

Making Forestry Work

By Doug Donaldson, Minister of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development

Photo: Courtesy of Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations, and Rural Development



Our government is committed to a sustainable economy that works for all British Columbians. I can't think of a more sustainable sector than forestry. In my time as Minister, I've been impressed with all those I've met who work in the sector, and their hard work and passion.

Forestry directly employs 57,000 people in over 140 communities in all regions of the province. For many communities, forestry is the main economic driver—contributing to the local tax base to fund community or recreation centres and in providing jobs for many families.

As Premier Horgan noted in his message, forestry is innovative and a quick adopter of modern technology; however, it still faces challenges—and one of those challenges—climate change—is one that we all face. Resilient forests can be a key factor in a long-term climate change strategy.

Unfortunately, the 2018 wildfire season was again record-breaking, with over 1.3 million hectares of land burned. This again highlighted the need to do more to help prevent wildfires, protect people, and mitigate potential damage. At the end of October we released our action plan to address the 108 recommendations brought forward by George Abbott and Chief Maureen Chapman

after their review of the 2017 wildfire and flood seasons.

In September, I was proud to announce the new \$50 million Community Resiliency Investment program. The program takes a holistic approach to wildfire risk reduction and fuel management treatments, and will consider fire prevention activities on provincial Crown land and private land—in addition to local government and reserve land. These actions will help keep British Columbians safe and protect homes, possessions, livestock and pets.

Wildfire risk reduction activities are also undertaken by the government-funded Forest Enhancement Society of B.C. To date, over \$163 million has been allocated for wildfire risk reduction, reforestation, forest rehabilitation, wildlife habitat restoration and raising awareness of the FireSmart program.

Our government believes that the 21st century holds bright promise for the forest industry, with new processes, products and markets. This is why over the last year, we have invested \$1 million in new and upgraded programs specifically in forestry at six public post-secondary institutions around the province. This includes new programs being piloted at North Island College in Campbell River, Vancouver Island University in Nanaimo, and a new program at University of British Columbia for a new undergraduate bio-economy degree.

The San Group in Port Alberni has announced it plans to invest up to \$70 million in a new sawmill and recently Paper Excellence announced its intent to acquire Catalyst Paper, which includes mills in Crofton, Port Alberni and Powell River. These investments indicate confidence in the forest sector.

However, we need to do more to ensure that the benefits generated by forestry activity are more equitably shared with all forest sector participants. That's why the Premier has tasked me with the Coast Forest Revitalization Initiative. I hosted meetings with coastal forest stakeholders in June and again in September. Ministry staff have been reviewing the over 200 ideas received.

We're committed to working with First Nations, communities, licensees, contractors, and labour to strengthen the sector and process more logs in B.C. to support B.C. jobs. We will have more to say about this in the new year.

And, as I write this, I'm about to lead my second trade mission to Asia. It will be the largest-ever, and in addition to some TLA member companies, we'll be joined by a larger number of First Nations than ever before. While we continue to diversify our wood products beyond 2x4s to pellets, cross-laminated timber, and everything in between we also need to grow Asian markets and reduce our reliance on the U.S. South Korea is a growing market as it has realized the benefits of wood construction in areas prone to earthquake. Japan, a valued customer for over 40 years, continues to appreciate the high-quality, high-value products from the Coast. China has come to recognize the environmental benefits of building with wood and is interested in wood construction to help reduce its greenhouse gas emissions. I look forward to being able to report out on a successful mission.

Last but not least, I want to thank everyone for their hard work on the Logging Contractor Sustainability Review. I understand from Dan Miller that you had many thoughtful conversations and that there was lots of collaboration between the parties. I also want to thank George Abbott and Circle Square Solutions for their initial work that Dan was able to build from. Final recommendations came to me at the end of the year, and I look forward to speaking to this more at your convention on January 18.

While there are some challenges, I am confident that if we all work together, we can “make forestry work.”