



MAKING SURE WE'RE "IN IT FOR THE LONG RUN"

Last month, the government released its new agenda, "Strong Past, Bright Future: Competitiveness Agenda for British Columbia's Forest Sector." It's meant to "broaden the conversation to explore new actions and include other participants from our integrated forest sector, community leaders and First Nations." This is good news for the TLA since we are a grassroots organization and a unifying voice for BC's forest industry. We just published our report, *Community Perspectives on the BC Coastal Forest Industry* and our members live and work in BC's rural communities. We welcome a broader conversation.

While the plan is quite high-level, I was pleased to read a vital strategic action within the Stable Communities and First Nations Partners goal: "Working with contractor associations and major licensees to ensure contractor interests are met." There is an imbalance right now in the forest sector which has led to TLA members expressing concern about the health of the industry's supply chain. I'm hopeful these concerns will be fully addressed as part of this action item.

While major licensees have significant influence given their size, contractors across the province are the foundation for the forest sector. No manufacturing, marketing or utilizing of the resource occurs without the use of independent timber harvesting contractors to harvest the timber and deliver logs to sawmills, pulp mills or export facilities. Almost every log in this province is handled by independent contractors. So, individually, contractors are small players, but collectively—under the umbrella of contractor associations such as the TLA—we create a combined voice larger than even the major licensees.

This brings me to our convention, a seasonal highpoint for many TLA members and a cornerstone in our advocacy efforts. The theme for the TLA's 74th Annual Convention & Trade Show

is "BC Forestry: In it for the Long Run." I think it describes our members well. Independent timber harvesting contractors are the economic backbone of BC's coastal communities. They helped build our coastal towns decades ago and they continue to play a strong role in their communities' economic success.

The theme also points to our main advocacy message: contractor sustainability. To ensure TLA members will always be in it for the long run, the TLA's advocacy focus over the last year has been on contractor sustainability. We believe the people who work in the forest industry should share in the prosperity. And the topics at this year's convention look at how that sharing of prosperity can happen.

With this in mind, we take another look at steep slope logging. First, we'll check in to examine what has taken place over the last year in steep slope best practices and update you on the productivity achieved.

Then we'll look at how success in harvesting steep slopes will demand synergy between technology and stakeholders in a changing market. What's the risk in stranded capital and can we afford to meet the challenge? The more capital contractors need to invest without certainty in their work, the more risk they take on and the less sustainable their businesses become.

The overhead costs of operating contracting businesses continue to mount. But we know that to drive a successful business, owners must be current, compliant and sustainable. We'll consider three types of overhead costs: drug and alcohol testing, human resources, and safety management. And then we'll address this question: How can contractors meet their obligations to their employees and industry regulations in a way that's also fiscally prudent?

Taking a broader look at contractor sustainability, we'll investigate models for success in the long run. Market logging for contractors is an old idea that's

coming back again. (For details on the market logging concept, see the article "Market Logging: A Win-Win for Everyone?" on page 36 of this issue.) We'll also look at new models for our forest sector. Often, I think contractor sustainability is an achievable goal if we set aside old paradigms and not just think outside the box, but eliminate the box entirely!

Forestry continues to face a not-in-my-backyard attitude in many of our urban/rural interface areas.

We'll have a variety of forest stakeholders—tourism, municipal government, labour and industry—discuss the relationship between their positions and resource use. When I think about this topic, I remember my first President's Message where I talked about the importance of communicating, building trust and aligning our goals. I look forward to hearing what these stakeholders have to say.

Contractor sustainability can help build changes made within our industry. However, outside forces impact us in ways that are hard to plan for or react to. The Softwood Lumber Agreement is one of those external pressures. In order to avoid a mass exodus of independent contractors or risk losing a natural resource industry, we need to defend a strategy that moves us from the past and provides a stake in the future of equitable benefits.

This is by no means a full review of everything that will be discussed at our 74th Annual Convention & Trade Show. But I hope this introduction makes you stop and think. We're at a critical time in the forest industry and it's more important than ever that TLA members come together to make sure we are "In it for the Long Run" as we have been for generations.▲

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