

Endangered Species and Spaces

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9.3 Macrofungi

Macrofungi are those fungi that produce fruit bodies that are generally visible to the human eye (greater than 1 cm in diameter). These are the mushrooms, toadstools and puff-balls that are commonly lumped in the public's perspective. It is thought that the number of macrofungi may well exceed the number of vascular plants in British Columbia, however, the present state of knowledge of the macrofungal flora of the province is poor at best. For more than 90% of the province, less than 1% of the macrofungal flora has been systematically documented (Redhead, 1994).

Macrofungi are beneficial to many trees as they help provide roots with nutrients, water and protection from root pathogens. They also can form part of the diet of animals at higher trophic levels, such as squirrels, voles, and deer. Others, by causing wood decay, create essential habitats for insects and ultimately larger animals. Mushrooms such as chanterelles and pine mushrooms harvested directly from the wild are an important cash crop for many humans. Macrofungi are also used extensively in the pharmaceutical industry because of their beneficial chemical makeup (Redhead, 1994).

As with most plant species, and in particular, the non-vascular plants, macrofungi are typically overlooked in any planning and decision-making processes. The greatest threat is habitat destruction, which is proceeding for the most part unabated in both the forest and non-forest ecosystems of the province outside of protected areas. The Columbia Basin is no exception in this regard. Inventories need to be conducted, rarity assigned and the results included in planning and decision-making processes.

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