

WAITING FOR PROVINCIAL PERMITS



The loggers and road builders of the Northwest are a vital contributor to the resource development that is happening here in the north. In addition to the forestry industry, the harvesting sector contractor force provides services as the first step in developing any project by removing and clearing trees for industrial and infrastructure development.

The economic engine of the Province requires that permits are issued in a timely manner so that the development of resources occurs, and that the revenue is provided back to the crown from those activities. How many times have we heard about delays in a project due to permits not being issued? The delays can be for multiple reasons that range from incomplete submissions from submitting proponents, First Nations consultation processes, and bureaucratic processes. The most common reason heard from government personnel is that the staff levels of those who process and issue permits are under-resourced. There is not enough time in a day to process what needs to be done.

This is troubling and is a drain on industries' and even local government regional districts' and municipalities' ability to commence projects.

If we take timber harvesting as an example, the recently delivered log cost analysis for our region puts the average cost to deliver logs to market at \$85.00 per cubic metre. For the average 15,000 cubic metre cutblock, that equates to \$1.275 million in economic activity for our communities and the Province. The government instantly has revenue coming back in the form of corporate, personal and excise taxes.

If there is a 20 per cent rate of return to the government on that economic activity, that's \$255,000. The money is even greater when you consider the additional opportunity of further economic activity that those trees provide in the form of

wood manufacturing, or the initiation of development projects such as LNG.

What a great business model the government has: issue the regulatory permits, sit back and watch the money roll in. That in itself, should motivate the most hardened of all bureaucrats.

The Contractor Sustainability Review identified permitting as an Achilles heel to the profitability of our members. We need this fixed where loggers and road builders, forest licensees and communities ... are not "waiting for permits" but going to work.

It is befuddling why the provincial government creates self-induced layers for permit submissions, thus creating more work for an understaffed workforce. By example, a Licence of Occupation tenure for an activity such as industrial development on crown land, also requires a parallel permitting process for an Occupant Licence to Cut permit. If the tenure has trees on the land and the purpose of the tenure is to develop that land, it is obvious that those trees will need to be cut and that there should not be two parallel permit submissions. There are many more examples of where efficiencies can be realized in the permitting processes, thus freeing up staff time to focus on getting more permits out the door.

To do what we need to do in a time when many industries and services are experiencing worker shortages, let's not create unnecessary work, slowing up development and draining the ability to be efficient and profitable for harvesting contractors and at the same time hindering economic activity.

How do we fix what is broken?

First of all, the permitting process needs to be streamlined to reduce redundancies. The government has recognized the system needs to be fixed and has been working (unfortunately independently)

on this process for over two years without results.

Secondly, there is a need to properly resource tenures personnel so that surges in permit submission are recognized, and staff are reallocated to deal with those surges.

No permits should be sitting on a desk for longer than a day more than what is needed. Much like a wildfire demands action be taken, there needs to be recognition that permits are important and that they need to be processed as quickly as possible. This can be done by paying employees overtime to process permits, reallocating current staff priorities, hiring more people, or better yet, have the private sector prepare the permits in a format that is shelf ready for the issuing authority to sign.

The Contractor Sustainability Review identified permitting as an Achilles heel to the profitability of our members. It is also affecting the full potential of the province's economic engine. We need this fixed where loggers and road builders, forest licensees and communities, (after all, it is all about communities) are not "waiting for permits" but going to work. 🌲

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