

Sea-To-Sea Greenbelt Society
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Auditor General to Investigate Land Giveaway

Victoria, BC – November 20, 2007

BC's Auditor General responded Monday to Sea-to-Sea Greenbelt Society's request for an audit by announcing he will review the provincial government's decision to remove over 28,000 hectares of private lands from three Vancouver Island Tree Farm Licences held by Western Forest Products. The lands include large portions of the wild coast currently accessible to residents of southern Vancouver Island.

"The lands released in the Capital Regional District (CRD) alone represent an area five times larger than the City of Victoria," says Ray Zimmerman of the Sea-to-Sea Greenbelt Society. "To change their status overnight from tree farm licence to residential real estate could ignite an explosion of urban sprawl."

Zimmerman is particularly concerned about the first potential real estate deal resulting from the January 2007 deletions. The pending sale represents an area of land larger than the City of Victoria but is spread out over a distance of 50 kilometres along southern Vancouver Island. Zimmerman says this move threatens the goals of the Regional Growth Strategy Plan to use best practices in planning and land development.

"The patterns of use that we lay down on the earth are difficult to reverse, especially the pattern of urbanization," says Zimmerman. "Given the importance of forests for climate stabilization and the need to limit urban sprawl as recognized in the Regional Growth Strategy, the minister's decision puts our descendents at a disadvantage. To give our descendents the consideration they deserve, these forest lands must remain as forest."

Minister Rich Coleman's decision to delete the lands without compensation or consultation shocked many and led to a variety of groups, including First Nations, local residents, forest sector unions, environmentalists, surfers and even the Capital Regional District, to support Sea-to-Sea's audit request, which was submitted to the Auditor General by the Environmental Law Centre in October.

"We believe this audit will determine whether government failed in its duty to protect the public interest," says Zimmerman. "We hope this audit will help us protect both the environment and the quality of life for all who live on southern Vancouver Island."

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