

GRASSROOTS LOGGERS KEEP PLUGGING ALONG



In the midst of uncertainty due to the COVID-19 pandemic and falling log export markets, the Northwest forest industry continues to plug along. It has never reached its full potential since the economic meltdown of Skeena Cellulose Inc. in 2001 and the shuttering of its sister ships, West Fraser Timber sawmill in 2007 and Eurocan Pulp & Paper in 2010. The forest industry in our region was controlled by a few players and when the end came, it came hard, affecting our members, and many businesses and communities in the region.

What came out of the ashes of the meltdown was a redistribution of the parts. Tenure was redistributed to community forests, First Nation licensees, small forest companies, BC Timber Sales and private ownership of the domestic sawmilling industry. This redistribution of forest tenures was a form of forced tenure reform. The result for us was a more diverse, adaptive and responsive industry that has the ability to react to changing log and lumber markets, technologies, and the opportunity to diversify the range of products by re-tooling the domestic processing sector into value-added and specialty products.

The Northwest is blessed with a vibrant and healthy forest land base that provides a diversity of tree species, ages and quality that are suitable for numerous markets and products. We have a stable harvest sector that has proven to be innovative and adaptive over the last two decades to supply logs to domestic and international markets; getting the right log to the right place. Domestic wood products producers have also been aggressive and innovative in developing or finding markets that provide a premium price. The standard 2x4 lumber market is very competitive and cannot be our only one-trick pony if we are to survive.

Domestic sawmills are producing products such as cants and adding value into products such as prefab bridge panels, drill pads, docks, fence panels,

instrument blanks, piano sound boards, finishing mouldings, house siding and tongue-and-groove flooring, just to name

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only a few. With market development comes new investments such as Kitwanga Forest Products' recent upgrade to a small-log line in its sawmill; and Skeena Sawmill's new pellet plant—a planned upgrade to their head rig that is well under way and their work to install a new small-log line. This has been planned for a few years, with the line being purchased and plans to install once capital funding is in place to complete the work. Recently, we've seen the opening of Touch Wood Forest Products, a new, small mill that produces high-end slabs up to six-feet wide for the European market, as well as piano sound boards, which is a niche and lucrative market.

This is a time when our industry has stabilized the best we can, in an industry that is never static. The people who live and work in the region are the reason why. They are the ones who are innovative, take chances and lay it on the line in an effort to ensure the profitability and the economic stability of our communities.

The NWLA has and will continue to engage government on the gaps and roadblocks that are preventing contractors from being successful in this industry and identify what is required for the industry to continue to be a main contributor to the province's economy. Government has looked at cost drivers, contractor sustainability, securing certainty of the working forest land base and streamlining bureaucratic processes; but nothing has happened. We need leaders in government to finally make the rubber hit the road and make decisions. If we want to have all the benefits of a healthy forest industry to provide for the tax base and community stability, then we need to

start ticking some boxes. A lesson can be learned from the federal and provincial government leaders in their response to

the COVID-19 pandemic and their bold and historic decisions that are helping us through this crisis.

The NWLA, along with our TLA and ILA partners, have been working collaboratively to impress upon government leaders that the status quo can change, and fundamental and structural change is possible. We ask that the elected leaders proactively engage with the associations that represent the grassroots of the industry.

Let us all take some lessons from those in communities who are innovative, know the industry, go to work every day and make decisions that work; the people and businesses who contribute to the continued prosperity of the province. Let's get to work on the fundamental changes needed to improve the prosperity and future of the industry. Let's get to work with the people that make up the grassroots of the industry.▲

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