

Ancient Sentinels

The Rainforest Conservation Corridor for the Robson Valley

by Julie and Rick Zammuto

Sometimes, people are too busy or pre-occupied with their daily lives to notice when something very precious is disappearing. Then, one day, they notice it is gone. That "one day" is rapidly approaching for the Ancient Inland Rainforest of Robson Valley.

Nestled within the Rocky Mountain Trench between the Rocky and Cariboo Mountains of East-Central British Columbia, the mighty Fraser River nourishes an ancient rainforest matched nowhere else on earth. Massive Western Red Cedar trees (*Thuja plicata*), some over 1200 years-old, 3.5 metres in diameter, and 45 metres high inhabit Robson Valley. This valley contains what scientists call the world's most extensive example of an Ancient Inland Rainforest in the northern hemisphere.

Save-The-Cedar League (STCL) formed in 1988, when we learned that most of the ancient cedar cut down were burned, with only a few fence posts being made from others. Mount Robson Park protected very few of the ancient cedars. STCL began to provide scientific rationale to protect cedar rainforests. The most ancient portions of this rainforest are made-up of ancient old-growth termed "Antique Forest," a forest that has remained as old growth for two or more generations of trees. The Antique Forests of Robson Valley are thousands of years old. They have been referred to by scientists as "an exceptionally rich assemblage of distinctly oceanic ecologies near the Continental Divide deep inland—an Inland Rainforest" (Trevor Goward 1994, 95, 96).

STCL is now working to protect a 400,000 ha "Rainforest Conservation Corridor" containing the most significant remaining Antique Rainforest in the world. Very rare, low elevation grizzly live here among cedar tree giants up to 12 feet wide. Our proposed Rainforest Conservation

Corridor would conserve the contiguous biological landscape connecting 8 Provincial Parks: Kakwa, Sugar Bowl/Grizzly, Bowron, West Twin, Erg Mountain, Ptarmigan Creek, Cariboo Mountains, and Willmore Wilderness, Alberta.

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the future. .
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them**

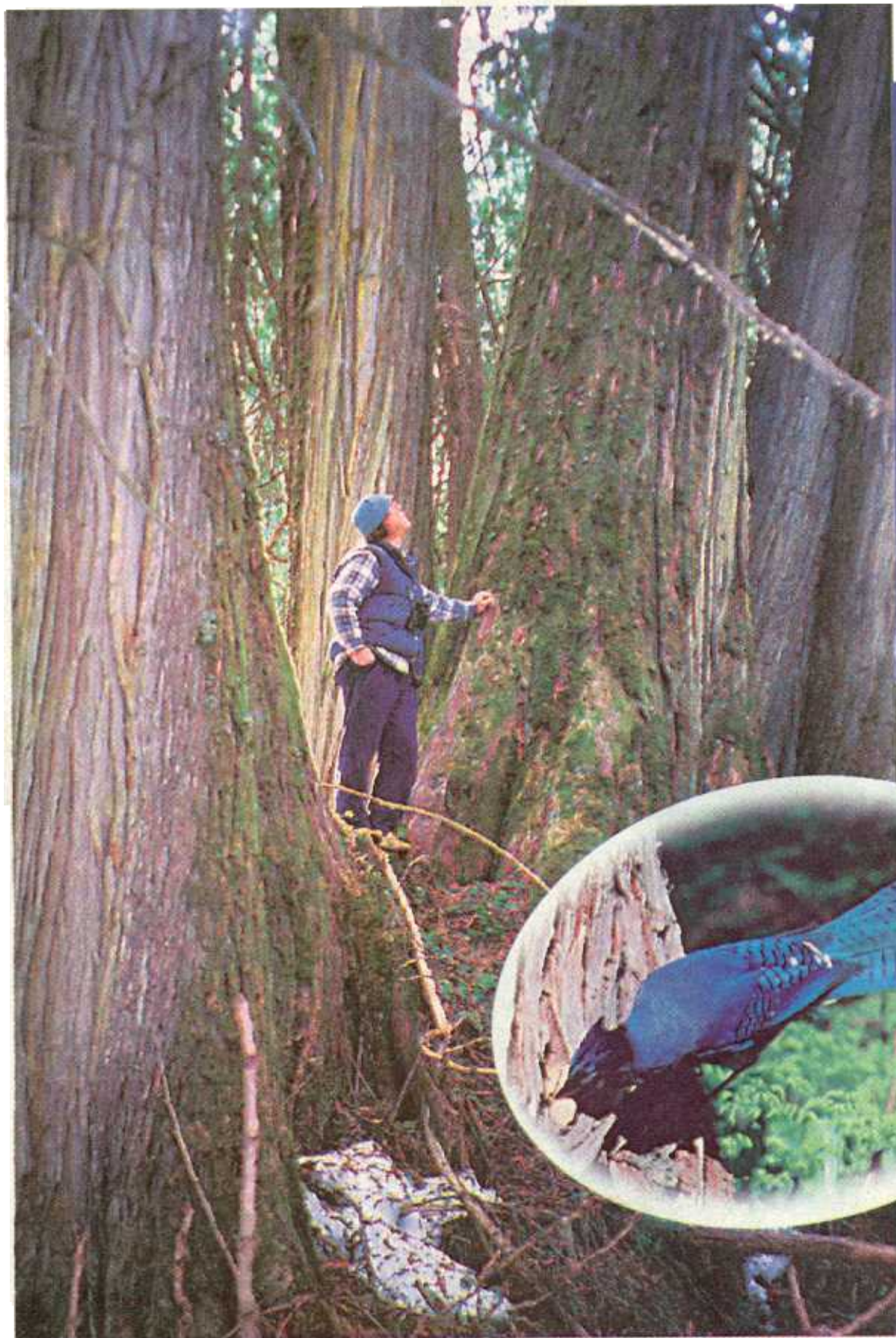
Some of the highest conservation values within British Columbia are present within the Rainforest Conservation Corridor:

- a) Chinook salmon of the Fraser River help feed grizzly bears and ecosystems of Robson Valley, the last place in all the Rocky Mountains of North America where grizzly bears have been documented to still feed on wild ocean-going salmon.
- b) An annual grizzly gathering where more than 25 grizzly bears can be viewed feeding over a weekend, part of the highest den-

sity grizzly population in East-Central British Columbia, with more than 150 grizzly bears.

- c) Some of the oldest cedar known to exist anywhere in the Interior of British Columbia.
- d) The calving grounds for the most southern remaining Alberta caribou herd, the calving and wintering habitats of the endangered mountain woodland caribou, and 6 other ungulate species: mountain goat; bighorn sheep; elk; moose; mule deer; and white-tailed deer.
- e) Interbreeding between Steller's Jays and Eastern Blue Jays. Hybrid crosses between these two jays were first discovered by STCL in 1996. Sightings of possible back-crosses may indicate that a new bird species may be arising in the rainforest of Robson Valley.
- f) Eight large predator populations: grizzly bear; black bear; gray wolf; cougar; wolverine; lynx; bobcat; and coyote.
- g) A bottleneck wildlife corridor, used annually for migration by many large mammals, with up to 1500 spawning Chinook salmon, and prime bull trout streams, are found on the Morkill, Hellroaring, and Forget-Me-Not watersheds.
- h) Some of the most biologically productive forests in the world and some of the highest species diversity of conifers, large carnivores, and rare species in North America.

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Left
Ancient
cedars
of the
Robson
Valley

Bottom
Hybrid Jay

Right
Last
Breeding
Woodland
Caribou
at
Crescent
Spur, BC

Photos
by Rick
Zammuto



← *Ancient Sentinels of the Robson Valley continued*

- i) Morkill Falls, with the highest water volume for waterfalls in the region. Salmon and bull trout spawn and grizzly feed on the 1 square kilometre raceway below three large falls.
- j) Most of the large North American mammals, more than 250 bird species, salmon, bull trout, and more than 325 vertebrate species.
- k) The deepest-penetrating salmon run of the Rocky Mountains, 60 km deep into the mountains, from the Fraser River main-stem.

If only everyone could see and experience this ancient treasure and witness, as we are witnessing, its methodical destruction, we feel everyone would be as concerned and saddened as we are. Once the ancient forests are gone, they are gone forever. Ancient rainforests take thousands of years to come into existence. We cannot realistically expect future generations to find it within themselves to re-establish these complex living organisms if we cannot find it within ourselves to allow them to survive today. Once gone, the impact on life, including human life, caused by the removal of the ancient forest, is irrevocable. We are so connected with all life, that what we do to other life becomes our own fate. Society's ravenous appetite to over-use natural resources is taking away nature, a high quality of life, and options from those who will inhabit the earth after each of us now living is gone. Society is in denial of what it is doing to our life-support-systems, and when everyone is in denial, and the ranks do not break, this denial becomes a powerful force, one that resembles mass suicide. Those of us who recognize and understand this must do what we can to break the ranks of denial.

Two different sawmills are now licensed to log the ancient rainforest

treasure of Robson Valley, so that most all the remaining, unprotected, intact ancient rainforest will be gone within 8 years, severely fragmenting this ancient life-sustaining ecosystem.

The land presently protected is not enough to protect endangered caribou, grizzly bears, salmon, and other species of this world-class rainforest. Despite the outcries of scientists, local communities, conservation organizations, and the public, the BC government is allowing this rare and precious ecosystem to be destroyed for the short-term gain of a select few, at a huge loss to the many. For the last seven years the cedar mill in McBride has been converting this rare and vulnerable biologically-rich ancient rainforest into a huge, lifeless mountain of cedar-mulch, for which there is no

market, and many cedar are still being cut and burned, buried, or left in piles to rot in the cutblocks.

The ancient cedars are our living link to the future. What we decide to do to them today will send a message of what our society is and the value we put on life. We can either actively participate to ensure that this ancient treasure remains viable for the long-term, or, we can allow it to be recklessly destroyed. Whichever choice we make will tell our descendants who we were and what we thought of them, and will help mold who they are to become and the quality of existence they will experience.



You can help stop the destruction of the ancient rainforest of Robson Valley and receive more information on the Ancient Inland Rainforest at:
 Save-The-Cedar League, General Delivery
 Crescent Spur, BC V0J 3E0
 email: STCedarL@aol.com
<http://www.savethecedarleague.org>