnusson and Shaw, *A Political Space*.

intelligible textually … In a sense, there is no Clayoquot outside the textual productions of 'Clayoquot.'" Magnusson points to the various Clayoquots – the multiple "texts" created by scientists, the state, tourist operators, Nuu-chah-nulth people, environmentalists – ponders how they relate, and asks: "How, in fact, is any particular representation of the place produced politically?"[25] The politics of representation is at the core of this approach to the forests and industry. This is seen in Umeek of Ahousaht's (Richard Atleo's) powerful contribution to *A Political Space*. Umeek details how the enduring representations of terra nullius (which emerged from John Locke's racist understanding of property) and the contradictions with Nuu-chah-nulth cosmologies and kin-based relations to the more-than-human world were foundational to the conflict in the rainforest and the colonial and anti-colonial movements at work.[26]

Braun makes a similar argument but in a longer format, one that draws on a broader range of discursive constructions of the temperate rainforest – rationalized industry representations of the "normal forest," wilderness photography, images of industrial clear-cuts, ecotourism, Emily Carr's famed paintings such as *Totem and Forest* (1931) and *Cedar* (1942) – all of which are situated historically and geographically.[27] Braun's project is to challenge the rendering of the rainforest as an external nature by pointing to the "wider field of cultural and historical practices – and relations of power – through which [coastal] forests have been invested with layers of cultural and political meaning."[28] Through so doing, Braun illustrates the buried colonial epistemologies at work in various stagings of the coastal forests.[29]

Without overstating the differences, the political-economic literature asks how the dynamics of capitalism and the specificities of a resource sector threw the forestry industry into crisis (and drove the clear-cutting of the coast), while the postcolonial and more culturally inflected literature interrogates the representational and political relations that informed, and flowed from, industrial extraction and the power of the

[25] Warren Magnusson, "Introduction: The Puzzle of the Political," in *A Political Space: Reading the Global through Clayoquot Sound*, ed. Warren Magnusson and Karena Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), xix–xx.

[26] Umeek of Ahousaht (Richard Atleo), "Commentary: Discourses in and about Clayoquot Sound – A First Nations Perspective," in *A Political Space: Reading the Global through Clayoquot Sound*, ed. Warren Magnusson and Karena Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 199–208.

[27] Braun, *The Intemperate Rainforest*.

[28] Braun, 3.

[29] Braun, 3. See also Bruce Willems-Braun, "Buried Epistemologies: The Politics of Nature in (Post)Colonial British Columbia," *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 87, no. 1 (1997): 3–31.

colonial state. At the same time, those looking through political-economic and poststructuralist-postcolonialist lenses certainly recognize the value that differing approaches offered. Braun, writing from a representational perspective, acknowledges that the economic imperatives of capitalism created "pressure to keep annual timber harvests at unsustainable levels," arguing that "economic processes always work in concert with other social, cultural, and political process." He adds: "they do not exhaust or determine the dynamics informing nature's construction, nor do they exist as the only, or always the most important, site of politics."[30] Working from a political-economic framework, Prudham also sees the importance of representational dynamics, acknowledging that "forest liquidation enacts the material erasure presumed by its discursive antecedent in the business pages."[31] No single piece of work will ever fully represent the multifaceted threads interwoven with the forests; but, taken together, this literature points to a politics that centres both materiality and representations and that is informed by political-economic approaches and poststructuralist and anticolonialist traditions. There is value in re-reading these debates and carrying them forward.

LOSING THE PLOT

In reaction to the social movements of the 1980s and 1990s, the political-economic changes afoot in the forestry sector, and the exercise of Indigenous Rights and Title, in the mid-1990s the provincial New Democratic Party (NDP) government sought to find some middle ground between capital, labour, and environmentalists – while doing little to advance the cause of Indigenous Nations. Though not reducible to policy changes, the War in the Woods certainly calmed down in the early 2000s, but a more responsive and "left-leaning" government played a part in this. By the end of the century, it was thought that job losses had bottomed out, and forestry corporations grudgingly absorbed reductions in their annual allowable cut and accepted a selective harvesting regime, even if it was far less selective than environmentalist and ecologists would have liked. After years of emotionally demanding activism, the environmental movement welcomed many of these changes, and nearly two decades of acrimonious conflict began to settle. At the same time, the Great Bear Rainforest accord came into existence, which for the first time brought forestry companies, First Nations, environmental groups,

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30 Braun, *The Intemperate Rainforest*.

31 Scott Prudham, "Sustaining Sustained Yield: Class, Politics, and Post-War Forest Regulation in British Columbia," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 25 (2007): 259.

and the provincial government together with the goal of establishing a more collaborative framework for forest management – one that built in ecosystem resiliency and the protection of Indigenous Rights and Title. As Low and Shaw say of the Great Bear Rainforest Agreement: "Not only did it appear that the decades-long 'war in the woods' … between environmentalists, industry, and government might have been resolved, but also that the even more long-standing and increasingly threatening wars over the role of First Nations in resource management might be forestalled."[32] The pause in outright hostilities and the movement to consensus building likely had the downstream effect of quieting academic interest. But still, the timing was curious.

The downturn in forest-related research in the early 2000s occurred just as the newly elected Gordon Campbell–led Liberal government came to provincial power, introducing sweeping changes that rolled back NDP legislation while liberalizing the forestry industry. The suite of changes introduced by the Campbell government represented a corporate counter-revolution of sorts. The Forest Land Reserve Act was repealed, and the Private Managed Forest Land Act and the Forest and Range Practices Act were introduced, reducing oversight and approvals and removing processing requirements attached to harvesting licences.[33] In select policy circles, these changes were critiqued,[34] yet academic research has barely commented on the raft of legislation that unshackled logging interests, and the roster of academic critics discussed in the previous section for the most part moved on from forestry research. Asking why researchers *haven't done something* – here continuing the trenchant critiques of the settler-colonial and capitalist interests driving extraction and the enabling legislation – is a speculative exercise, yet several explanations are possible, including the settling of old scores noted above.

From the early 2000s through to the present there has been a discernable shift in critical attention towards the oil and gas sector and, in

32 Low and Shaw, "Indigenous Rights and Environmental Governance," 18.

33 Province of British Columbia, Forest Land Reserve Act 1996 [RSBC 1996] Chapter 158, https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/consol2/consol2/96158_01; Province of British Columbia, Forest and Range Practices Act 2002 [SBC 2002] Chapter 69, http://www.bclaws.ca/Recon/document/ID/freeside/00_02069_01; Province of British Columbia, Private Managed Forest Land Act 2003 [SBC 2003], http://www.bclaws.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/03080_01.

34 Ben Parfitt, "Restoring the Public Good on Private Forestlands," Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 16 July 2008, https://policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/restoring-public-good-private-forestlands.

particular, the politics of pipelines and related transportation networks.[35] The climate emergency, the consequences of which are not unrelated to the clear-cutting of the province,[36] means scholars are increasingly concentrating on the pipeline infrastructure that would lock-in oil and gas extraction, lest that infrastructure become a devalued stranded asset.[37] Protest movements and political organizing targeted the Enbridge Northern Gateway pipeline proposal (the pipeline was never built) and have continued to challenge the publicly owned TransMountain pipeline and the LNG Canada Coastal GasLink pipeline. It is not a stretch to suggest that research has followed the protests: where blockades against pipeline or export facilities emerge, critical scholars quickly follow. To be clear, this is crucial research that helps to elevate the work of land defenders and activists and offers a rejoinder to the doom-and-gloom stories of escalating fossil fuel extraction alongside frightening climate scenarios.

Together with this shift in social movements, progressive organizations such as the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) increasingly centred their research and public policy work on the oil and gas sector. Some of this movement likely reflected changes in donors and mandates that flow from fundraising on the climate emergency and energy infrastructure.[38] An example would be the work of Ben Parfitt, a resource policy analyst at the CCPA. Parfitt has been one of the key public researchers and voices on British Columbia's forestry industry, publishing several books and indispensable reports in the 1990s through to the 2000s.[39] Much like the ebbs and flows of research emerging from

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35 For a short list, see Tyler McCreary and Richard Milligan, "Pipelines, Permits, and Protests: Carrier Sekani Encounters with the Enbridge Northern Gateway Project," *Cultural Geographies* 21, no. 1 (2014): 115–29; Deborah Cowen, "Infrastructures of Empire and Resistance," *Verso Blog Post*, https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/3067-infrastructures-of-empire-and-resistance; Tyler McCreary, "Between the Commodity and the Gift: The Coastal GasLink Pipeline and the Contested Temporalities of Canadian and Witsuwit'en Law," *Journal of Human Rights and the Environment* 11 (2020): 122–45; Samuel Spiegel, "Fossil Fuel Violence and Visual Practices on Indigenous Land: Watching, Witnessing, and Resisting Settler-Colonial Injustices," *Energy Research and Social Science* 79 (September) 1–18; Kyla Tienhaara and Jeremy Walker, "Fossil Capital, 'Unquantifiable Risk' and Neoliberal Nationalizations: The Case of the Trans Mountain Pipeline in Canada," *Geoforum* 124 (August 2021): 120–31.

36 Ben Parfitt, "Five People Died in a Landslide: BC Wants to Know Why," *Tyee*, 16 June 2022, https://thetyee.ca/News/2022/06/16/Five-People-Died-Landslide-BC/.

37 See James Rowe, Steph Glanzmann, Jessica Dempsey, and Zoë Yunker, "Fossil Futures: The Canada Pension Plan's Failure to Respect the 1.5-Degree Celsius Limit," Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, https://policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/fossil-futures.

38 Credit to Rosemary Collard and Jessica Dempsey for this point.

39 Michael M'Gonigle and Ben Parfitt, *Forestopia: A Practical Guide to the New Forest Economy* (Madeira Park, BC: Harbour, 1994); Ben Parfitt, *Forest Follies: Adventures and Misadventures in the Great Canadian Forest* (Madeira Park, BC: Harbour, 1998); Parfitt, "Restoring the Public Good."

universities, Parfitt's interests became more squarely focused on climate change, oil and gas, and fracking. The campaign against the Site C dam on the Peace River, a campaign with which Parfitt and the CCPA were involved, likely furthered the shift away from forestry matters. In the past number of years, Parfitt has returned to his work on forestry, offering careful public-facing critiques of log exports,[40] the fall-down effect of overharvesting and the industry crises to follow,[41] and the loopholes that allow logging in protected areas.[42] The reinvigoration of this research and activism by organizations like the CCPA (as well as the British Columbia Sierra Club, the Wilderness Committee, and the Ancient Forest Alliance) will no doubt be followed by a swell of academic work.

On top of the changes in activism and campaigning, the environmental assessment processes at the provincial level and the joint review panels led by the national Canada Energy Regulator compel massive investments of time into deeply bureaucratic appraisals of infrastructure and extraction projects – the major and contentious reviews are often focused on pipelines and dams. Rosemary Collard and Jessica Dempsey point to how the capacities of Indigenous Nations, settler communities, and non-profits are channelled into the terrain of the liberal environmental state and its legalese, commanding time, attention, and resources and thus "suspending" critical change.[43] There are no such review processes in British Columbia's forestry sector, especially after the Liberal government introduced the Private Managed Forest Land Act and the Forest and Range Practices Act, which reduced community consultation and public oversight. The asymmetry in review processes means the bandwidth of those working against extractivism at the level of the state becomes directed towards all matters related to oil, gas, and dams, even as forestry remains far and away the largest extractive sector by area in the province.

A changing political and research landscape meant a pause in critical attention on forestry just as a new Liberal provincial government introduced changes that would roll back many of the gains won through previous mobilizations. With a resurgence in activism and public-facing

[40] Ben Parfitt, "The Great Log Export Drain: BC Government Pursues Elusive LNG Dreams as More than 3,600 Forest Industry Jobs Lost to Raw Log Exports," Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 27 February 2017, https://policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/BC%20Office/2017/02/Raw%20Log%20Exports.pdf.

[41] Ben Parfitt, "The Last of the Green Gold," Evergreen Alliance, 14 April 2022, https://www.evergreenalliance.ca/analysis/23/.

[42] Ben Parfitt, "The Great Bear Loophole: Why Old Growth Is Still Logged in BC's Iconic Protected Rainforest," *Narwhal*, 29 November 2019, https://thenarwhal.ca/the-great-bear-loophole-why-old-growth-is-still-logged-in-b-c-s-iconic-protected-rainforest/.

[43] Jessica Dempsey and Rosemary Collard, "Future Eco-Perfect: Temporal Fixes of Liberal Environmentalism," *Antipode* 54, no. 5 (2022): 1545–65.

research, what are the past silences and what are the shifts in the political landscape that need consideration?

PAST SILENCES, NEW QUESTIONS

The preoccupations that anchored earlier rounds of critical inquiry have endured – the conjoined political, economic, and ecological crises and the coloniality baked into the forestry industry – and this should come as no surprise as capitalism and settler-colonialism haven't gone anywhere. At the same time, there are several blind spots and pivotal changes that have emerged since the debates of the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s that shape the politics of forests in new and distinct ways. Rather than trying to be falsely exhaustive and recognizing that sustained on-the-ground engagement is necessary to fully grasp the dynamics at play in conflicts such as Fairy Creek, I here draw on my own collaborative research to speak to past silences and new questions distilled into the three points that follow. The research I've undertaken with Van Wagner, S. Morales, and R. Morales examines the legacies of nineteenth-century land grants to the Esquimalt & Nanaimo Railway Company (E&N) that privatized more than 20 percent of Vancouver Island and the enduring legacies of extraction, colonial control, and Indigenous resistance that flowed from the original enclosures the Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group refers to as the "Great Land Grab."[44] (see Figure 1). In keeping with the spirit of a research note, my goal isn't to comprehensively report on the work we've done but, rather, to present new vignettes from our research that speak to past silences in literature and to emergent concerns.[45]

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[44] Robert Morales, Brian Egan, and Brian Thom, "The Great Land Grab: Colonialism and the Esquimalt & Nanaimo Railway Land Grant in Hul'qumi'num Territory," Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group, n.d., http://www.hulquminum.bc.ca/pubs/HTGRailwayBookSpreads.pdf?lbisphpreq=1 .

[45] At great risk of self-promotion, parts of the project have appeared in long form in the publications listed below. These pieces in many ways represent the foundation upon which this article builds. See Michael Ekers, "Land Grabbing on the Edge of Empire: The Longue Durée of Fee-Simple Forest Lands and Indigenous Resistance in British Columbia," *Journal of Peasant Studies* (forthcoming); Michael Ekers, Glenn Bauen, Tian Lin, and Saman Goudarzi, "The Coloniality of Private Forest Lands: Harvesting Levels, Land Grants, and Neoliberalism on Vancouver Island," *Canadian Geographer* 65, no. 2 (2021): 166–83; Michael Ekers, "Financiers in the Forests on Vancouver Island: On Fixes and Colonial Enclosures," *Journal of Agrarian Change* 19, no. 2 (2019): 270–94; Estair Van Wagner, "The Legal Relations of 'Private' Forests: Making and Unmaking Private Forest Lands on Vancouver Island," *Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law* 53 (2021): 103–26; Estair Van Wagner, "Views from the Periphery: Examining Non-Ownership in Property Law," in *The Routledge Handbook of Law Property and Society*, ed. Nicole Graham, Margaret Davies, and Lee Godden (London: Routledge, forthcoming); Sarah Morales and Brian Thom, "The Principle of Sharing and the Shadow of Canadian Property Law," in *Creating Indigenous Property: Power, Rights, and Relationships*, ed. Angela Cameron, Sari Graben, and Val Napoleon (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 120–62.

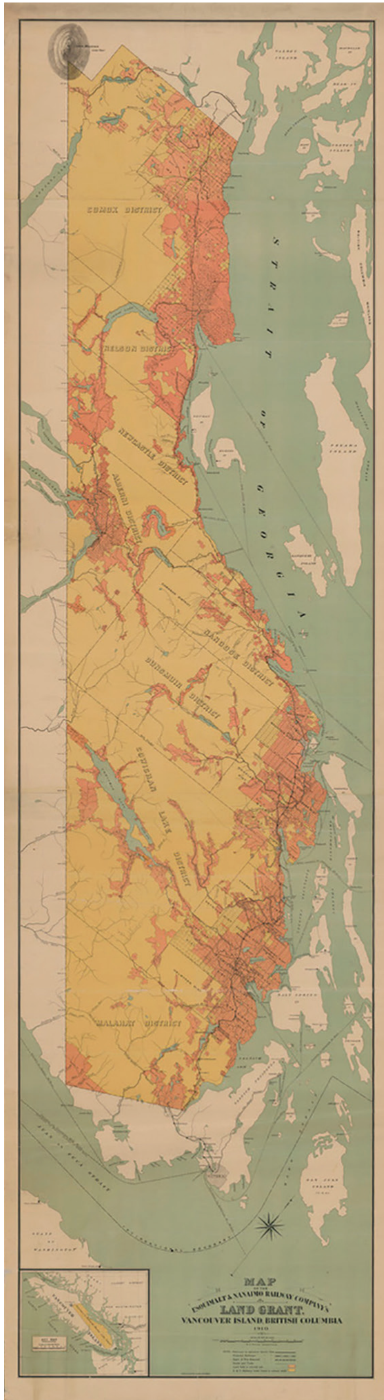

Figure 1. Map of the Esquimalt & Nanaimo Railway Company's Land Grants, Vancouver Island, 1910. *Source*: Library and Archives Canada, R/603/1910.

Without exception, earlier debates focused on forestry activities and the cultural politics of forests on land that doubled as Indigenous territory (largely unceded) and "Crown," or "public," land. In part, this again stems from scholars following activists and Indigenous organizing, and, in the 1980s and 1990s, this was largely taking place on the west coast of Vancouver Island – the famed struggles in Clayoquot Sound. However, a massive tract of private forest land on the east coast of Vancouver Island, stretching from Campbell River south to Sooke, the territory of Coast Salish and Nuu-chah-nulth Nations, was hidden in plain sight and often misrecognized as "public land." The enormous belt of private land is the product of the nineteenth-century land grants to the E&N, then in the twentieth-century was owned by the Canadian Pacific Railway and industrial forestry giants, before, in the twenty-first century, being acquired by Brookfield Assets Management and three public-sector pension plans. The land is now managed by Mosaic Forest Management on behalf of the pension plans. It is strange that the forestry regime specific to private land was overlooked in past debates,[46] given that, first, extraction has almost always been more intensive on private land, and, second, that land held in fee-simple title has been off the Treaty table – creating a major stumbling block in Crown-Indigenous negotiations.[47] Cole Harris argues that, "if one seeks to understand how colonialism functioned in the province, there is no better place to look [than First Nations reserves]."[48] Yet on Vancouver Island the fee-simple title created out of the E&N land grants is certainly as constitutive of Indigenous-settler dynamics and enduring forms of enclosure as is the partition between reserves and "Crown land" to which Harris points. It is remarkable that so little attention has been dedicated to forest matters on private land given that over 20 percent of Vancouver Island has been enclosed by forestry interests for nearly 150 years. Our research, some of which I speak to below, is

46 What is perhaps even stranger is that, to my knowledge, *BC Studies* has never published a full-length article interrogating the centrality of the Esquimalt & Nanaimo land grants in settler-colonial control of land, forestry issues, and fraught Treaty negotiations. The only mention of the land grants beyond several reviews of popular historical texts is Kelly Black's short *BC Voices* piece: Kelly Black, "The Great Land Grab: Real Estate and Commuter Rail on Vancouver Island," *BC Studies*, 20 June 2016, https://bcstudies.arts.ubc.ca/bc-voices-part-1-the-great-land-grab-real-estate-and-commuter-rail-on-vancouver-island/#content.

47 Brian Egan, "Sharing the Colonial Burden: Treaty-Making and Reconciliation in Hul'qumi'num Territory," *Canadian Geographer* 56, no. 4 (2012): 398–418; Brian Thom, "Reframing Indigenous Territories: Private Property, Human Rights, and Overlapping Claims," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 38, no. 4 (2014): 3–34.

48 Cole Harris, *Making Native Space: Colonialism, Resistance, and Reserves in British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002), xxv.

seeking to address this silence through building on the work of a small group of scholars that has engaged with the legacies of the E&N grants.[49]

Second, finance capital has always been involved in British Columbia's forestry industry, structuring investments, mergers, and acquisitions. Robert Dunsmuir, president of the E&N Railway Co., partnered with US financial and railway interests in the nineteenth century to fund and build the rail line and acquire the land grant.[50] In the early twentieth century, his son James Dunsmuir leveraged himself to buy out US interests in anticipation of a sale that didn't materialize. Canadian Pacific Railway took advantage of his "embarrassment," as it described his plight, to acquire the rail line and accompanying land grant.[51] Fast forward a century, and finance capital stepped into the forestry sector in a major way. The industrial forestry companies that held massive tracts of E&N land were purchased and transformed by finance capital. TimberWest became a timber investment trust, with extraction representing a revenue stream. What is now Brookfield Assets Management took over Weyerhaeuser's coastal holdings and separated the private E&N land from public harvesting rights and manufacturing facilities – essentially creating two different companies, one focused on private land holdings and a second concentrated on Crown harvesting rights and processing. On Brookfield's acquisition of Weyerhaeuser, my close friend and sometime collaborator Scott Prudham wrote: "there is, sadly, nothing all that new or different I can identify about this particular transaction."[52] While he is right to point to the extraction that predated and would continue afterwards, and the abstraction of forests into timber that fostered this, from the vantage point of 2022 the arrival of new financial interests had a transformative effect. Sawmills and pulp mills were shuttered, unionized manufacturing jobs were lost, and the deregulation of private forest land, through separating fee-simple and Crown tenure, were all changes orchestrated by finance capital. To be fair, these shifts would have been difficult to anticipate as they represented

[49] Brian Egan, "From Dissertation to Decolonization: Towards a Critical Indigenous Geography of Hul'qumi'num Territory" (PhD diss., Carleton University, 2008); Thom, "Reframing Indigenous Territories";; Sarah Morales, "Snuw'uyulh: Fostering an Understanding of the Hul'qumi'num Legal Tradition" (PhD diss., University of Victoria, 2015); Kelly Black, "An Archive of Settler Belonging: Local Feeling, Land, and Forest Resource on Vancouver Island" (PhD diss., Carleton University, 2017).

[50] Donald MacLachlan, *The Esquimalt and Nanaimo Railway: The Dunsmuir Years, 1884–1905* (Victoria: British Columbia Railway Historical Association, 1986).

[51] R. Marpole to D. McNicoll, 5 June 1905, William M. Sloan Professional Papers, PR-2376, MS 3341, 907976-0963 – fol. 3, E&N and Pacific Logging documents no. 1, British Columbia Archives.

[52] Prudham, "Sustaining Sustained Yield," 259.

unprecedented changes. And the changes didn't end there. Historically, the industrial giants that owned E&N land provided largely unfettered access to Indigenous Nations and the settler-public. In the case of the former, this allowed Indigenous communities to gain access to spiritual sites, medicinal plants, trees for ceremonial purposes, and territory for hunting and fishing – a suite of Indigenous Rights connected to their Title to land that has a double life as private property.[53] The arrival of finance capital meant a securitized landscape: gates suddenly blocked logging roads, trenches and barricades were created out of logging debris to prevent access, security guards patrolled the private land, and closed-circuit television cameras were found at strategic access points.[54] In 2013, TimberWest was considering how to prevent all-terrain vehicles from gaining access to private forest land, and it recommended "using the existing woody debris, stumps, etc. … to build a large blockade." It added: "We can then armor this section further with a large tank trap type of ditch on the down road side of the blockade to make it difficult to get through" (see Figure 2).[55] The financialization and securitization of coastal forests represents new dynamics on the landscape – dynamics that are reshaping the politics of forests and the meaning of Indigenous Rights, Title, and modes of life.

Third, Braun highlighted the coloniality at work in the binary framing of forestry as a debate between forestry interests and environmentalists,[56] and others, such as Umeek of Ahousaht[57] and Blomley,[58] pointed to the distinct difference between the positions, epistemologies, and ontologies of Indigenous Nations and forestry companies and the state. Since then, First Nations, specifically elected Band Councils mandated through the Indian Act, have been tied much more directly to the extractivism of the forest industry. This has taken a number of forms, the most prominent of which is the development of "memorandums of understanding" (MOUs)

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[53] This is one of the many themes articulated in the Hupacasath First Nation's legal challenge lead by Judith Sayers against Brookfield Asset Management and the Minister of Forests: *Hupacasath First Nation v. British Columbia* ("*Hupacasath*"), 2005 BCSC 1712; *Ke-Kin-Is-Uqs v. British Columbia (Minister of Forests)* ("*Ke-Kin-Is-Uqs*"), 2008 BCSC 1020. These themes are richly articulated in Affidavit no. 1 of Judith Sayers, 3 October 2004, *Hupacasath First Nation v. British Columbia* ("*Hupacasath*"), 2005 BCSC 1712.

[54] Brandy Lauder, "Private Managed Forest Land Review – Engagement and Comment Opportunity," Private Managed Forest Land Program Review, Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations, and Rural Development.

[55] TimberWest is one of the companies owned by two public-sector pension plans and managed by Mosaic Forest Management. The quote comes from a personal communication, name and date withheld to protect confidentiality.

[56] Willems-Braun, "Buried Epistemologies."

[57] Ahousaht, "Commentary."

[58] Blomley, "'Shut the Province Down.'"

Figure 2. Photograph of a barricaded access point in the Ash Valley, Port Alberni. The "tank trap" (ditch) is at the left of the image, and logging debris is at the front. Photo by the author.

between forestry companies and First Nations Band Councils. Forestry companies point to these as forms of reconciliation and relationship building that is distilled into the business speak of corporate social and environmental responsibility. Despite being touted as a promising development that represents a new era in corporate-Indigenous relationships, the content of the MOUs is a closely guarded secret. Returning to our research on the massive belt of private forest land established out of the E&N land grants, in 2020, Jeffery Zweig, president and CEO of Mosaic Forest Management (the firm managing the land and forestry operations on behalf of three public-sector pension plans), in a letter to Murray Rankin, the Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, wrote: "Our average annual financial involvement with First Nations through commercial partnerships and community investment is over $50 million … We have detailed memorandums of understanding with 14 First Nations and history of commercial ventures with over 30 Nations."[59] Very few people outside of Mosaic and the Band Councils

[59] Mosaic Forest Management to Murray Rankin, Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, 8 December 2020, FOI Request – FNR-2021-13289.

have access to the agreements. These agreements have drastically changed the politics of Indigenous engagements with forestry companies (and, in this case, with Mosaic and finance capital) as First Nations find it much harder to take oppositional positions in the face of MOUs, which likely contain financial and access agreements. In the case of private forest land, some First Nations engaged in the Treaty process with the provincial and federal governments are seeking to acquire private land as part of their settlements, but this involves there being a "willing-seller." This makes it difficult to challenge the ownership structure and management practices of Mosaic and the three pension plans, as they own the vast majority of private land on the coast. A contradictory landscape is established whereby three public-sector pension plans have a monopoly on private forestry land on Vancouver Island, which is said to be off the Treaty table because it is "private," yet the pension plans are Crown corporations that serve public-sector employees. Any Treaty settlement for First Nations with territory either within or overlapping the E&N belt will necessarily involve negotiations with Mosaic, a firm that, as our freedom of information requests reveal, has direct access to the government and to the Office of the Premier.[60]

CONCLUSIONS

The increasing role of finance capital, the securitizing of forests and Indigenous territory, and the increasing incorporation of First Nations into corporate forest regimes represent key shifts in the BC forestry sector. In this article, these issues are addressed through my collaborative research on private forest land and Coast Salish and Nuu-chah-nulth territory, but they are also at play in other parts of the province and in

[60] One of the observations emerging from two freedom of information requests with the Office of the Premier and Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations, and Rural Development is Mosaic's direct line of communication with both the Premier's Office and the ministry responsible for forestry matters. For instance, a "Briefing Note for Decision" prepared for Katrine Conroy, minister of forests, lands, natural resource operations, and rural development, notes: "In February 2021, staff conducted confidential discussions with the Managed Forest Council (MFC), the Private Forest Landowners Association (PFLA), and two companies within the PMFL, representing large and small tenure holders (Mosaic and Monticola Forest)." All of the substantive content of the discussions is redacted, but it is notable that Mosaic and its industry association, the PFLA, had cloistered discussions with the ministry that are surely shaping anticipated changes to the legislation pertaining to private forest lands. In the extensive "responsive records" there is no mention of similar meetings with First Nations or other groups affected by private forest lands established out of the E&N land grants and other pre-emptions. See Patrick Russell, "Briefing Note for Decision prepared for Katrine Conroy, Minister of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations, and Rural Development," 26 June 2021, FOI Request – FNR-2021-13289.

the context of so-called Crown land. The RCMP wield a heavy hand, enforcing injunctions against old-growth protesters. In the complicated dynamics between the Pacheedaht Nation, Teal-Jones, and the government, there are tensions between elected Pacheedaht First Nation Councillors and Hereditary Leadership. Meanwhile, the Huu-ay-aht First Nations are expanding their direct investment into harvesting rights in Tree Farm Licence 44 through a joint venture with Western Forest Products. While there are particularities to private land, some of the processes at play noted above are defining the broader forest politics of the province.

Indigenous Nations continue to struggle for jurisdiction over their territory, social movement organizing in the forests is growing again, public-fronting researchers are digging into the sector, and environmental matters are more pressing than ever – with climate change meeting clear-cuts and burnt landscapes to create catastrophic floods and landslides, such as those experienced in autumn 2021. Given this, it seems that those situated in academic spaces should ask how their time and resources can elevate the work already being done, while considering how research can help navigate some of the thorny cultural and political economic entanglements in BC forests.

There is also a question of audience and engagement: Can and should academics working on forestry issues find ways to write publicly, engage with policy, and serve settler communities and First Nations? Absolutely. Such questions were not at the forefront of earlier debates but surely deserve more consideration now. This means changing research design and how and where one writes as well as reflecting on how leverage can be created for those engaged politically on the ground. How can the political, economic, and poststructural and anticolonial perspectives be mobilized publicly to create political space for envisioning more just forest spaces – whether this is in representations and art, the protection of spiritual sites for Indigenous communities, the establishment of abundant ecological futures, or the pursuit of dignified and secure employment. This smacks of utopianism, no doubt, but academics, including me, are far better at critiquing the dismal state of affairs and (here) the colonial and capitalist relations that structure forests, policy, and industry. There is value in thinking more seriously about what might fill up spaces of critique, whether that be Indigenous legal orders in relation to forests, a forestry industry that supports communities and secure employment, or a forested landscape that preserves watersheds, biodiversity, and the rich mycorrhizal networks between trees and soil that store massive

amounts of carbon dioxide. There is no perfect "win-win-win" scenario, but it is more important than ever to think about a future not based on extractivism, which puts so much, that is so dear, in jeopardy. What *should* be done – an awful lot. What *can* be done – often if feels like not enough in a capitalist and colonial context. How can we close this gap, and what role can forestry research play in doing so?