

# WORKING TOGETHER FOR A STRONGER BC

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Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development

It's a pleasure to be in back-to-back issues of *Truck LoggerBC*. This time, I have the privilege of giving you an update on Budget 2018—our first full budget as a new government. Our overarching goal as a government is to make life more affordable for British Columbians.

I note that the theme for the upcoming Interior Logging Association's convention is "Our Strength...A Unifying Voice for 60 Years" that mirrors our approach as a government—we believe that we are stronger when we all work together and consider all British Columbians in our decisions and policies.

Representing Hazelton, I know firsthand the struggles that face rural communities and feel honoured that I am also Minister responsible for Rural Development. At the time of writing, we're nearing the end of our online engagement in gathering input from rural British Columbians on what they want to see in a rural development strategy. I firmly believe that the most effective and enduring strategies are built from the ground up—not from the top down. It's important that people in rural communities—where they generate the wealth that helps pay for vital public services such as health care and education—also benefit from the resources that are leaving their communities.

The forest industry is one of BC's foundational industries and is a key economic driver supporting tens of thousands of families throughout British Columbia. There are many challenges—especially in the Interior, which have been adversely affected by the mountain pine beetle and wildfires. However, there are still great opportunities. The innovation involved in tall wood buildings or using residual fibre for pellets, instead of waste, are two examples of wood usage that were not on the horizon just 20 years ago.

One area that needs improvement is the social licence between the forest industry and communities. The social li-

cence needs to be strengthened. Broadly speaking, this means that communities need to benefit from the forests that surround them. It means licensees operating on public forests need to be open with their logging plans and consider community input. It means that the public needs reassurance that the professional reliance model is working. It means that the public and all operators in our forests need to have confidence in our forest inventory.

I look forward to working with the industry to improve social licence. We are expecting the results of the engagement on professional reliance later this spring, and the results of the review of forest inventory by the end of September. And of course, we're looking forward to recommendations stemming from the logging contractor sustainability review.

Returning to Budget 2018, we're dedicating an additional \$72 million to wildfire-related initiatives over the next three years. This includes \$50 million specifically to help communities better prepare for and respond to wildfires through the development and implementation of community fire risk, prevention, and response plans. There is also another \$22 million for land-based recovery in the areas most heavily impacted by the 2017 wildfires. Given the unprecedented scale of the fires, it will take a few years for forests and ecosystems to recover. Funds will be used for fire access roads, improving/recovering water storage facilities, rehabilitating rangelands, and reforestation. The funding announced in Budget 2018 builds on investments to date, including over \$20 million from the Forest Enhancement Society of BC on wildfire risk reduction and reforestation in the Cariboo alone.

Ministry staff have been working closely with First Nations and licensees in developing timber salvage strategies and approving cutting permits as quickly as possible for salvage harvesting. Salvage harvesting is also being guided by



the ministry's recently published retention guidelines. While public safety is the overriding priority, it's also important to maintain environmental values as much as possible. The wildfires did not burn even. In some areas, forests were burnt to a crisp, while in some areas within a wildfire perimeter there are pockets of green stands.

Funding priorities for wildfire related activity will also be informed by the results of the George Abbott and Maureen Chapman's review of the 2017 wildfires and floods. Their report is expected at the end of April.

Budget 2018 also commits \$16 million over three years to modernizing land-use planning—another one of my mandate letter commitments. The funding ramps up over three years; with the first year focused on developing the strategic policy and appropriate balance between conservation and the use of natural resources. We will be developing our approach in collaboration with First Nations and with input from communities, industry, environmental groups, tourism, outdoor recreation groups and other stakeholders.

I look forward to meeting with you at the ILA's 60<sup>th</sup> annual convention in May.▲