



IMPACT OF PROPOSED CHANGE TO FOREST UTILIZATION

Lately, a topic of great interest has been the Fibre Recovery Zones that were implemented on the BC Coast early in 2019, increasing the amount of wood fibre that is removed from harvested areas in the Interior. Reducing wood waste in cutblocks and maximizing volume recovery sound like attractive concepts, but what is the cost of these initiatives and who will be footing the bill?

In January 1966, government introduced Close Utilization to the industry and it constituted “logging all wood between a 30 cm high stump and a 10 cm diameter top in all trees with a 17.5 cm diameter breast height and larger.” Starting as a voluntary policy in certain areas of BC, Close Utilization was designed to reduce waste in the forest and provide fibre for nearby pulp mills. After its initial implementation in the mid-60s, the Forest Service noted, “all districts are reporting an upsurge in the shipment of chips to pulp mills, which in turn results from an increase in the number of sawmills with barkers and chippers.”

More than 50 years later, the utilization standards remain relatively unchanged, but with the ongoing demand for more fibre for pulp mills, and the desire to reduce waste in the forest, changes in utilization is touted as a solution to the problem of roadside waste piles.

In the summer and fall of 2019, one of the topics discussed at the Interior Forest Sector Renewal workshops was manufacturing capacity and fibre utilization. Changes to fibre utilization and the idea of maximizing the fibre potential from forested stands by harvesting and hauling whole trees is not a new concept.

Cutting stems to a 20 cm high stump and a 5 cm top was proposed as well as skidding the whole tree to roadside, loading and ‘off-highway’ hauling the whole tree to a processing yard or mill, then processing the tree into lengths for sawmill use while saving the remaining long-butts, branches, hog-fuel, etc. for

other users such as pulp mills. Adoption of such a proposal would change the way forestry is done in the Interior, and while there are many advantages, there are disadvantages as well.

Advantages:

- Higher utilization: Increasing utilization means getting the most economic value out of a harvested tree. The increased volume coming from blocks would provide biomass consumers with opportunities to increase their supply; and in some cases, may potentially allow for an Annual Allowable Cut uplift in areas where pulp mills operate.
- Increased supply: While the merchantable supply of fibre to the sawmilling industry will not effectively change, the supply of lower grade fibre to downstream consumers of sawmill by-products will improve. With the ongoing closure of sawmills, the demand for biomass continues to increase. By maximizing the fibre utilization from stands harvested in the field, this demand for biomass can be alleviated by hauling undersized and less desirable stems.
- Less waste: If whole trees were utilized, the excess waste that would normally be burned in large waste piles would decrease dramatically. The benefits would include less time and labour for piling the waste and burning it, ‘cleaner’ areas for post-harvest activities, and less CO₂ released into the atmosphere.
- More employment: Increasing the utilization standards in a cutblock would result in an increase of the overall volume that is hauled. More truck loads would be required to deliver this extra volume since whole, undersized and low-grade trees that do not meet mill quality specifications would be added to the mix. This increase in workload would result in higher employment

opportunities for logging and chip truck drivers.

Disadvantages:

- Harvesting costs: To change the way forest harvesting and hauling practices are done in an entire industry will require many new innovations and adaptations, and change doesn’t come cheap. Investment in new equipment, equipment modifications and associated training that would enable contractors to meet new harvesting standards is a cost that would have to be made up front.
- Log hauling costs: Whole-tree hauling would require contractors to invest in revised trailer configurations, and anyone hauling ‘cut-to-length’ trees would have to change their operating procedures; also, a significant cost up front.

As much of the Interior logging industry moves from harvesting dead pine stands to greener wood, the amount of waste left behind in cutblocks has been diminishing. However, we are a long way from the ‘zero-waste’ strategies some European countries employ. There are many benefits to changing, but investment is required up front for changes to machinery, safety and training.

Demanding truck logging and harvesting contractors to make these changes on their own will create an environment of cut-throat competition amongst themselves, and to avoid this, government- and licensee-funded initiatives must be implemented to ensure the transition is made smoothly. While changing utilization standards may increase available wood volume, tax-break incentives, low-interest loans, training initiatives, and long-term contracts should be provided to ensure contractors are not stuck paying for it.▲

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