

April 8, 2025

Immediate Media Release
Roberts Creek, BC

The Water Protection Forest Logging Should Not Proceed

On April 3rd, a sign reading “Active Work Site” was posted leading to BCTS’ Blk TA0519 – the prime contractor listed as SkyTech of Squamish. Site work preparation now taken place near the block, including temporary fencing placed in front of an old rock quarry now partially restored as a breeding pond for the endangered Red-legged frog (RLF), a blue-listed (vulnerable to population decline based on habitat loss).

The letter “H” was spray-painted on the spur road indicating a helicopter pad. At least a 1/3 of the trees have been spray painted with the letter ‘P’ signifying trees earmarked as utility poles. The contractor revealed that these trees are destined to a Texas utility company and probably to be heli-logged.

Blk TA0521 and the surrounding area was named “The Water Protection Forest” (WPF) to reflect the role that forest ecosystems play in the hydrologic cycle.

“It’s troubling that BCTS didn’t consider the many reasons why the WPF is an important natural asset to our community, and was okay knowing that up to a 1/3 of the trees will end up being exported as poles to Texas to replace telephone poles blown down during a hurricane in that State.” says Ross Muirhead, ELF Forest Campaigner. “A logging road is surveyed to go through a RLF breeding pond #1 for the blue-listed RLF. An independent biologist documented 31 RLF egg masses this March, which means that 31 female RLFs came out of the adjacent forest to lay eggs here and then fertilized by an unknown number of males. ELF has proposed that this pond anchor the first RLF Wildlife Habitat Area (WHA) in the Sunshine Coast Forest District. A WHA would provide legal protection for this at-risk species – which is absolutely needed at this time.”

“Sizeable sections of this forest were identified by the government’s own Old Growth Technical Advisory Panel (TAP) as Old-Growth Recruitment Forest since this landscape has a dire lack of existing old-growth. There is also the issue of down-stream infrastructure (culverts at Hwy 101, Porter, Conrad and Lower Rd) being at risk to flooding caused by a change in hydrology from the logging and specifically from two new roads cutting across moderate steep slopes. BCTS needs to step back from the brink on and immediately inform the contractor that TA0519 is canceled and then negotiate an out of court settlement.” Muirhead concludes.

Background:

In the Spring of 2024, ELF came across one adult RLF in the main TA0521 block, and a 2nd one just outside a sub-block. This triggered a BCTS-led amphibian study because they have a “Sustainable Forest Management” protocol under the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SEI), which commits them to a management protocol since it’s an endangered species. It’s a 14 page “management protocol which gets triggered when RLF egg masses or individuals are identified near or within an operational area.

On August the 1st, 2024, Madrone Environmental under contract to BCTS, conduct a ‘Preliminary Amphibian Survey’ at three separate former rock quarries looking for signs of amphibians. Pond #1 is the largest with suitable habitat conditions with natural restoration occurring, and could be enhanced with some limited intervention. The Madrone biologist (Greg Howard, RPBio) documented 10 tadpoles, 5-10 in-betweens, and 5 near-metamorphosed juveniles, but no egg masses because the survey was conducted during the wrong time of year – mid summer. It’s well-known in the biological profession that amphibian surveys need to be conducted at least 3X a year and for certain in early Spring to look for egg masses. By August, adults will have dispersed across a wide forest area. Therefore, the Madrone survey is incomplete. Sample quote from the report:

“Based on the lack of available breeding habitat and the potential for larvae to overwinter in these quarries, additional planning is required prior to development.”

As will be explained more below, an independent survey by Aimee Mitchell, RPBio confirmed 31 egg masses in pond #1, so Mr. Howard needs to update his conclusion re: “lack of breeding habitat”, and then follow-up with BCTS to re-engage Madrone in another contract to re-visit pond #1 between now and end of the breeding season to document the egg-masses. In the meantime, no operational activity should occur.

“Quarry ponds 1, 2 and 3 do not represent highly suitable breeding habitat for the identified amphibian species, however, it is possible that available breeding habitat is limited in the general area.”

In the above statement, Mr. Howard conveniently lumps the 3 ponds together qualifying the conditions of the ponds to support egg mass laying, which does dis-service to pond #1’s conditions. Further, he does not qualify what “highly suitable habitat” amounts to. Pond #1 has ample vegetation growing in the water and along shoreline, is open to sunlight so waters can warm to temperatures conducive to egg metamorphosis.

Link to the Madrone report: https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/farming-natural-resources-and-industry/forestry/bc-timber-sales/updates-information-releases/preliminary_amphibian_survey_of_quarries_near_ta0521.pdf

An ELF-led amphibian study undertaken by Aimee Mitchell, RPBio, was conducted in late March 2025, with positive identification of **31 RLF egg masses in pond #1**, and in

her report, states that due to the cooler water temperatures (4 degrees) more eggs could still be laid as water temperatures warms. Ms. Mitchell's report is attached.

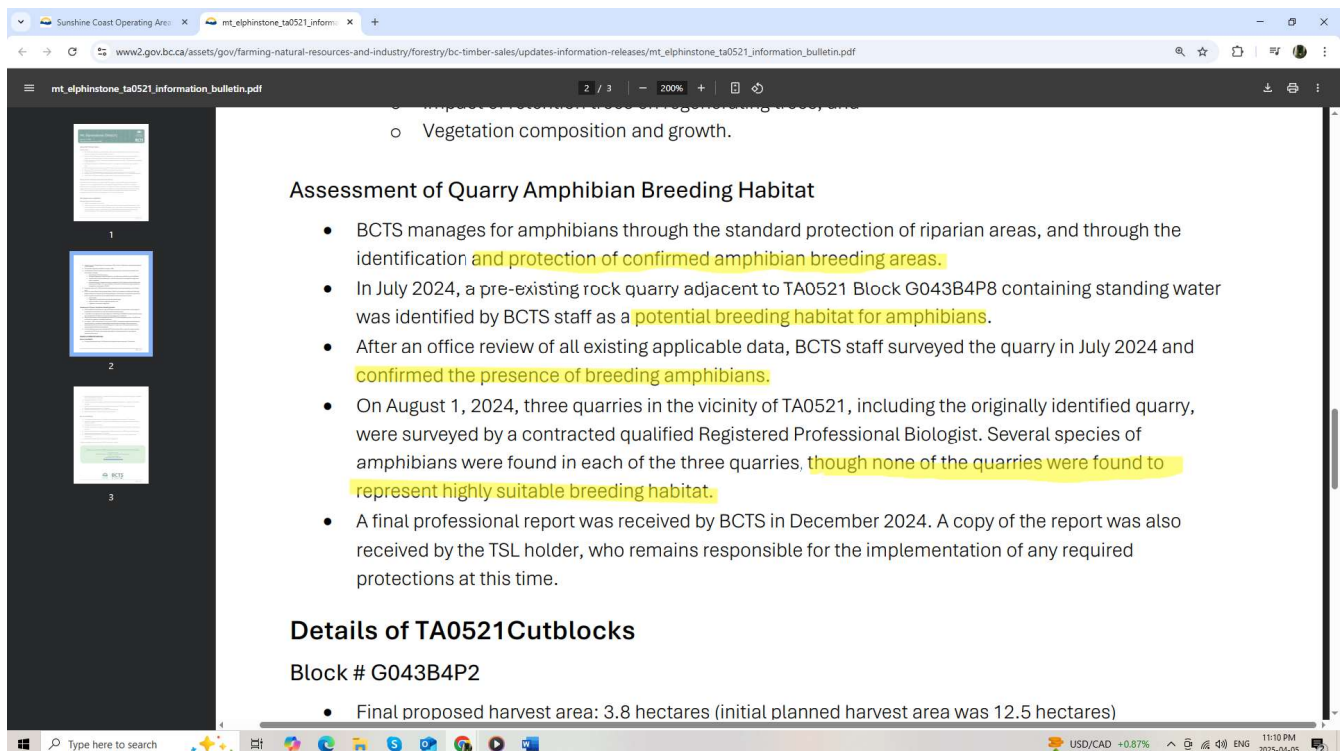
ELF is recommending that the two biologists share their reports, discuss via a Zoom call, agree to a management plan for pond #1, discuss what connectivity measures could be taken between the pond and forest dispersal areas.

The above management steps requires that BCTS immediately inform the contractors (Skyteck, OceanView Logging and Saxon Contracting) not to enter the work site, until the two RPBio's come up with a management plan, including a RLF Wildlife Habitat Area consideration.

In addition, Madrone needs to conduct 2-3 more surveys to complete their preliminary survey of August 2024.

ELF stands by its position that the Water Protection Forest in the S. Elphinstone Watershed needs protection by means of a RLF WHA, TAP old-growth recruitment forest and has a community natural asset securing the intact hydrology for generations within the context of the climate crisis.

Supporting Information:



https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/farming-natural-resources-and-industry/forestry/bc-timber-sales/updates-information-releases/mt_elphinstone_ta0521_information_bulletin.pdf