



INTENSIVE SILVICULTURE TO IMPROVE TIMBER QUALITY FOR THE FUTURE

An enduring topic of consideration by forest management specialists, which has been resurrected in recent months, is whether or not the BC forest industry has been managing Crown forest lands to maximize their future commercial value. BC is known worldwide for providing high-quality lumber and other forest products. As the BC forest industry transitions toward harvesting more second-growth timber, the question remains, is the quality of these second-growth stands going to achieve the high standards that our consumers expect?

With this question in mind, the issue of forest tenure and the argument supporting a transition from volume-based tenure to area-based tenure was discussed at length during the Interior Forest Sector Renewal meetings that occurred in the fall of 2019. One argument supporting a transition to area-based tenure would be to motivate an increase in intensive silviculture within forest plantations that are beyond the free-to-grow stage. Intensive activities that maximize economic value from managed stands would secure BC's reputation of providing high-quality forest products to the world. But will the legislation ever be passed to support this strategy?

With the recent downturn in the forest sector provincially caused by mill closures, curtailments, reduced allowable annual cut, low lumber prices, high stumpage, and the longest worker strike in coastal forest history, the resulting loss of employment among forestry workers in BC has been massive. When times are bad, opportunities can be created to provide alternate forms of work for those who are suffering most from the industry downturn. Provincial and federal worker assistance programs can be directed toward intensive silvicultural initiatives and related research projects to keep forestry

workers active in the industry, and to improve the quality of our second-growth stands for future benefits.

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In January, during the TLA's Conference + Trade Show in Vancouver, Dominik Roeser from the UBC Faculty of Forestry discussed the benefits of commercial thinning during his session titled, "Making the Most of Timber Supply." Roeser iterated the need for "long-term thinking" by forestry leaders to increase the value of a stand by utilizing good silvicultural practices. Suggestions such as strategic stand selection, increased planting densities to as much as 2200 trees/hectare, commercial and pre-commercial thinning and pruning strategies would help ensure our timber quality remains at a high level. However, Roeser also noted that these activities come at a price. Planting at higher densities costs money, and in best case scenarios, licensees break even on the cost of commercial thinning. To alleviate these economic concerns, government initiatives, strategies and funding could be implemented to help licensees achieve these goals.

Funding should not only be provided provincially, but federally as well. With increasing global concerns directed toward climate change, politicians have begun to acknowledge how some forest management practices can be used to sequester carbon. Along this vein, in September 2019, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau made an election promise to plant two billion trees in the next 10 years; and in January 2020, President Donald Trump also jumped on board announcing at the World Economic Forum that the US

would join the one trillion tree initiative. These announcements are good news for the forest industry in BC. If managed

stands can capture carbon in wood products for centuries to come, then federal funding could be directed toward stand management as part of Canada's climate change obligations.

So, the potential exists to ensure the quality of BC's forests for future generations, the government just needs to make the changes in legislation, provide the programs and direct the funding to make it possible.

With the state of BC's forest industry still reeling from economic downturns, the opportunity exists for government to make significant changes to the way forestry is done in BC. With the support of the rest of Canada and the global community, revisions can be made to legislation and the *Forest and Range Practices Act*, stocking standards can be updated, and new jobs can be created to help contractors and mill workers that are now suffering the industry downturn. The time is ripe for change, but does our current government have the political will and vision to make that change?▲

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