

B. C. TAP WATER ALLIANCE

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February 27, 2013

For Immediate Release

LAND GRAB REJECTED 24 YEARS AGO — RESURRECTED IN BC LIBERALS' *BILL 8*

Vancouver: Mere months before the May 2013 provincial election, the unpopular BC Liberals have announced omnibus **Bill 8**, *Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act*. Tucked inside in *Section 24* are provisions for a controversial amendment to the *Forest Act* which would gift timber corporations with added tenure rights over vast areas of public forestlands, by converting volume-based timber tenures to area-based tenures. First unsuccessfully proposed in 1988–1989, and known as the ‘rollover’ of Tree Farm Licenses (TFLs), the proposal was extremely short-lived.

The ‘rollover’ proposed by the BC Liberals’ predecessor, the Social Credit Party, was summarily rejected by British Columbians in 1989. The Socreds were forced to hold a series of public meetings throughout the Province, and Forests Minister Parker was forced to disclose to the public not only the names of the 54 companies involved in the 122 applications, but to also release a “secret” map showing their areas. (*Website background documents link, <http://www.bctwa.org/TFL-Backgrounder.html>*)

The Socred proposals would have significantly increased and concentrated the amount of timber cut in all TFL tenures (from 29 percent to 67 percent of the provincial Annual Allowable Cut). The single largest proposal was by New Zealand multinational Fletcher Challenge for an area twice the size of Switzerland (more than 6 million hectares). Described in leaked confidential documents, the rollover scheme originated during a secret meeting between the Council of Forest Industries and Premier Bennett in 1983. The rollovers were linked to a series of overarching privatization agendas hatched by the Socreds in the 1980s, and linked in turn to international privatization agendas of powerful interests.

Unrelenting opposition from First Nations, hundreds of community and environmental organizations, academics, professionals, forestry workers, the NDP opposition, and the general public resulted in a media backlash and precipitated the following:

- the fifth provincial inquiry into forest resources since 1910 (1990-1991);
- a scientific review and the implementation of an old growth forest strategy;
- the defeat and then disintegration of the Social Credit Party in September 1991;
- numerous regional and sub-regional Land Use Plans;
- the 1995 *Forest Practices Code Act* legislation.

The current proposed provincial TFL rollover legislation contained in *Section 24* of *Bill 8* originated in an April 4, 2012, eleven-page confidential, and subsequently leaked, briefing document to BC

Liberal Cabinet from Lands, Forests and Natural Resource Operations Minister Steve Thompson, titled: *A Timber Supply for Babine Forest Products Mill*. The rollover had initially been intended to benefit American-based Hampton Affiliates' tenure and Burns Lake mill operation, but the attached recommendation, "*Legislation – Forest Act amendment to enable forest license conversion to tree farm license,*" would soon evolve into an agenda to resurrect rollovers provincially.

According to information compiled by independent MLA Bob Simpson, this last-minute agenda began to take shape from September to October 2012 in statements emanating from the Ministry of Forests executive, who deliberately misconstrued recommendations made in the provincial Timber Supply Committee's final report. (The Committee had been assigned to investigate impacts on the timber industry resulting from the pine beetle infestation across BC's interior forestlands.) The Committee had not specifically recommended the "rollover" of forest licences.

"It has been 24 years since the public rejected the rollover of Tree Farm Licenses in BC. Why is this old, discredited agenda to privatize public forestland being raised again, just before the election, by a political party that has lost all credibility and has no mandate?," asks Will Koop, B.C. Tap Water Alliance Coordinator. "For more than a decade now, the public has been denied meaningful involvement in land use planning, and this in tandem with the abysmal lack of government accountability has been disastrous for BC forests and future generations. We haven't had a provincial inquiry into the state of our forestlands for over 20 years. BC clearly needs to have another and before any substantive amendments to the *Forest Act* are contemplated."

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Website Link for Tree Farm License Backgrounder: <http://www.bctwa.org/TFL-Backgrounder.html>