

CHANGES TO THE INDUSTRY — THE NEW NORMAL



The year 2018 will go down as one of the most devastating fire seasons the province has experienced. This year came on the heels of the 2017 fire season that caused the evacuation of some 65,000 people (primarily in the Southern Interior and Cariboo regions), burned over a million square kilometres of forest land, and amassed direct firefighting costs of close to \$600 million. We've heard the phrase "the new normal" from people in the industry and throughout the world who are experiencing the global effects of climate change. This is being coupled with increases in the frequency and intensity of floods and landslides.

The new normal is where we see Northwest rivers—now considered to be in the fifth year of a drought—where the streams and creeks are all but dried up, the side rivers to the main river systems resemble creeks, and the main stems of rivers such as Skeena, Nass and Nechako look like small rivers, flowing at 30 per cent of their normal volume for this time of year.

In 2017, the Northwest experienced flooding and slides that cut off access to valleys such as the Copper River and Clore Valley, significant operating areas for both regional licensees and other users such as BC Hydro, Pacific Northern Gas and visiting tourists. One year later and millions of dollars spent, access is not yet restored.

In 2018, the hardest hit area of the province from wildfires was the Northwest, where communities were evacuated, property values lost and vast areas of forest burned. The impact to communities, families and people who work there cannot be understated: it was comparable to a war.

Challenges that lie outside the industry's direct control—the loss of mature and second-growth forests through fire, coupled with 25 years of mountain pine beetle attack and amid preparations for

the impacts of a spruce bark beetle infestation—will continue to challenge an industry that has already seen the impacts of reductions in timber supply. Changes will need to be made in how we manage our forests in terms of reintroducing fire to abate and modify forest fuels, creating large landscape fuel breaks that alter fire behaviour, fire-smarting our communities, and bringing industry back into the fire prevention and suppression business as full, contributing partners. The harvesting contractor force has the local knowledge, equipment and workforce to do this work in spades.

In addition, we will need to revisit how we design and maintain our road and bridge networks so that the infrastructure is safeguarded against the imminent floods and slides we can expect from this new normal. We will need to address other challenges to our industry as well, such as retaining a financially healthy contractor force, recruiting and competing for new workers to create an environment in which businesses want to invest and people want to enter the forest industry, and reducing process-orientated red tape for cutting authorities.

The NWLA, along with the TLA and ILA, have been working for a number of years to convince government and forest licensees that a financially healthy contractor force is paramount to the success of the industry as a whole—one that has the opportunity to make a fair rate of return on investment, recapitalize on equipment to promote innovation and competitiveness, provide training and development to new workers, and be a positive contributor to our communities and the province.

The government-commissioned Contractor Sustainability Review recognized the state of the harvesting sector and the immediate need for change. Government representatives, along with the appointed facilitator, Dan Miller, are work-

ing hard to bring the harvesting sector and forest licensees together to work on the changes necessary and critical to the future of the industry.

The province has a vested interest in the sustainability of the industry, and an obligation to all communities in which forest licensees have been granted tenure on Crown lands, and the authority to harvest trees, to ensure that the harvesting sector that supplies the industry is treated fairly in its financial dealings. This obligation by government will be ongoing as long as the right to harvest on Crown land is in the control of a few. The NWLA, TLA and ILA will continue to commit significant resources to promoting this change.

Given the increasing risk of wildfire, flood and landslide events, the industry will continue to need to adapt to change by understanding the challenge of this new normal and then getting out in front of it. To be successful in all aspects of our business, we will need to view that change as just that: *normal*.▲

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