



PACIFIC LOGGING CONGRESS: PERSPECTIVES ABOVE & BELOW THE 49TH PARALLEL

Early in November, I attended the 108th Pacific Logging Congress (PLC) in Scottsdale, Arizona. Massive cacti and tall palm trees replaced the evergreen forests that most of the delegates work in; however, it is a central (and warm!) location for most of the delegates.

Founded in 1909, the PLC's mission is to provide sound technical education about the forest industry and to educate politicians, educators, their students and the general public about the need for responsible forestry to supply global wood fibre needs. The PLC membership consists of contractors, suppliers, licensees and timberland owners from around the Pacific Rim. The annual conference seeks to provide opportunities for members to learn, network, collaborate and ensure they are on the forefront of emerging logging technology, best operating practices and recruitment strategies.

President Jacqui Beban and myself represented the TLA. The following are the main themes that we heard.

Skilled Labour Shortage

A shortage of skilled labour is prevalent on both sides of the border. In the Pacific Northwest, logging truck drivers are in shortest supply. The younger generation is not attracted to the industry. Whether this is due to the environmental stigma associated with the forest industry or working conditions (low wages and long hours) was unclear. While the BC industry certainly does not pay low wages, we still need to compete against relatively higher-wage industries like oil and gas and the negative stigma associated with our industry.

One way the PLC has begun to counter the labour shortage is their Adopt a High School Program. (See their website at: www.pacificloggingcongress.org for more details.) Essentially, a contractor or forester engages with a local high school and works with teachers and students to introduce all that goes on in the working forest, including providing hands-on experience with the contractor's heavy machinery. The hope is to create awareness in young minds about jobs in the woods.

Technology is one of the key pathways to achieving greater safety in the Pacific Northwest.

In BC, the TLA helps fund three high school programs led by dedicated teachers who carry out their own forestry programs supported by contractors, consulting foresters and licensees. Furthermore, we are fortunate to have the very successful Festival of Forestry program in BC that takes 20 or so teachers out annually and tours them around harvesting sites, sawmills, nurseries, etc., so they can see for themselves the technology, science and sustainability our forest industry incorporates. And the TLA is also lobbying hard for a training tax credit to incentivize contractors to hire and train new workers.

Both the TLA and PLC also offer scholarships to students seeking post-secondary education in forestry.

Safety

Technology is one of the key pathways to achieving greater safety in the Pacific Northwest. At the PLC, I learned about CAT safety initiatives that include fatigue monitoring systems for drivers

and alarm systems RFIDs on front-end loaders (particularly useful on dryland sorts). Almost every grapple yarder in New Zealand now has a grapple camera according to presenter Hunter Harrill of the University of Canterbury. Other tech systems to improve safety and productivity are being developed, such as the teleoperations (aka remote-control operations) of backline machines as presented by Paul Milliken of Applied Teleoperation. Summit Attachment's

Bruce Skurdahl says his company's innovations are motivated by using technology to address the shrinking labour pool. One innovator, Mark Standley, is trying to develop a drone to carry straw lines to the backline. He says he is almost there—after many drones have been sacrificed in the learning process. Clearly, innovation in safety is still a motivating force.

Softwood Lumber Dispute

I gave a presentation on the Canadian perspective of the softwood lumber dispute. One of my main premises was that BC lumber exports to the US have seen their peak, given restraints to the BC Interior SPF (spruce-pine-fir) timber supply. The US perspective, presented by Duane Vaagen of Vaagen Bros. conveyed that Canada had an unfair advantage largely because of the incredible hurdles that independent US sawmills face in accessing timber supply from US public lands due to onerous bureaucracy and persistent litigious environmental

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campaigns. This is something US lobbyists hope President Trump can address by cutting away red tape, said another presenter, Travis Joseph of the American Forest Resource (AFRC). With little happening in terms of active forest management on US public lands, the fire hazard has grown very high and they are experiencing greater wildfire threats that

increase carbon emissions and threatens livelihoods as well as timber supply.

Our respective forest industries are similar and we clearly face similar problems, no matter which side of the border. However, how we approach our problems often differs. Solutions come from raising awareness of what we do and how we do it. To that end, the PLC

will be hosting an In the Woods Show—a live demonstration of harvesting operations—in Corvallis, Oregon next September. While most of the audience will be high school students from Oregon, this too helps us in BC, by raising awareness of what loggers do and what we offer.▲

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