

The Nahmint River Watershed

The Nahmint River Watershed is located on central Vancouver Island, about 20 kilometres southwest of Port Alberni. The watershed covers 19,550 hectares. The Nahmint contains no parks or similar protected areas. In the lower portion of the watershed, about 2,000 hectares are designated treaty lands under control of the Ucluelet First Nation. BC Timber Sales' (BCTS) operating area is approximately 17,600 hectares. Since obtaining the operating area in 2003, BCTS has harvested an average of 56 hectares a year in the Nahmint.

The Vancouver Island Land Use Plan Order

In 2000, the provincial government approved the Vancouver Island Land Use Plan Higher Level Plan Order (HLPO). The order designated the Nahmint as one of 21 special management zones (SMZ) on Vancouver Island, and one of five in high biodiversity landscape units. This designation recognizes the importance of the Nahmint for biodiversity conservation, while undertaking timber harvesting.

The Vancouver Island Land Use Plan identified the Nahmint as a high priority for landscape unit planning that would emphasize landscape level biodiversity objectives and harvesting practices, and would establish old growth management areas and targets for protecting mature forests to support biodiversity.

Biodiversity Objectives for the Nahmint SMZ

The HLPO established biodiversity objectives for the Nahmint SMZ that were to be considered during landscape unit planning that would further define how to meet the objectives. Government expected a landscape unit plan to be approved by Dec. 1, 2002. If the landscape unit plan was not completed by that date, then the biodiversity requirements in the order would become the legal objectives. A landscape unit plan was not completed and the HLPO objectives still apply today, nearly 20 years later.

For biodiversity in the Nahmint SMZ, HLPO requires retention of one-quarter to one-third of the forested area as mature forest. Second, it requires retention of old forest at the site series level of representation with emphasis on rare and underrepresented site series. Third, it requires representation of old forest in a range of patch sizes.

Old Forest in the Nahmint Watershed

Currently, BCTS's FSP commits to protecting 19% of the Coastal Western Hemlock biogeoclimatic zone, and 28% of the Mountain Hemlock biogeoclimatic (BEC) zone. This protection is for each variant in those zones. More detailed planning is needed to determine how much additional old growth needs protecting when site series and rare ecosystems are considered. Other factors, such as connectivity and the quality of each stand, need to be considered in the final design of a landscape unit plan and will influence how much old forest is eventually protected.

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Understanding Zones, Variants and Site Series

BEC zones are the highest level of ecosystem classification and represent areas of broad macroclimate. They are generally named after dominant tree species and a descriptor of the general climate or region. British Columbia has 15 BEC zones. The Coastal Western Hemlock BEC zone and Mountain Hemlock BEC zone are found in the Nahmint. Subzones are divisions of zones that have similar vegetation as a result of similar climate.

Variants are divisions of subzones that are slightly wetter, drier, cooler or warmer than other areas in the subzone.

The smallest unit of classification in BEC is the site series. **Site series** are ecosystems that have similar soil moisture and soil nutrients and have plant species that are indicative of the potential vegetation community that can occupy a site at maturity.

For more information:

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