



9

British Columbia

Learning Objectives

- To describe the physical and historical geography of BC as a basis for understanding the region's economic and social position in Canada
- To demonstrate that BC's significance to Canada's economic system is increasing
- To illustrate the growing importance of knowledge-based activities, innovative manufacturing, and tourism in the BC economy
- To illustrate some decline in the resource-based industries even as they remain strong and important to the BC economy
- To describe environmental challenges in BC and tensions that can emerge in relation to environment and industry.

Chapter Overview

Chapter 9 outlines the geographic dimensions and importance of another single-province region: British Columbia. The chapter focuses on three main themes:

1. British Columbia as “an emerging giant within Canada’s economic system” (p. 285).
2. The key role that resources have played in shaping the region’s economy.
3. The emergence of an urban-based economy lead by knowledge-based activities, tourism, and global trade.

British Columbia within Canada

Steady economic and population growth have strengthened British Columbia’s regional geopolitical position within Canada. The province includes the massive Western Cordillera and the energy-rich northeastern portion of Interior Plains.

Population

With nearly 5 million people, British Columbia comprises just over 13 per cent of Canada’s population, with an urban core in the Lower Mainland.

British Columbia’s Physical Geography

British Columbia’s physical geography, as Bone notes, is “perhaps the region’s greatest natural asset” (p. 288). In terms of both climate and physiography, BC’s diversity is unmatched. This has significant effects on human activity, ranging from the province’s resource-based regional economy to settlement pattern. Only about 2 per cent of the province’s land is classed as arable.

Environmental Challenges

A notable environmental challenge in British Columbia lies in preserving its landscape and old growth forests in the face of activities such as mining and forestry. Pipeline development has sparked controversy and poses another challenge to national unity.

British Columbia's Historical Geography

Indigenous peoples lived along the Pacific coast of British Columbia long before European contact. Settlement grew following the gold rush in 1858, and there was significant growth post Confederation with the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1885. Over the past two decades, British Columbia's increasing economic strength, partly driven by the Asian economy, has outpaced that of all other regions in Canada.

British Columbia Today

The industrial structure is moving toward that of a core with 80 per cent of the labour force employed in the tertiary sector. Changes in the economy emphasize technology, innovation, and expansion of service industries.

Technical Spearheads

In British Columbia, there are three notable high-growth industries which are described as technical spearheads: shipbuilding, filmmaking, and natural gas. Technological innovation in drilling techniques has enabled access to massive shale gas deposits. As a result, BC could become one of the world's largest natural gas producers.

British Columbia's Economic Anchor: Forestry

One of the most crucial elements of British Columbia's economy is the forest industry. In this chapter, the challenges facing the forest industry are reviewed. A crucial aspect of these challenges centres on the ongoing softwood lumber dispute between BC and the United States. As the fortunes of the forest industry fluctuate, Bone notes that tourism has become a key and growing element of the services sector.

Mining, Energy, and Fisheries

Bone's discussion of the fishing, mining, and hydroelectric power industries in British Columbia raises several important issues: (1) the importance of external events, such as foreign demand for resources; (2) the delicate balance of the resource base; and (3) the social and environmental costs associated with megaprojects.

British Columbia's Urban Core

In the final section of the chapter, Bone discusses British Columbia's urban geography, which is, of course, dominated by Vancouver and, to a lesser degree, Victoria. The concentration of British Columbia's population in the southwest corner of the province, centred on Vancouver, is striking. In some respects this concentration at the provincial level mirrors the pattern at the national scale, where the vast majority of Canadians live in the extreme south of the country.

Challenge Questions

1. Which physiographic region is associated with BC's natural gas discoveries?
2. Do you agree that BC faces a difficult choice between development and its environment? Why or why not?

3. What are the anticipated economic impacts of Prince Rupert becoming a major port for container traffic?
4. What is the basis of the trade dispute that was temporarily settled by the Softwood Lumber Agreement of 2006? What is the goal of the 2017 Softwood Lumber Agreement negotiations?
5. To what extent is the concept of Cascadia (p. 287) rooted in the centralist/decentralist faultline? What other bases do you believe this concept has?
6. Why is the pine beetle population growing and spreading?
7. What is meant by the “Big One” and why is this a particular threat for British Columbia?
8. What is meant by Bone’s statement about British Columbia that “The foundation of its economy rests on its resources and its advanced economy”? Do you agree?
9. Most sectors of BC’s economy are prospering, but the forest industry faces many difficulties. Why is this so? What are the difficulties for the forest industry?
10. Why is manufacturing not more important in British Columbia’s economy?
11. What makes the management of the salmon fishery so complex?
12. Why are Asian markets important to Canada (BC and Western Canada in particular) and what is necessary to access them?
13. Why does Bone describe Vancouver’s rich and vibrant culture as a suitable base for attracting the “creative class” (p. 315)?

Key Terms

Alaska Panhandle A strip of the Pacific coast that was awarded to the United States in 1903 following the Alaska boundary dispute. (p. 285)

Asia-Pacific Gateway and Corridor A system of transportation infrastructure that reach across Western Canada and into the economic heartlands of North America, including British Columbia’s Lower Mainland and Prince Rupert ports, road, and rail connections, and major airports and border crossings. (p. 302)

Biosphere reserve Designation by the United Nations of lands and waters that in turn are protected by provincial or state legislation. Such UNESCO reserves contain core areas where no resource development is permitted; buffer zones where limited resource extraction is permitted; and transition zones where resource development takes place in a sustainable manner. (p. 291)

Calder Supreme Court of Canada ruling in 1973 that Aboriginal peoples have some undefined collective rights, based on historic occupation, possession, and use of traditional territories, known as “Indian title” (now called “Indigenous [or Aboriginal] title”). These rights are not property rights, which involve the full weight of ownership. (p. 298)

Cascadia The name proposed for an independent sovereign state advocated by a grassroots movement in the Pacific Northwest, which would include British Columbia, Washington and Oregon. (p. 287)

Clayoquot Sound Located on the west coast of Vancouver Island, Clayoquot Sound in 1993 became the centre of environmental protests against logging in old-growth rain forests. (p. 291)

Container A sealed steel “box” of standardized dimensions (measured in 20-foot equivalent units or TEUs) used to transport cargo. (p. 300)

Great Bear Rainforest Temperate rain forest along British Columbia’s central and north coast, an area of 6.4 million hectares with 85 per cent of the old-growth forest designated as protected from logging by the BC government in 2016. (p. 291)

Grooves of geography The physiographic structures that facilitates connections between adjacent regions. (p. 317)

Horizontal drilling A new technology used for drilling for oil and gas; the opposite of vertical drilling. (p. 302)

Hydraulic fracturing A method used to fracture rock formations in order to allow oil or natural gas to flow from impervious strata. (p. 302)

Liquefied natural gas (LNG) A liquid form of natural gas chilled to -162°C . The cooling process, called liquefaction, reduces the volume to one six-hundredth of its original volume. As a liquid, it can be loaded onto special tankers and transported by sea around the world, making a once regional commodity a global one. At regasification terminals, the LNG is warmed until it returns to a gaseous state. (p. 309)

Lower Mainland A local term describing Vancouver and its surrounding area. (p. 286)

North West Transportation Corridor The CN rail line and Yellowhead Highway that connect Prince Rupert to Western Canada. (p. 314)

Pineapple Express A strong and persistent flow of warm air associated with heavy rainfall that originates in the waters adjacent to the Hawaiian Islands. (p. 291)

Provincial Agricultural Land Commission An independent British Columbia agency responsible for administering the province’s land-use zone in favour of agriculture. (p. 290)

Sea-to-Sky Highway The highway through BC’s Coast Mountains that links communities from West Vancouver to Whistler. (p. 315)

Softwood forest The predominant forest type in Canada. Softwood forests consist mainly of coniferous trees characterized by needle-like foliage. (p. 307)

Tragedy of the commons The destruction of renewable resources that are not privately owned, such as fisheries and forests. Historically, common pasture was available for the livestock of all people within a community, but in the absence of some form of collective control some individuals may maximize the use of the resource for personal gain; such use, in total, overwhelms the capacity of the resource to maintain and regenerate itself. The result, for those who seek to maximize profit, is short-term gain; the result for everyone is middle- and long-term loss. (p. 312)