

THE FUTURE OF FORESTRY IS BRIGHT

By Doug Donaldson, Minister of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development

Photo courtesy of Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations, and Rural Development



I don't need to tell the TLA, ILA or NWLA members about the importance of our forests and the forest industry in British Columbia. You already know that our sustainable, renewable industry supports 65,000 direct jobs—and many more indirect jobs—in 140 communities in every corner of this beautiful province. You know that healthy forests support climate change mitigation and that our forests are integral to a whole host of recreational, cultural and spiritual activities.

It's no secret that the industry has faced challenges, and our government is working with industry associations, First Nations, local governments, labour organizations and others to transform the sector, so that it will continue to support families and communities for generations to come. The discussions with your associations' executives have been incredibly informative and useful as we have embarked on this work.

Had this work been done years ago, when it was apparent that timber supplies would decline because of the end

of the beetle-killed stands, we believe the industry would be in a better position now. But our government is committed to making real long-term changes to support this foundational industry.

Last April, Premier John Horgan announced the launch of a regionally driven renewal of the province's Interior forest industry, aimed at developing a competitive, sustainable future for forest companies, workers and communities.

Through the summer and fall of 2019, Parliamentary Secretary Ravi Kahlon and I travelled to communities throughout the Interior, meeting with local government officials, mill owners/operators, workers and First Nations. We worked with them to come up with ways to put supports in place for forestry workers impacted by mill closures in the Interior. As a result, we announced a \$69 million support package to support workers, their families and communities while the industry goes through this transition.

A healthy forest sector needs healthy forests. With that in mind, we made a series of amendments to the *Forest and Range Practices Act* (FRPA) last spring in order to strengthen government oversight of the forest sector and help restore public trust in how our forests and rangelands are managed. These changes will help improve forest management across the landscape, given ongoing changes to land uses, needs and interests of Indigenous communities and climate change.

We also amended the *Forest Act* to add a public interest test to tenure transfers or change of control in forest licences. Our government brought in these changes so that the needs of Indigenous Nations, workers and communities would have to be considered before a transfer would be approved.

Many will remember the valley-by-valley battle over old growth in decades past. Those emotional arguments were

extremely disruptive to the sector and don't support our goal of striking a balance between protecting old-growth trees and protecting jobs and the economy. The two-person panel of Garry Merkel and Al Gorley have been engaging with local and Indigenous communities, the forest, tourism and recreation industries, experts, stakeholders and British Columbians on the future of old-growth management in BC.

Our government remains focused on this industry and on working with you to build a better future for it. That's why the ministry's budget will increase in 2020/21 by \$28.5 million to over \$843 million, an increase of 3.5 per cent over the previous fiscal year. This reflects just the latest investments this government is making in the forest industry. For example, there is now \$13 million available over the next three years to support a new forest economy based on a collaborative and innovative forest sector.

Budget 2020 also builds on our success at supporting forestry workers with funding for the Coast Forestry Revitalization increased from \$10 million to \$14 million over four years. This combined funding of \$27 million compliments the \$69 million we announced last year to make sure that workers and their families have the supports and services they need.

Despite the challenges, the future of forestry is bright. We have healthy forests which produce strong products, and the expertise deployed by people in our industry is world-leading. I want to thank the TLA, ILA and NWLA for their passionate leadership and commitment to building a strong, sustainable industry. I look forward too many more years of working together as we support the sector and the British Columbians who rely on it.▲