

Wanted: skilled employees to work in B.C.'s woods

HUMAN RESOURCES | In the face of growing demand and dwindling options, the province's lumber industry struggles to find the next generation of forestry workers

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A recent study confirms B.C.'s forestry industry is approaching a human resources crisis.

"By 2022, we're going to need 4,700 people in our industry," said Dwight Yochim, Truck Loggers Association executive director. "On the coast, nearly 50% of the workers there now will need to be replaced."

Yochim recently oversaw a B.C. coastal forestry industry study in a partnership project that assessed the forestry industry's labour market and training needs.

The report, which was steered by a committee of industry experts and B.C. government representatives, indicates that industry demand for skilled workers will increase by 26% in the next 10 years, while occupational supply is predicted to grow by only 8%. According to the report, 75% of the jobs needed are in categories already faced with high vacancy rates, including hand fallers (17%), forestry workers (13%) and logging machine operators (7%).

The approaching tidal wave of retirement is also set to hit the forestry industry hard. For example, according to the study the average age of tree fallers is 55.

Widespread industry modernization also means workers now require better, more expensive and more time-consuming training.

"Some of the machines we use cost \$2 million," said Yochim. "You can't just throw someone on there and hope they can pick it up."

More discouraging for the forestry sector is the study's finding that there is a pervasive perception among youth that forestry is a dead-end career. Study results show 50% of people in communities along the B.C. coast don't think there's a career in forestry. The statistics have forestry

companies stepping in to help develop the labour market in ways they've never done before.

For example, TimberWest helps to develop forestry-specific curricula for grades kindergarten to 12, according to Jan Marston, vice-president of human resources.

"We're also providing information on opportunities at career fairs," she said. "[But] the industry's ability to recruit new workers requires a collaborative effort. The [past] lack of co-ordination on a comprehensive strategy has impeded us."

Shannon Janzen, chief forester at Western Forest Products Inc., agreed.

"The industry will need to look at the current work structure and be willing to challenge past norms in order to attract enough people."

For Janzen and others, that means working together to rescue the industry as a whole. Janzen said Western runs a seven-week logging fundamentals training program that produces skilled entry-level workers, a task that has traditionally fallen to the education system. It's a veritable drop in the bucket.

According to Yochim, the forestry industry labour shortage is predicted to drive the annual costs of turnover and recruitment to \$35 million, costs that will need to be absorbed by industry and the government.

Statistics Canada's Canadian International Merchandise Trade Database projects that B.C. will report \$6.5 billion in lumber and lumber products exports to China alone through 2013, a number that is expected to grow.

Failure to meet the demand could be costly.

"[It] has broader implications for the sector and local communities through lost profits, compensation to employees, taxes and investments," said Yochim.

But the effect on those who survive on logging could be much

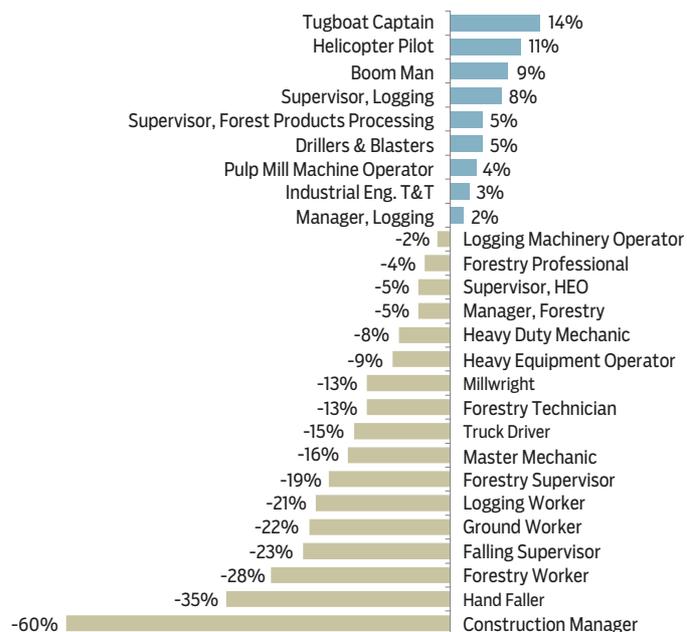


Truck Loggers Association executive director Dwight Yochim: "by 2022, we're going to need 4,700 people in our industry"



Shannon Janzen, chief forester at Western Forest Products Inc., promotes labour development through the company's seven-week training program

Projected annual skills surplus/shortages in priority occupations within B.C.'s logging industry through 2022



SOURCE: TRUCK LOGGERS ASSOCIATION, B.C. COASTAL FORESTRY INDUSTRY LABOUR MARKET PARTNERSHIP PROJECT - LABOUR MARKET & TRAINING NEEDS ANALYSIS - FINAL REPORT

more dire, warned Yochim. "The impact on coastal communities is not something to be

taken lightly," he said. "It is incumbent upon the entire industry to attract the youth that

50%	Percentage of people in communities along the B.C. coast who see forestry as a dead-end career
26%	Projected percentage increase in the demand for skilled forestry industry workers in the next 10 years
8%	Projected percentage increase in the occupational supply of workers in the forest industry

are living on the coast in order to keep the industry going." ■

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