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## Washington Post -- Huge Canadian Park Is Born of Compromise

by **Doug Struck**  
February 7th, 2006



Great Bear Rainforest, ancestral home of nearly a dozen native tribes, boasts salmon, eagles and bears. Most of it is accessible only by boat or seaplane.

Ending a decade-long environmental battle once dubbed the "War of the Woods," British Columbia is set to announce Tuesday the creation of a park twice the size of Yellowstone along a vast coastal swath where grizzly bears and wolves now prowl under thousand-year-old cedar trees.

The park will cover 4.4 million acres, and strict new controls will protect against exploitation on an additional 10 million acres. The entire territory, being called the Great Bear Rainforest, is the result of an unusual alliance of loggers, environmentalists, native groups and the provincial government.

"This is aimed at trying to find a balance, where people can understand and really enjoy our wilderness and we protect our wildlife, while recognizing that people are part of the ecosystem," Gordon Campbell, the premier of British Columbia, said in a phone interview Monday. "We all win. I think this model will be emulated in different parts of the world."

## press room



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By Laris Karklis, The Washington Post

The agreement ends a bitter dispute over the lush coastland and islands that stretch across more than 250 miles and include most of British Columbia's central and north coast, from the northern coast of Vancouver Island to the Alaskan border. Warmed by the ocean and fed by rain, this area of evergreen forest is the ancestral home of nearly a dozen native tribes, called First Nations in Canada, and most of it is accessible only by boat or seaplane.

Salmon return to spawn in rivers and streams, providing food for eagles and bears that include grizzlies, black bears and a rare white bear called the Kermode. About 30,000 people are scattered in small towns or reserves in the area, more than half of them natives.

The land already was owned by the provincial government and was slated for logging. For years, environmental groups fought to stop the clear-cutting practices that they say ravaged Vancouver Island and the southern portion of the British Columbia coast. In the late 1990s, they pressed big companies to boycott wood and paper made from the forest, a tactic that led to a truce and the start of negotiations.

"They were very successful in influencing the customers," Patrick Armstrong, a negotiator for the forest product industry, said Monday. "I remember a group of German papermakers who came here and took everyone to the verbal woodshed, telling them to solve the problem."

More than five years later, the talks that started out as "highly conflictual" have resulted in compromise on all sides, according to Merran Smith, a Vancouver representative of the environmentalist group ForestEthics, who has been involved in the controversy since the start.

"This is a transformation of what happens in the British Columbia forest," she said in a phone interview. "The revolution is looking at a standing forest not as a commodity, but as an economic model based on conservation."

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Outside the park, 10 million acres will be managed by committees that will set limits on logging, mining and the commercial efforts of native groups that still have claims to land. Negotiators expect additional agreements will bring the total protected area to 21 million acres.

The tribes have agreed to forest-friendly development such as eco-tourism, with the help of a planned \$105 million fund. The U.S.-based Nature Conservancy helped raise about half of that privately. British Columbia has promised about \$26 million, and negotiators are hoping that the Canadian federal government will contribute the rest.

"This is the key. This will jump-start the economy," said Arthur Sterritt, executive director for the Coastal First Nations groups. "The way the forest will be used will be absolutely sustainable. We are confident of that."

"There still will be logging," Smith said. But "we are looking for a much lighter footprint on the land. There will be less roading, less logging. The volume of wood coming out will be less. Streambeds and wetlands and wildlife habitat areas will not be touched."

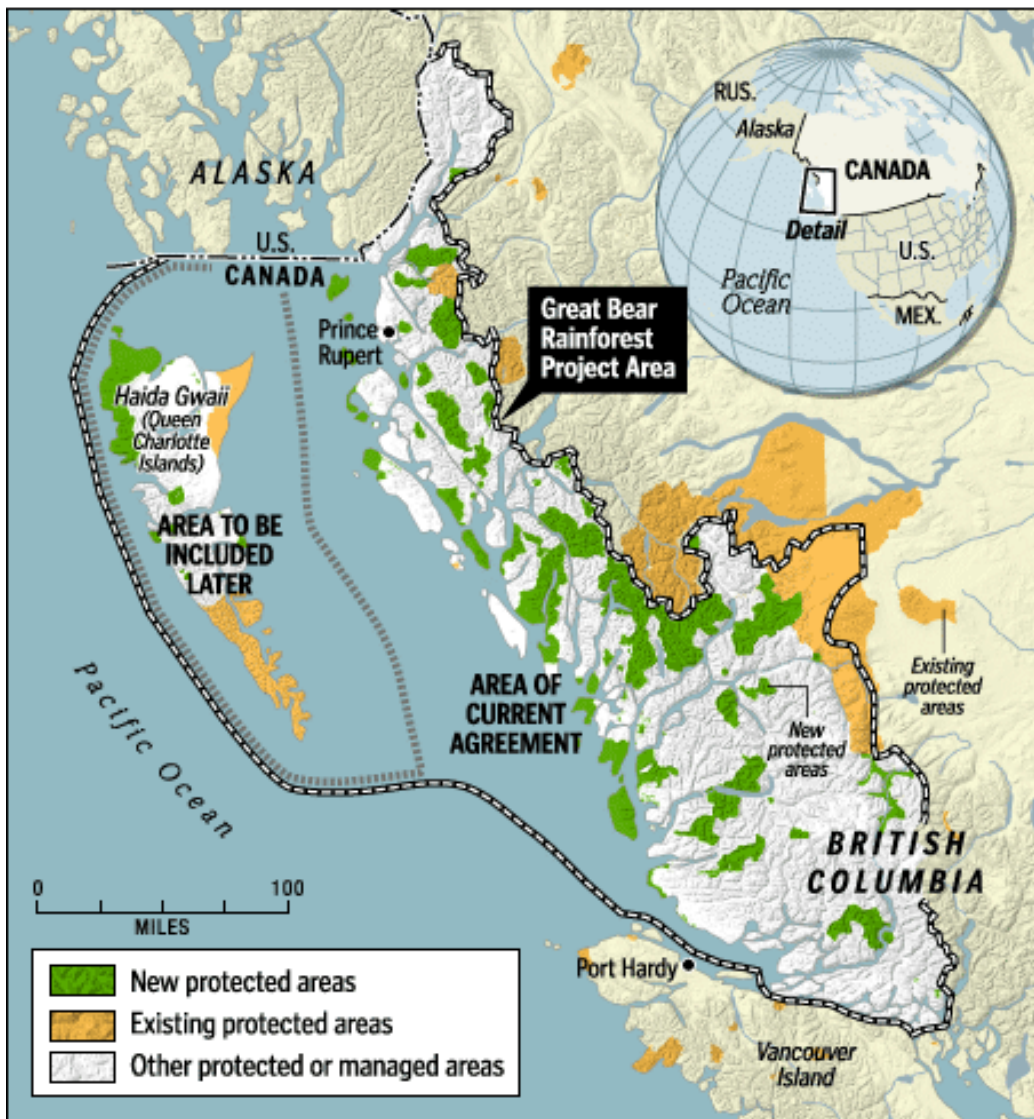
Logging and all other economic activity will be allowed only if experts determine that the resource is sustainable, officials say.

The Nature Conservancy decided to launch the fund-raising for the Canadian project because of its size and the unusual conciliation of the final negotiations, officials of the organization said.

"This really represents conservation in the 21st century," said Steve McCormick, chief executive officer of the group. "It's not an all-or-nothing proposition -- all protected, or all used. To conserve globally important natural habitat worldwide on a scale that will be meaningful, we have to contemplate human use."

Kent Gilges, a Rochester-based manager for the Nature Conservancy, said donors that include foundations and private individuals were quickly convinced of the advantage of preserving such a large area.

"This is basically two-thirds of the British Columbia coast," he said. "If you look from space, it actually stands out as an extraordinary green spot. Here you have an opportunity to save something big enough that, even with global warming, it could sustain its biodiversity long into the future."



SOURCE: Rainforest Solutions Project | By Laris Karklis, The Washington Post - February 07, 2006

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