

BUILDING A STRONG, SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY FOR BRITISH COLUMBIA

By Premier John Horgan

For 75 years, the Truck Loggers Association has stood tall and strong for forestry and forest-dependent communities. As premier, my job is to stand tall and strong for all British Columbians. A dynamic and sustainable forest economy is key to our province's economic future.

When I was sworn in as Premier on July 18, British Columbia was more than a week into a provincial state of emergency due to our unprecedented wildfire season. More than 65,000 people in the Interior were evacuated, 1.2 million hectares were burned, and direct wildfire fighting costs exceeded \$552 million.

When people are in trouble, communities come together. Firefighters and emergency responders fearlessly and tirelessly protected our communities, and thousands of volunteers opened their hearts and homes to help. Our government recently launched the Above and Beyond Awards program to recognize the exemplary service of these everyday heroes, who stepped up during the wildfires and the devastating spring floods. It will take time to rebuild, but BC will come back even stronger than before. Our government is working closely with communities and First Nations as we recover. Supporting our forest sector is critical to those efforts.

Also in July, I travelled to Ottawa to meet with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, and to Washington DC, where I met key US officials to press our case for a negotiated agreement on softwood lumber. The softwood lumber dispute affects tens of thousands of BC workers and forest-dependent communities across BC. We're fighting for a deal that's good for BC workers, for the industry, and for our communities.

In November, the US Department of Commerce announced final duty rates totalling almost 21 per cent for the majority of Canadian forest companies. These unfair duties put thousands of BC jobs on the line, creating uncertainty for the people and communities who depend on those jobs.

BC is a fair and competitive trader. Every time the US has imposed unfair

duties on softwood, the courts have sided with Canada and our industry has been vindicated. We stand united with forest workers, industry leaders, and forest-dependent communities in the fight against unfair duties. And we stand united defending the 60,000 people who rely on BC's forest sector for their jobs and livelihoods.

The softwood lumber dispute with the US just reiterates the importance of diversifying markets for BC wood products. To that end, Doug Donaldson, Minister of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development, led a forestry trade mission to China and Japan in November to help increase the value of exports to those two important markets.

That's just one of many actions we are undertaking to meet our commitment to build a strong, sustainable, innovative economy for British Columbia, one that works for everyone. The Contractor Sustainability Review being led by George Abbott is also scheduled to wrap up near the end of 2017 and I look forward to hearing how we can make the industry more sustainable for independent timber harvesting contractors who live and work in BC's rural communities. Finally, I've also tasked Doug to work with the communities and industry to find a fair, lasting strategy to process more logs in the province to deliver more benefits for families and communities.

I've tasked Jobs, Trade and Technology Minister Bruce Ralston to work with Doug on increasing employment in the forest sector and innovative wood manufacturing sector.

Our government continues to explore ways Indigenous peoples can have a broader stake in forestry activities on their lands. We have embraced the United Nations Declaration on the



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Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and are determined to build a true partnership with First Nations, based on rights, respect and reconciliation. In my mandate letters to all cabinet ministers, I told them to review policies, programs and legislation to determine how to bring the principles of the declaration into action in British Columbia.

Across the province, we are entering a new era of co-operation and collaboration. The people of British Columbia need to see that government can work across all parties to move forward on the things that matter the most to them. After all, they work hard to build a better life for themselves, and they deserve a government that's working for them. This means making sure the forest sector—one of BC's founding industries—continues to provide well-paying jobs for families across our province.

Over the last 75 years, there have been many changes, and over the next 75 years, there's sure to be many more. I welcome the opportunity to work with you to build a better British Columbia. And I look forward to celebrating with you in January, to mark 75 years of standing tall and standing strong for BC's forest sector.▲