

Fifty-Million-Year-Old BC Fossil Forest Communities: *The Dawn of the Modern World*

The early Eocene Okanagan Highlands series of lacustrine shale deposits of southern British Columbia and northern Washington constitute a significant group of fossil sites with exceptional preservation of a diverse suite of organisms. These deposits offer a unique opportunity to examine terrestrial communities in a temperate, low-seasonality montane setting across more than a thousand kilometers in a time of Holarctic intercontinental connections and increased global atmospheric carbon and temperatures. With this system, we can better understand the emergence of modern global patterns of biodiversity, biogeography, and the diversification of key plant and animal taxa constituting a major turning point in terrestrial community development.