

WHAT MAKES A SUSTAINABLE INDUSTRY



While recently speaking with some North West Loggers Association (NWLA) members, we discussed what each of us thought were the critical barriers for the forest industry in north west BC. Not surprisingly, we landed on the following three items as critical to creating stability in our area.

1. The lack of viable market for 'fibre' and waste wood.
2. The lack of log flow, either due to a lack of investment in infrastructure (roads and bridges), or marketable wood approved for logging.
3. Inconsistency in market demand and/or prices for a significant part of the timber profile.

Many will say that if we address these first three issues, then our problems will be solved. While they would bring us much closer to sustainable prosperity, they'd be only partially right. There's one other factor necessary for success, and it's the main reason why the NWLA operates.

4. The contractors that harvest and move forest products must be viable (profitable and sustainable).

Contractors and their workers are critical to the success of the forest industry and must be supported. If there is no one to fall, yard, process, or haul the logs to market, then what happens? The industry stops.

It doesn't matter if you can mill all the wood in the province—if there's no one to bring you that wood, you are dead in the water.

It doesn't matter if you have all the permits and approvals in the province—if there's no one to log the wood, you are dead in the water.

It doesn't matter if the highways are open and newly paved—if there's no one to haul the logs, you are dead in the water.

It doesn't matter if you have great plans for hospitals, schools, swimming pools or arenas—if you don't have contractors and their workers to pay the taxes that pay for

those facilities, or their families to use those facilities, you're dead in the water.

So yes, we need to make sure that each log that comes out of the forest is turned into a product that pays for the cost of delivering that log to the marketplace. Yes, all the timber from a forest has to have an end use. And yes, we need to ensure that there is always enough of that timber approved and available to provide a steady and sustainable supply to the marketplace.

for profits and reinvestment capital to poor planning or communication of logging programs leading to contractor inefficiency and higher costs; and unacceptable long delays in processing plans and permits by government agencies. We understand there are reports being written about these issues: our hope is that the conclusions and recommendations from those reports will result in real and sustainable change.

The NWLA continues to work on and

Instead, what we see is that our members and contractors throughout BC are becoming increasingly less viable—every single person in this province should be concerned about that.

However, just as important is that we need to have contractors that are able to consistently, efficiently, and sustainably bring that timber to market, and to do that we need the contractors' workers to be trained and steadily and sustainably employed.

It is in everyone's interest to make sure this happens, from the contractor investing in its own equipment and people to maintain or improve its safety and efficiency; to the mill or forest licensee ensuring that the contractor is fairly compensated for the work it does, to ensure the long-term viability and sustainability of its suppliers; to the bureaucracy supporting and promoting continued and sustainable access to the forests so that there will be a steady source of tax and stumpage revenue for social programs and public infrastructure.

Instead, what we see is that our members and contractors throughout BC are becoming increasingly less viable—every single person in this province should be concerned about that. Contributing to this is the licensees' lack of recognition of the costs and need

support initiatives that will make our local timber profile more economically viable and available. We also promote interest in markets or products that bring more value from the forest, and support any initiative that reduces red tape.

But we need to remember why we are doing all this, and to remind licensees and bureaucrats that a viable contractor force means a healthy forest industry with happy workers and families, and that makes for prosperous and sustainable communities. 🌲

Rick Brouwer is a registered professional forester and lives in Terrace BC with his wife and daughter. He is the executive director of the non-profit Skeena-Nass Centre for Innovation in Resource Economics (SNCIRE), and a partner in Westland Resources Limited, a natural resource consulting company and associate member of the NWLA. While Rick has lived and worked throughout the western half of BC, he grew up in the Skeena Valley and believes there is great potential for people in the northwest woods!