



IS SHARING IN THE PROSPERITY A ZERO-SUM GAME?

Last month I attended the annual Wood Design Awards event hosted by Wood WORKS! BC. The event celebrates innovation and design in wood construction in British Columbia. There were indeed some truly amazing award-winning structures that have been built using timber harvested from BC's forests. What struck me the most about the evening, was that none of those 500 plus architects, designers, engineers and manufacturers that filled the ballroom would have been there if not for the timber harvesting contractors that toil to cut down and deliver over 90% of the timber in this province which then goes into those fantastic structures using various finished forest products.

It would seem that we are all part of a large team in the great effort to take a standing tree and turn it into everything from pulp, paper, lumber, plywood, OSB and beyond. Yet, I hear from too many, that while they may be part of the team, that it is in name only. After all, a team typically shares in its successes.

Commodity pricing of many forest products have been at beyond stellar levels—SPF 2x4s just recently were at an all-time high. Let me say that again, all-time high. In contrast, my membership has clearly expressed that they are not sharing in the prosperity of the forests they work within. And when contractors ask to do so, the major licensees just say no, as they do not want to get into a discussion that resembles a “zero-sum game.”

So, what is a “zero-sum game”? According to Wikipedia, “in game theory and economic theory, a zero-sum game is a mathematical representation of a situation in which each participant's gain or loss of utility is exactly balanced by the losses or gains of the utility of the other participants.” A zero-sum game assumes there is Pi (π) or profit, where you get a few slices and so do I. But if you want more of the pie, then I will get less.

Contractors, which have been leaving this sector out of frustration due to a

dramatic imbalance of weak profitability versus risk, are only naturally desiring some of that pie too, if only to just survive. If the prosperity of the public forest resource of this province needs to be shared far more equitability, doesn't that mean we need to play a zero-sum game to fix the imbalance?

Many are questioning the health of our forest industry because of this large gap in prosperity. Many of the “small guys” ranging the full spectrum from logger to independent manufacturers have told me something has got to change. And it's just not from within the industry that those observations are being made. The issues that the TLA has been harping about have now been clearly acknowledged by not one, but two consecutive Premiers of this province. Then Premier Christy Clark's announcement of the government's commitment to start the Contractor Sustainability Review, demonstrates that there is an issue that merits government investigation.

Then, at the TLA Convention just a few months ago, Premier John Horgan, made a speech appealing to the TLA members in the audience, that many later said to me was calling a spade a spade. Premier Horgan acknowledged, “it's a certainty in many communities that the relationship between the tenure holders [the majors] in the community has been broken and it's in all of our interest to make sure we re-establish that relationship in the days and weeks and months ahead.” And furthermore, in reference to what is generally today's forest policy, Premier Horgan said, “It's not working for communities and it's not working for the province. What we've seen is a concentration, particularly on the coast, that undermined that social licence that we all knew existed in British Columbia...”

So, are we playing a zero-sum game when it involves a public resource that includes the government as a player? The Contractor Sustainability Review will hopefully add a new dimension to

the game. But while the government might not want to pick winners and losers, the Minister of Forests will have to make decisions that will favour some and displease others to create meaningful change.

Levelling the playing field is one thing that government can do to help contractors. But there are many other issues that are affecting contractors and their communities that we would like to continue discussing with the Premier. There is a growing desperation in the competition for skilled workers. How many logging trucks in this province are sitting idle? We need the province's help here because this situation is only getting worse.

Other issues include more certainty on the land base for our working forest; a need to improve emergency response capabilities for our workers in remote locations (HEMS—sign the petition at Change.org); and some significant movement on the First Nations file.

One last issue, the wildfire review is something that many are watching. The TLA will be providing a submission to George Abbott and Chief Maureen Chapman regarding the Flooding and Wildfire Review that they are conducting that conveys contractor perspectives on the wildfire issue of both communities in the Cariboo and across the province.

Final note, I would like to give a heartfelt thank you to Brenda Martin who has left the TLA to pursue a new career opportunity. Brenda was the engine behind *Truck LoggerBC* magazine for the last 20 issues. Good luck Brenda!▲

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