



## A TLA PERSPECTIVE: MORE ON ADDRESSING THE FOREST INDUSTRY LABOUR SHORTAGE

As predicted, the timber harvesting sector is experiencing an acute labour shortage crisis. For the past decade, employers and forest industry stakeholders have increasingly been challenged to find well-trained, competent people to meet their staffing needs.

An aging population and retirement-related turnover are the key factors supporting projected job vacancies over the next decade and is expected to increase in forestry and logging occupations in BC. While these vacancies are projected for the future, the industry is already experiencing this shortage now.

This issue is compounded by the fact that fewer young people are joining the forest industry as a career. The logging sector is particularly vulnerable to this trend given its physical nature and the remote and often seasonal or contract-based aspects of the work.

According to WorkBC's latest 2018-2028 *BC Labour Market Outlook Report*, over the next decade 2,000 logging-related jobs will need to be replaced mainly due to retirements. Unfortunately, the situation for timber harvesting contractors is not entirely unique. By comparison, the report indicates healthcare and social assistance as the top sector for expansion (new demand) and replacements, which forecasts 67,900 openings and a daunting 80,500 jobs that need to be filled due to attrition.

For the logging sector, WorkBC predicts that it is not going to grow over the next decade, which is accurate, at least in terms of allowable annual cut trends. We will not be harvesting as much in the BC interior, and at best a stable harvest trend for the coast, which equates to less employment.

So only 2,000 jobs in logging compared to 148,400 jobs in healthcare. Why should government care about logging jobs? There is one obvious distinction between these two sectors. Healthcare workers are essentially employed directly by the province and government; whereas, logging is one of the very few sectors that actually pays for itself, generates financial support for communities, and is one of the single largest sectors that generates non-taxpayer generated income (i.e., not personal income tax and property tax) for our government.

We believe exposure to understanding the industry and generating interest in logging at an early age is one way to address future labour needs. While the courses already offered in the high school curriculum such as science, biology, physics and math

already provide exposure to students' interest in potential careers in health-care and social assistance, logging-related courses may also generate similar interest to those who possess the required unique skillset.

## In response to this dilemma, in 2016 the Truck Loggers Association (TLA) proposed a logging contractor training tax credit to ease the financial burden of on-the-job training for contractors.

The forest industry and all of its related associations already make a substantial contribution to raising awareness to attract jobs. For example, the TLA has invested in numerous high school programs, provides funding through its Forestry Education Fund, and awards scholarships to post-secondary forestry students at BCIT, VIU and UBC; we help support members seeking to obtain the training for Level 3 First Aid certification, coastal log scaling exams and heavy-duty mechanics; we sponsor programs such as Festival of Forestry and Logger Sports, and support the BC Forest Discovery Centre.

Despite our collective efforts, it is not enough. We recommend building an elementary and high school program that teaches students about natural resources and how we manage them in a sustainable manner. The government, as the main shareholder and beneficiary of the timber resource (and other natural resources), needs to take a more active role in educating the population about the industries that provide for all of us.

Additionally, the most common pathway for worker training in the logging sector is through on-the-job work experience and workplace knowledge, which is passed down from more experienced, senior workers who tend to be the most productive on the crew. Unfortunately, taking top workers away from production to pass on valuable knowledge to the next generation reduces production and profitability. At a time when contractors are struggling to remain sustainable, this creates a disincentive to make training the next cohort of workers a priority. As a consequence,

equipment including trucks are now sitting idle as contractors are left with no choice but to reduce their operations if they can't find a skilled worker.

Given that logging involves heavy machinery unique to forestry, a dangerous

natural environment in a competitive business with razor thin or non-existent margins, the solution to the training problem is about more than simply sending new entrants to a school. Logging is all about learning on the job, not in a post-secondary classroom.

In response to this dilemma, in 2016 the Truck Loggers Association (TLA) proposed a logging contractor training tax credit to ease the financial burden of on-the-job training for contractors. This approach would help ensure the next generation of workers acquires the necessary knowledge to be productive and safe, before the know-how is lost to retirement.

There is overwhelming wide support from the TLA's 500-member companies for this type of training support. Anticipated benefits of this approach include incentivizing employers to free up resources for targeted skills training and encouraging increased hiring of younger trainees into the sector.

This approach to ensuring proper on-the-ground, industry specific training for new recruits is not new to this province and given the significant economic impact that the forest industry has on the province and especially in BC's rural and First Nations communities, it should be a no-brainer.

The current government recognizes the need to recruit and train for the forest industry. In the Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Training Melanie Mark's mandate letter, she is specifically tasked with "developing more degree and certificate programs to increase the number of skilled workers in BC's forestry sector, focusing on

growing innovation and the manufactured wood products sector." While positive, funding for existing programs are lacking and more degree and certificate programs are not a substitute for on-the-ground training.

The TLA is asking the government to review the work done thus far on this creative idea to resolve a major challenge for our industry and could become a template for similar programs across Canada. Logging contractors are the economic backbone of rural communities across the province. Talk to your mayor. Talk to your local MLA. Help them understand the need for support to ensure BC's forest industry has the manpower to address growing markets while at the same time supporting rural communities.

The forest industry labour shortage is a collective responsibility, one that the government as the owner and beneficiary of the resource needs to support.▲

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