



## WE NEED BETTER CONTROL OF OUR DESTINY

It is with great frustration that as I write this in mid-September I am once again, like my fellow contractors, going through yet another significant downturn in the Province's forestry industry. Somehow, we endure as timber harvesting contractors, but there are always casualties in times like these.

In the last week alone, there have been headlines about Interfor announcing the closure of their Hammond sawmill in Maple Ridge affecting 147 direct sawmill workers, Teal-Jones indefinitely halting Coastal logging operations impacting 300 contractors and their workers, and another 500 Teal-Jones workers at their sawmills once logs run out, and Tolko indefinitely curtailing their Kelowna sawmill, affecting 127 sawmill workers. And then there's the 400+ workers impacted in MacKenzie earlier this summer at Conifex and Canfor; and the list goes on.

The provincial government estimates approximately 2,547 workers in 13 Interior communities have been impacted by indefinite curtailments or shift reductions, 497 workers in three Interior communities have been impacted by permanent closures, and 728 more are experiencing some impact resulting from temporary curtailments.

It's additionally frustrating to read headlines about a mill closure but there's very little recognition of some 3,000 workers and contractors who are caught between the United Steelworkers and Western Forest Products labour conflict going into its third month. Why hasn't that made the headlines?

It's in times like these when the advocacy efforts of the TLA is more important than ever. Over the past summer, we have also been busier than ever lobbying government on behalf of our members. We are doing all we can to identify and raise issues with all levels

of government—mayors, MLAs, ministers and the Premier, to ensure we have a voice at every table and they hear our concerns. As always, I get asked how will the TLA help?

The TLA Board has known and communicated for years that contractor sustainability needs to be addressed well before the sector enters into conditions such as we see today. If you are not working, and there are no options because everyone else is not harvesting, sustainable rates don't matter. I hope that government leaders finally get this message as I am sure we will be witnessing financial hardship soon enough.

Over the summer, we continued to meet with other forestry associations and government about the Contractor Sustainability Review to fight for changes to Bill 13. I know many of you are wondering when are you going to see changes on the ground; I am as equally frustrated, it's been a lengthy, arduous task with slow results, but the TLA will persist to ensure our voice is heard so contractors will have a future that is better than today. I can assure you government is committed to making changes but it's the details that take time to negotiate between the licensees and contractors.

In June, the TLA launched a *Forestry Equipment Hourly Rates* publication in partnership with TimberTracks™, an invaluable tool for contractors to create awareness about equipment rates. How many times have you had to negotiate the rate of a yarder with someone that has never owned or operated one? The new publication was initiated by the TLA to help its members and their employers know what their equipment is actually worth for hourly charge out.

BC Wildfire Service has embraced and used these reference rates for contractors' equipment. For the industry,

if both negotiating parties are truly committed to a viable supply chain, and contractors are truly part of the team, then licensees should be using this information as well.

In hindsight, times were good over the last few years because at least most of us were working. The TLA, along with the other associations, recognized that good times don't last forever, and sooner or later, some licensees, including timber sale licences, become insolvent. Most definitely we are in such a period right now where I wouldn't be surprised if some licensees are not able to pay their contractors. It is for this reason the TLA lobbied hard to see the creation of the *Forestry Service Providers Protection Fund*, which over successive years, has approximately \$7 million available for unpaid contractors to apply for. Be sure to keep on your invoicing because in times like this, paper work is very necessary.

As a contractor, like many others, I know having no revenue is very hard. What I can also see is the damage being done to the industry's image. Workers need to pay mortgages. If we can't offer our employees steady work due to strikes or layoffs, we won't be able to attract and retain them. This must change. We need to have better control of our destiny. The TLA is absolutely committed to working tirelessly to bring contractors the fair policies they deserve and do what we can to ensure this downturn does not drastically impact the future of this industry.▲

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