

74th Annual Convention: In It For The Long Run

By Minister Steve Thomson, Forest, Lands and Natural Resource Operations



The TLA convention is on the horizon and with it always comes the beginning of a new year, and an opportunity to reflect on the past year and to focus on our strategies to meet upcoming challenges in the months and years ahead.

This year's convention is aptly named: In it for the Long Run. The British Columbia forest sector has been an economic driver in rural communities and larger cities alike since the founding of the province. We are working hard to ensure it remains a staple of the BC economy as embodied by the August 2016 launch of *Strong Past, Bright Future: A Competitiveness Agenda for British Columbia's Forest Sector*. The agenda contains 49 strategic actions to address the three inter-related goals of: healthy, resilient forests; a diverse, globally competitive industry; and stable communities and First Nations.

The agenda is supported by other recent government programs, including the three-year \$75-million Rural Dividend, and \$85 million for the newly created Forest Enhancement Society of BC, which will help with community safety in the face of increasing wildfires due to climate change and to rehabilitate forests damaged by the mountain pine beetle. The second intake for the Rural Dividend has been completed and decisions for project applications

will be announced before the end of this fiscal year.

BC Timber Sales continued to do its part—selling 13 million cubic metres of timber in 2015/16 substantially achieving its goal of selling its full apportionment. BCTS supports the market-based pricing system, rural economies, jobs and families. During 2015/16 BCTS also earned \$134 million in revenue, supporting vital government services like health care and education. At the same time, BCTS supported sustainable forest management by growing 42.7 million seedlings and planting 37.7 million trees.

We place a high priority on sustainable forest management, so for that reason, I, along with the Chief Forester have provided direction to licensees as they renew their forest stewardship plans. In short, they must be written so they are easier to understand, and results and strategies are easier to enforce.

In addition to sustainably managed forests, we need a sustainably managed sector. The TLA Executive and Executive

tractors and licensees. Once the economic assessment is completed, the details around governance, leadership and reporting out for the facilitated process will be finalized.

We are continuing to move on action items within the competitiveness agenda, including our continued focus on safety. We have decided to apply SAFE certification consistently as eligibility criteria for Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations contracts, beginning April 1, 2017. Contractors interested in this work should begin preparing themselves to meet the standard and contact the BC Forest Safety Council. For wildfire, and other emergency response contractors, this will be treated as a preferred requirement given the nature of their work.

Internationally, we continue work to expand and develop our markets overseas and to diversify our trading partners. At the time of writing, I'm about to embark on my fifth forestry Asia trade mission. Strengthening key Asian markets is an action item within the competitiveness

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This is an issue that the ministry will be working on with the logging contract associations and major licensees. The ministry will begin a four-phase contractor competitiveness review to identify common areas of action that, if adopted, have the potential to improve the competitiveness of both contractors and licensees. This is one of the actions under our competitiveness agenda that I mentioned earlier, and a key priority for my ministry. The first phase will be an economic assessment and review of the contracting sector to develop baseline and economic drivers within the sector. It will be followed up by a facilitated process to define issues and potential actions that all parties can support to improve competitiveness of both con-

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All the best for a successful convention!▲