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Spring 2021

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# FROM THE EDITORIAL BOARD DESK...

Welcome to the Spring 2021 issue of *Truck LoggerBC* magazine.

In this issue, Business Matters provides an overview of the federal and provincial funding programs to support businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic; the Safety Report reminds everyone about the importance of MSI risk assessments; and the Market Report provides an update on the current wild lumber super-cycle.

Newly appointed Minister Conroy delivers a message about government's plans to update and modernize the forestry sector, and vision for a "21<sup>st</sup> century forestry sector that will be a mix of large industry and independent manufacturers producing a diverse mix of conventional and innovative products and selling them at home and to all four corners of the globe."

As TLA members impatiently await the promised changes to the Timber Harvesting Contract & Subcontract Regulation to be implemented—which have sat with government for more than a year—the article, "Why the New CSR Regulations Must Work," reiterates how costly arbitration still continues today.

The article, "The Social and Economic Value of Old-Growth Logging," highlights several mayors' and First Nations leaders' perspectives on the devastating socio-economic impact the elimination of old-growth logging would have on their communities.

The "Are BC Mills Poised for Long-Term Success?" article demonstrates that BC mills are not as competitive as those

in Alberta and Saskatchewan, and that the focus for change should be on BC forest policy to reduce log-related costs.

For many years, the TLA has been lobbying to fill the significant gap in helicopter emergency medical services (HEMS) in remote areas. However, recent circumstances and discussions have been growing the interest in communities across BC. The article, "A Serious Gap in Emergency Medical Services," reignites our plea to save forestry workers' lives.

*Truck LoggerBC* magazine exists to reflect the issues facing the industry, bring awareness to government, and provide readers with current information on BC's forest industry. Without the support of our advertisers, we wouldn't be able to continue to share our industry's perspective on the many important issues we face. Once again, we would like to express our appreciation to the advertisers who have continued to support our magazine and the TLA during these challenging times.

As we begin to see a glimpse of possible change in the coming months with easing public health restrictions, I hope everyone continues to stay safe and healthy. As always, I trust you will find this issue insightful and informative. Please share your feedback or comments with our Director of Communications Jennifer Kramer by email at [jennifer@tla.ca](mailto:jennifer@tla.ca). 🌲

Sig Kemmler  
Editorial Board Chair



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## WHEN WILL WE HAVE CERTAINTY AND CONFIDENCE?



Spring is arriving and hopefully the snowy season is behind us on the Coast and contractors in the Interior can start preparing for their breakup period. One thing we all have in common is the hope that the world we work and live in will approach some level of normality towards the end of summer.

However, I fear that normal for our working environment may be awhile off—if ever. There is so much uncertainty with government making nation-to-nation agreements that will profoundly affect contractors and their employees, record lumber prices affecting stumpage, and decisions still to come around the Old Growth Strategic Review.

As always, the TLA is looking to government to create certainty on the land base so industry knows where it stands. Big (licensees and mill owners) and small (contractors, suppliers, and municipalities) businesses alike will not risk investment on an uncertain land base or business climate. This needs to be the goal in British Columbia. Confidence is not created when we have tree farm licences with up to 50 per cent undercuts, new and unclear policies around fibre recovery zones, and land use policies on many horizons that have yet to undergo social and economic reviews. Undercuts need to be made available to the many stakeholders; policies must be clear and not create a climate of waiting for the right timing; and land use policies need to be transparent.

As if that is not enough to cause uncertainty for contractors, the anti-everything crowds have all resource industries in their sights and are pushing hard to stop, it seems, everything. It is incredibly frustrating to see leading news outlets giving time to entirely “not news”. This of course is their right, as it is others’ right to push back with factual science-based information. I encourage everyone—contractors, employees, spouses, family, and everyone you know—to share their knowledge of the forest harvesting and wood products

sector and have a voice. Write letters to the editor of your local newspaper, take to social media and share the great posts put out by the TLA, Council of Forest Industries, Association of BC Forest Professionals, and others. It would be a huge help if the average British Columbian had a better understanding of how well our forests are managed and what that means to communities, ecosystems and economies across the province. Please share your story.

**I encourage everyone—contractors, employees, spouses, family, and everyone you know—to share their knowledge of the forest harvesting and wood products sector and have a voice.**

On this subject, I am proud to be an owner in a forest harvesting company, live in a predominantly forestry driven community, and serve as president of the Truck Loggers Association. I am proud that resource industries can continue to support the province during a pandemic, and it is refreshing to hear Minister Conroy speak in glowing terms about the sector’s ability to adapt and persevere for the better good of the whole province—now that’s “real news”!

The TLA has restructured some of its committees, and I want to thank those who give their time to sit on them and provide their valuable insight and input. Committee work is not a huge time commitment for someone who wants to be involved, and it is key to much of the work we do at the association. If you have an interest in a specific committee, please reach out to a director or to Bob Brash.

One of the ongoing high priorities of the Safety and Training Committee is helicopter emergency medical services and timely evacuation. The TLA has been advocating this need for at least 20 years, and we believe it is well past time for a 21st century solution to emergency evacuation and transfer of

injured workers. It is becoming more obvious that this is not only a forest industry issue. It’s infuriating to see that a helicopter can land quickly at a car accident in the lower mainland, but we have to wait several hours in a cutblock, or a fish farm, or a remote community, all situated many hours away, where a critically injured person is at least two separate emergency vehicle trips away from a hospital.

When a person is airlifted, they are

critical enough to need a higher level of care and should be heading to the facility best suited to their treatment. This is a healthcare issue across the province, and the solution needs to be collaborative. Rural communities, industry, volunteer organizations like search and rescue, can all come together to help create a solution, but no one organization is strong enough on its own. Government needs to be involved to anchor the process and help get a program established. Transportation of the critically ill or injured is everyone’s issue, and a patchwork of responders cobbled together by government or industry is just not good enough in 2021.

Finally, I’d like to welcome Jeff Cutforth from Stella-Jones Inc. (Kanak Creek Pole) as our newest director on the TLA board. We value your commitment to our industry and look forward to your input on the issues that affect all of our members.▲

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## THE CONTRADICTION OF UNCERTAINTY AND INVESTMENT

We are certainly living in a time when many groups tackling the important issues of the day do it through whatever tricks and stunts the world of traditional and social media offers. The latest stunt being some ENGOs “failing report card” on the government’s handling of the old-growth logging issue. Cute, but not really constructive. These days call upon all of us to take a long hard look at where we want BC’s forest sector and economy to head. But first, some fundamental contradictions have to be tackled head on. For some, there seems to be a false sense of reality that the current state of our forestry sector is just fine. Unfortunately, those of us in the business know very well that our reality is full of uncertainty and is stifling BC’s investment climate.

We’ve often commented on (and will continue to do so) the need to protect and enhance BC’s working forests. Without such assurances, any new business will be hard pressed to make major investments in technology and productivity. And, if the associated legislative and regulatory environment remains unnecessarily cumbersome and cost prohibitive, this will have a decidedly stifling affect. If the cost structure of your industry is out of alignment with your global competitors, would you put your dollars there? As you will read in this issue, BC is not competitive, even within Canada. More specific to TLA members’ interests, when can we expect to see the definitive completion of the Contractor Sustainability Review process to provide us with the certainty moving forward for our investment in businesses and communities?

For investors, requirements are relatively simple. Assurance of supply, a stable regulatory environment, stable political climate, decent markets, and the potential to realize a reasonable rate of return are prerequisites to bringing investment dollars to BC—or keeping

them here. But this is nothing new, our association and many others have been saying this for years/decades. The question is whether anyone is actually listening to these basic truths.

**We hear well-crafted statements depicting actions taken regarding such uncertainties, but frankly they really only represent, at best, tinkering on the edges.**

Herein lies a contradiction. Do the facts show concrete and real actions being taken to reduce these uncertainties? We hear well-crafted statements depicting actions taken regarding such uncertainties, but frankly they really only represent, at best, tinkering on the edges. In fact, most of the conversations these days head in the direction of actually increasing costs and complexity. In the next breath, we hear expressed desires to have a reinvigorated forestry sector, the creation of more jobs, the move towards a high-value manufacturing sector, and, of course, the need to get more money out of the sector in terms of taxes and provincial revenues. Now, I don’t know about you, but all of that seems to be just a series of contradictions.

Are there difficult challenges facing all of us in the forest industry? Certainly. Is there a collective ability to work around them? Certainly.

If nothing else, all of us involved in the forestry sector have shown a remarkable ability to innovate, persevere and withstand the many changes and challenges that have confronted us over the years and decades. We’re not oblivious to changing public expectations for what needs to be done out in the woods. There are solutions out there that can address the questions asked regarding forest practices, climate change, sustainability, and increased diversity and investment in our businesses. But most of those solutions require a common vision about where we want to head as a sector and

the absolute necessity for a working forest that will support such a vision.

Some solutions will also require a rethink on the stumpage and revenues collected by the Province and other levels

of government. To be blunt, adoption of more intensive harvesting systems, innovative forestry, and the ability to be responsive costs more. But the benefits of any reduction in stumpage, for example, far exceed the minor losses in revenue through the increased level of economic activity and the downstream taxation revenue derived as a consequence.

So, why is all of this important to everyone living in BC? Because no matter how you slice it, the potential for the forestry sector to provide sustainable forest products, sequester carbon, and tackle climate change surpasses anything out there. And the fallacy by some that carbon credit revenue from simply leaving all trees standing in perpetuity somehow comes remotely close as a substitute to the economic activity from forestry is just as silly as biased and unsubstantiated report cards.

Time to move forward. The window to create that change in direction is hopefully in front of us. New political leadership and the potential for a revamped ministry that better supports the forestry sector might be the catalyst. Let’s work on a vision most of us can accept, and create the certainty for investment to happen.▲

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## YOU CAN'T PUT A PRICE ON SAFETY

In January, the Auditor General's office released its audit report on the state of British Columbia's management of forest service roads (FSR). Not surprisingly, there are issues, the biggest being from 2010 to 2018 there were 70 motor vehicle deaths and from 2012 to 2016 there were 499 motor vehicle accidents.

Other concerning facts from this report included:

- The requests for road maintenance funding from district offices ranged from \$28.6 to \$40.2 million; on average they received only \$5.5 million.
- 48 per cent of bridges and culverts are overdue for high priority repairs.
- Almost \$9 million of high priority maintenance work went unfunded.

**It is important that our industry do as much as possible to ensure the women and men who keep our industry moving are safe at all times.**

Further items of concern include the fact that the ministry's Engineering Funding Policy, which sets out the policy for forest district maintenance, primarily speaks to access for communities, rural residences, and high value recreation sites. Districts are not responsible to maintain FSRs for industrial use and are instructed to consider road closures and deactivation as an alternative to maintenance.

Of the nine recommendations that were put forward, it is disconcerting there was no mention of upgrading existing roads to accommodate industrial traffic. Most of us in the industry know that many of the resource roads were constructed years ago to accommodate 5- and 6-axle configurations of logging trucks; now we have 7- and 8-axle configurations trying to navigate roads that were just not designed for them. Issues like widened corners, line of sight, and a wider running surface are just a few of the

items that should be included as part of the recommendations and immediately corrected. I'm not sure if this is included in the \$9 million of high priority maintenance work which went unfunded, but it should definitely be considered as a priority. It is important that our industry do as much as possible to ensure the women and men who keep our industry moving are safe at all times.

Is this issue part of another problem that we need to consider? Hours of service and fatigue have become all too common and generally accepted by our industry. Is there a correlation between adjusted cycle times and road standards contributing to longer hours and burn-out in our drivers? Are these factors also

contributing to some of the 499 accidents as mentioned in the report?

Another concern regarding the recommendations is the lack of a timeline. It is important that we have a list and a plan to execute, but there is no end date. Given the severity of the issues discussed, should there not be a finish date? And not just around these recommendations, but with reporting and inspections, there will inevitably be another list of issues to be remedied. So, what will the timeline be for these to be fixed? One would hope that the most severe issues will be fixed in 2021.

If funding is the issue, perhaps we need to look to the past to assist in the future. In 2019, the provincial government announced the creation of the three-year Forest Employment Program. At the time, it was intended to bridge the shortfall in opportunities for contractors as a result of an economic downturn. Initially it had a

budget of \$9 million, but it has since been increased to \$21 million, which appears to be more than enough to cover the unfunded high-priority work mentioned in this report. Perhaps this funding would provide a dual purpose; not only to create safer roads but to assist some of those contractors who are still feeling the effects of the downturn over the last few years. After discussions with government regarding projects and priorities, it appears the ask needs to come from the local level. Given the outcome of this report, perhaps the district staff may want to look at their wish list with a different lens. I would imagine any of the forestry districts in the province would have at least one project that this funding could be spent on, and I would be more than happy to put them in touch with contractors who could do the work for them.

Speaking about safety, the health and safety of the general public continues to be our number one priority, especially during this unprecedented time. As such, our annual conference and trade show in May has been postponed, but we continue to monitor provincial and federal health orders regarding public gatherings to determine when we might be able to host it this year. Please continue to check the ILA website for updates.▲

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# BIO-RENEWABLE ENERGY TO JUMP-START THE NORTH WEST ECONOMY



Since this is my first time contributing on behalf of the North West Loggers Association, I will start by providing a short background of my involvement with the NWLA.

I owned and operated a trucking company in the Terrace area for about 25 years with 20 years involved in log hauling and the last dozen almost exclusively in logging. During that time, I felt it was important to belong to an organization that would give a voice to our industry, and I still do, even if that voice is not listened to sometimes.

I served many terms as president and vice president of the NWLA over those years. Around 1997, I stepped back from the logging industry and by 2000 was out altogether. When I left, the north west had two sawmills in Terrace running two shifts, a sawmill in Hazelton running two shifts, and numerous smaller sawmills serving niche markets. There were two pulp mills operating 365 days a year and sawmill residuals and pulp fibre were in strong demand. In 2019, after my retirement, there was some pressure for me to fill a void in the NWLA as a part-time manager. I still had some ties to the NWLA as I had continued to serve as a director on the board.

The industry has changed significantly. Terrace now has one remaining sawmill operating one shift, both pulp mills are gone, and the logging sector is about 40 per cent of what it was. The small and medium-sized independent sawmills serving niche markets are still there and some have even expanded. The strong demand for sawmill residuals and pulp logs is gone. Some pulp logs are shipped to pulp mills on the southern Coast, and some chips are exported, but due to geography we are considered high-cost producers and as such very sensitive to small changes in demand. Skeena Sawmills has added a pellet plant that is

promising for its own residuals but supply far exceeds demand.

Meanwhile, in the rest of the province, an industry that barely existed 25 years ago has experienced major growth. Cogeneration and pellets have expanded exponentially due in part to the increased allowable annual cut (AAC) as a result of the mountain pine beetle. Sawmills expanded, creating more mill residuals feeding the industry with low-cost fibre. But now, as the beetle-affected wood dries up and AAC reductions come into effect causing mill closures, we are seeing more stress on that industry. The North West was not able to participate in that growth because of myths about the viability of making pellets out of hemlock and balsam, which Skeena's pellet operation has since debunked. A recent operation with some unique thinking about piling woody debris has shown another myth about moisture content can be overcome. The North West had some interest from European companies in developing a pellet industry, but the financial crisis of 2008/09 put the brakes on that.

All of this brings me to my point, which is that not having a dependable market for our fibre-quality logs at the cost of production has impeded our ability to fully exploit the potential of the industry in the North West. A group of individuals in our region have spent many years developing a plan that would open those opportunities. It is a simple plan to create bioenergy with unique aspects to help government fulfill some commitments to First Nations, meet its promises on clean energy, and offset carbon emissions from LNG.

A maximum annual bio-renewable energy stimulus of \$12 million would open the door to \$400 million of private capital investment, increase log processing here, while cutting the need to export, creating 500 new permanent

jobs and generating \$50 million of GDP annually. These numbers have been reviewed by experts and have been found to be sound estimates.

It is estimated that there is over 378 million cubic metres of mature timber available in this region. Unfortunately, many of those stands have up to 50 per cent pulp (fibre) log content. While it costs the same to log a pulp log as a saw log, this bio-renewable energy stimulus would bridge market differences and open the potential for our North West forests.

This proposal has been vetted and presented to government agencies at the provincial and federal level, and the bureaucrats have received it with positive interest. The GDP, jobs, and cost of each job created is better than the Site C project. By comparison, the \$220 million federal government invested into gas turbines for LNG would have funded this program for 20 years.

This program ticks off many of the current government's priorities. It helps with treaty discussions, provides more value for each log harvested, creates renewable energy, helps address carbon and climate targets and would stabilize the economy of rural communities, reducing the pressure on social programs, and providing incentive for private capital investment.

Coming out of an economy ravaged by COVID-19, this bio-renewable energy stimulus is a low-cost way to jump-start the North West economy, while allowing private capital to do the heavy lifting.

All we need now is buy-in and leadership from our elected representatives to move it forward.▲

---

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## COMMERCIAL THINNING IN THE BC INTERIOR

In August 1961, the Prince George, BC night sky was lit up by the massive 23,000-hectare Grove fire raging on nearby Tabor Mountain and Willow River area. In the aftermath, the local *Prince George Citizen* newspaper described what was left behind as “an awesome, utterly black wasteland”. However, as areas devastated by forest fires typically do, a young forest grew from the ashes and today, the area hosts a vibrant forest of spruce, Douglas fir and pine trees. At 60 years old, portions of the Grove burn that lie within the Willow River Demonstration Forest (aka Woodlot Licence 272) serves as an example of an area on which specialized silviculture in the form of commercial thinning should significantly increase the current and fu-

ture commercial value of the stand. The Willow River thinning project is initiating interest among forest planners in the private and public sectors, and it is hoped that positive results will motivate the BC government to support similar initiatives and invigorate the midterm fibre supply to ensure the commercial value of the forests in the BC Interior are sustained.

### Government- and licensee-supported programs could provide opportunities and initiatives for contractors in nearly every forestry community in the Interior.

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Numerous communities throughout the Interior are surrounded by intermediate-aged stands that have evolved either from timber harvesting or natural disturbances such as wildfire. Like the Grove burn area, many of these intermediate stands have high stem densities and would naturally self thin over the next several decades. However, by applying commercial thinning to these stands, where the demand exists and the economics support the cost, this natural process is sped up and the trees that are left behind benefit from the extra nutrients, water and sunlight made available from

the stand opening up. A consequence of commercial thinning is that the remaining trees will grow larger and more vigorously than they would if no stand tending were applied. Accelerating the growth of the remaining trees will allow a second-pass harvest to occur sooner.

Mike Trepanier, TLA member and manager of the Willow River Demonstration Forest, says their commercial thinning project is similar to activities commonly practised in Scandinavian countries. “There is not a lot of history of commercial thinning in the Interior of BC, and perhaps there is an opportunity to supply jobs and fibre in the short term, and get high quality sawlog yields in the mid- to longer-term, closer to home.” The commercial thinning project in Willow River is targeting a spruce and Douglas fir stand that Trepanier states is a good site for this type of silviculture treatment. “You have to treat the right stands with the right cutting prescription to obtain the desired outcome.” Other attributes in a preferred natural stand include an age of about 40 to 80 years, 1,500 to 2,500 stems per hectare, well-drained, productive growing sites where the trees have good rooting and are fairly wind-firm. Additionally, focussing on stands that are close to communities and processing facilities decreases the transportation costs for the fibre that is being removed, while providing local work for community members.

Willow River’s commercial thinning is planned to remove about 70m<sup>3</sup>/ha of fibre from the project area, of which about 30 per cent is destined for a sawmill, with the remainder going to a local bioenergy plant. Today, the most significant challenges of commercial thinning in the Interior include:

- The current tenure and appraisal policies are not conducive to the practice of alternative silviculture systems or responsive to their higher costs.
- The need for specialized equipment.
- The requirement for a properly trained workforce who are skilled at identifying the most suitable trees to leave behind for retention.

Willow River’s commercial thinning is currently being conducted by TLA member, Freya Logging, who Trepanier observes as being “conscientious and knowledgeable” in their operations. However, specialized companies such as Freya are not in abundance in the Interior, and with the potential for communities to focus on their own nearby intermediate stands of timber, opportunities exist for contractors to acquire the equipment and training required to conduct commercial thinning on candidate sites. Government- and licensee-supported programs could provide opportunities and initiatives for contractors in nearly every forestry community in the Interior. This would not only create more local employment, but would help to alleviate shortages in the pulp and bioenergy supply chain in the short term, while improving timber supply in the midterm.

During the 2021 Association of BC Forest Professionals conference, Chief Forester Diane Nicholls mentioned commercial thinning as an example of the new forest landscape planning practice that will soon be implemented throughout BC. Perhaps putting those practices to the test in those high density stands next to forestry communities would be a good first step.▲

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# NAVIGATING COVID-19 GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS AND SUBSIDIES FOR BUSINESSES



It's been a year since COVID-19 became a common household term and in that time the pandemic has significantly impacted the economy in Canada and abroad. To help mitigate the impacts, federal and provincial governments have introduced a multitude of programs and incentives to stimulate employment and spending. The following programs may benefit business owners.

## Federal Programs

### Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS)

The CEWS program is a wage subsidy paid to businesses that have had revenue losses during the pandemic. Since its inception, the initial requirement of a 30 per cent drop in revenue has been streamlined to account for recovering businesses, with a reduction in the subsidy amount as a business recovers its lost revenues.

Government claims that since March 2020, the CEWS has protected more than four million jobs, helping businesses and workers through the challenges of the pandemic.

The CEWS program has been extended until June 2021. The application deadline for the program's first five claim periods came to an end January 2021. Every month will now see deadlines for businesses to file for additional periods.

- The wage subsidy remained at the maximum rate of up to 75 per cent of eligible wages until March 13, 2021 at which time the government re-evaluated the subsidy amount.

### Canada Emergency Rent Subsidy (CERS)

The new CERS, which replaces the Canada Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance (CECRA) program, intends to provide simple and easy-to-access rent and mortgage support for periods from September 27, 2020 to June 30, 2021 for qualifying organizations affected by COVID-19.

- The rent subsidy will be provided directly to tenants rather than through landlords.
- It will support businesses that have suffered a revenue drop by subsidizing a

percentage of their expenses on a sliding scale, up to a maximum of 65 per cent of eligible expenses and up to 90 per cent for those organizations that have been temporarily closed due to a mandatory public health order.

- An application is required for each claim period with a 180-day deadline to file after the end of each claim period. An attestation by the owner or senior management must accompany each application in the prescribed form.

## British Columbia Provincial Programs

### Small and Medium Sized Business Recovery Grant

This provides grants of \$10,000 to \$30,000 to support BC businesses impacted by the pandemic that employ between two and 149 BC residents, or sole proprietorships and partnerships with fixed costs related to tangible assets and have experienced declines in revenue since March 2020.

- As of December 21, 2020, the program has been enhanced to make it easier for businesses to qualify with a streamlined application process and simplified criteria, including reducing the previous three years of business results initially required to 18 months.
- Instead of requiring a revenue loss of 70 per cent or more, the criteria has been reduced to 30 per cent at the time of application.
- The program runs until August 31, 2021 or until funding is fully allocated, whichever comes first.

## BC Increased Employment Incentive

The incentive offers a refundable tax credit for all private sector BC employers to encourage the creation of new jobs for BC workers or an increase in payroll for existing low- or medium-income employees.

The tax credit is calculated at 15 per cent of the amount that the employer's qualifying BC remuneration exceeds the employer's base BC remuneration.

- Remuneration increases over the last quarter (October to December) of 2020 are eligible.
- Applications opened online March 2021.

## BC PST Rebate on Select Machinery and Equipment

Through the BC PST Rebate on Select Machinery and Equipment, corporations can apply to receive an amount equal to the PST they paid between September 17, 2020 and September 30, 2021 on qualifying machinery and equipment.

- Applications opened online April 1, 2021.
- Incorporated businesses may make up to two PST rebate applications: the first application can be made between April 1, 2021 and September 30, 2021. The second application can be made starting October 1, 2021. The last day applications will be accepted is March 31, 2022, which is 6 months after the rebate period ends on September 30, 2021.

## Word of Warning

Since initially announced in 2020, there have been many changes made to all of these programs. The rules and criteria for eligibility are constantly evolving as governments learn how to administer the programs. Check with your advisor for the most up-to-date application processes and eligibility.▲

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## SHOULDERING THE LOAD

### Reduce the risk of musculoskeletal injuries associated with log hauling

When we think about being injured at work, we often think of obvious physical injuries that are easy to see, like cuts or broken bones. But in many industries—including log hauling—drivers are at risk of serious job-related injuries that we can't see. These injuries can be as equally painful as cuts or broken bones and can have significant negative impacts on one's quality of life.

Musculoskeletal injuries (MSIs) are one such injury where the risks may be less obvious—but the consequences can be serious. It's critical that truck drivers and employers are aware of how to mitigate the risks associated with MSIs, and ensure they take deliberate measures to prevent these potentially life-altering injuries.

#### What is an MSI?

A musculoskeletal injury is an injury or disorder of the muscles, tendons,

ligaments, joints, nerves, and blood vessels. Sprains, strains, and inflammation are common MSIs that may be caused, or aggravated by physical work.

Common tasks for logging truck drivers—including long hours sitting in the cab, climbing in and out of the cab, and throwing and cinching wrappers—are all examples of seemingly low-risk activities that can cause significant stress to the body, resulting in MSIs. Factors such as repetition, posture, frequency, duration and force all exacerbate the risk of damage to soft tissues in the neck, shoulders, arms, wrists, legs, and back. The more significant these factors are, the greater the risk of injury.

Throwing wrappers over a load places a great amount of stress on the shoulders and other areas of the body because of the awkward posture and force required to complete the task. While you might not notice an impact right way, risk factors surrounding this activity are

compounded over time as the task becomes more repetitive. The risk of injury also increases as drivers age and see decreased strength and flexibility.

Overexertion injuries are very common among logging truck drivers—from 2013 to 2018 WorkSafeBC recorded 89 overexertion injury claims caused by securing loads on logging trucks. Almost 60 per cent of these injuries occurred while the worker was throwing wrappers; 33 per cent while tightening or cinching the load; and 10 per cent of injuries resulted from removing the wrappers. These injuries occurred in workers from 24 to over 65 years of age and incurred over \$4 million in costs for health care, wage loss, and disability benefits.

The impact of claims cost and lost workdays for both workers and employers is significant—especially when injured drivers have extended recoveries, or if drivers are never able to return to their job due to ongoing health challenges.

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For employers, MSIs mean there are fewer experienced drivers to meet the needs of logging operations—increasing training costs and potentially creating greater risks for motor vehicle incidents. Injured workers with MSIs may see significant impacts to their careers, and potentially their overall quality of life in the form of reduced income and chronic pain, which can lead to mental health issues. Many workers with MSIs lose their ability to enjoy hobbies and daily activities like picking up their child, going on a fishing trip, or tinkering on that old car in the yard.

### Managing MSI risks in the workplace

Sections 4.46 to 4.53 of the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation outline requirements for employers in preventing MSIs in the workplace.

Employers are required to identify potential risk factors, perform risk assessments, and implement controls to

eliminate or minimize the risk of MSIs for workers. They must also show drivers how to recognize early signs and symptoms of MSIs and their potential health effects, and train them in the use of engineering controls, work procedures, and personal protective equipment to control the risk.

Constantly monitoring and evaluating your MSI safety plan and incorporating feedback from your drivers will ensure a safety program that works for everyone. This includes reviewing first-aid records for evidence of MSIs, and consulting with worker health and safety representatives or your joint occupational health and safety committee, if you have one.

Drivers also have a responsibility to understand the risk factors that could lead to musculoskeletal injuries and must follow the controls implemented by their employer to eliminate or minimize the risk of injury. If a job-related activity is causing you pain or seems unsafe, say something.

Are there techniques or tools to reduce the amount of force required to get that wrapper over the load? Is loader assist available to place wrappers on the load?

We all have a responsibility to create safe workplaces and ensure that everyone goes home safely at the end of the day. WorkSafeBC's *Preventing Musculoskeletal Injury (MSI): A Guide for Employers and Joint Committees* outlines the prevention process, including ergonomics requirements and common control measures, and also outlines procedures on how to investigate musculoskeletal injuries. Also, *Understanding the Risks of Musculoskeletal Injury (MSI)* helps employers with the requirement of section 4.51(1) of the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation, and focuses on educating workers about risk identification, signs and symptoms of MSI, and their potential health effects.

Visit [worksafebc.com/ergonomics](https://www.worksafebc.com/ergonomics) for more information.▲



**Most injuries for logging truck drivers occur when they aren't behind the wheel**





## A WILD LUMBER SUPER-CYCLE

In the last few weeks through to mid-March, I have read various headlines referencing a commodity super-cycle, US housing super-cycle, and, of course, a lumber super-cycle. We are currently in some kind of wild lumber super-cycle where record-level prices are being achieved and cyclical high prices are expected to continue for much of 2021 and into 2022 (and perhaps longer).

As one of the first adopters of the potential of a North American lumber super-cycle thesis, I did get the basics right, but not the timing. What I predicted back in 2010 was that when lumber demand rose to a level where new housing starts reached (or exceeded) about 1.3 million units, there would not be enough North American lumber supply to match with demand, igniting a short-term lumber shortage that would establish new record

prices. The timing of this event was expected to occur around the middle of the decade but stalled as US lumber demand rose more slowly from 2010 to 2015 than as predicted by dozens of economists. Consumption then started to slow in 2016 and then plateaued between 2017 and 2019 with a total increase in US demand lumber of less than 1 per cent. With no significant demand growth, lumber capacity slowly caught up. Even in 2019, high cost producing regions curtailed or closed sawmills due to an oversupply of lumber during a period

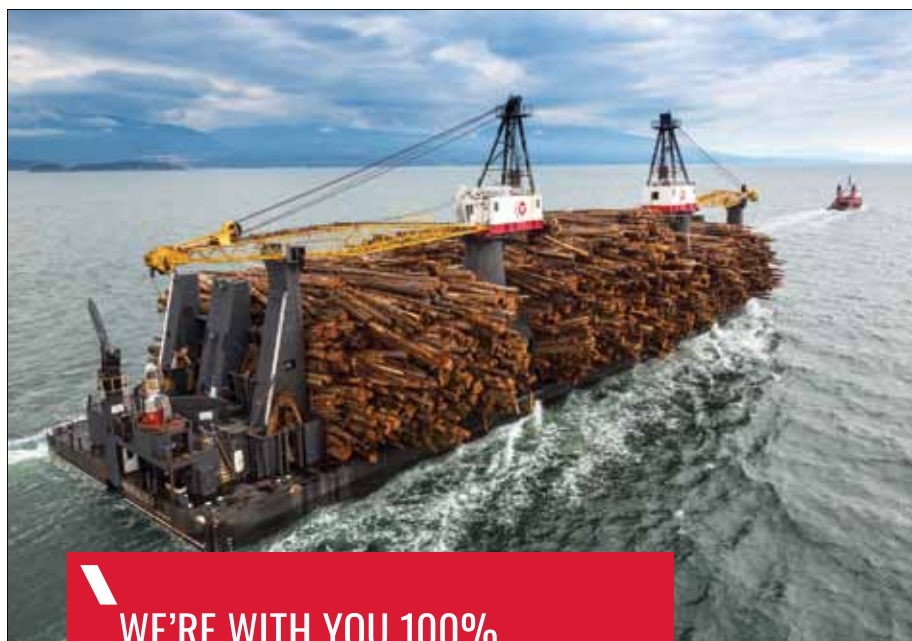


Chart courtesy of Russ Taylor Global

of weak demand. During this period, the BC Interior permanently closed five sawmills from weak prices and soaring incremental log costs (from declining timber supplies).

US housing starts did not break the 1.3 million housing starts threshold until 2020! They surged to 1.38 million units during the global pandemic—a healthy increase from 1.29 million in 2019. And as we all know, repair and remodelling demand also soared as homeowners stuck at home started renovation projects at a torrid pace. This spike in demand against a relatively fixed sawmill capacity in North America, coupled with a fragile supply chain during the pandemic, caused prices to surge. New records for 2x4 W-SPF dimension lumber were recorded in September 2020 (US\$955/Mbf) and then to US\$1,025/Mbf in early March 2021. Finally, the long expected super-cycle was achieved. This same cycle has occurred in OSB and plywood, as both products are currently selling at monster prices with no end in sight (at the time of writing).

Despite the initial uncertainty about the pandemic in March and April 2020, sales in repair and remodelling at big box stores have also been on a tear since then. The double-whammy of strong housing starts and ramped-up home renovations caused US lumber demand to increase by 5.3 per cent in 2020. So far in 2021, steady growth has occurred, but a slow-down in repair and remodelling in 2021



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Q2/Q3 is expected. Why? Simply because it is expected that mass vaccinations will start to allow people to get away from their homes where they can restart travelling and spending their money elsewhere. However, it is expected that larger renovation projects will start later in the year, allowing for a rebound in renovation activity.

The supply response in March and April of 2020 following the onset of the pandemic resulted in about six weeks of lost production even though demand was soaring. Despite this setback, North America production in 2020 managed to increase by 568 million bf (+1 per cent) as compared to 2019. However, looking at BC lumber production, overall output declined by 758 million bf (-7.8 per cent) in 2020 as compared to 2019. For the Interior, it will be about 7 per cent lower and for the Coast over 10 per cent lower. The BC Interior permanently closed five sawmills in 2019, so this accounts for the bulk of the decline in 2020.

The rest of Canada recorded a slight production decline of 1.4 per cent in 2020 as compared to 2019, so Canada saw a net decline in output of about 4 per cent. This reduction coupled with surging lumber prices caused offshore imports to soar in 2020, mainly from Europe. Led by Germany, Sweden and Austria, European lumber exports increased by about 50 per cent in 2020. Exports were spurred on by the massive spruce bark beetle epidemic in Central Europe that has made this region one of the lowest cost lumber exporters in the world.

With a continued erosion expected in the BC timber harvest, lumber produced in BC will continue to play a flat to diminishing role in the US lumber market. As a result, US softwood lumber demand will increasingly be met by expanded supply in the US South, Eastern Canada, and overseas.

BC Coast log exports continue to languish after reaching their peak of 6.5 million m<sup>3</sup> in 2013. With strong lumber markets in 2020, more logs are staying in BC for processing at domestic sawmills and not going offshore—especially to China and South Korea at relatively low prices. As a result, BC log exports are expected to be only 2.5 million m<sup>3</sup> in 2020, or about half of what was achieved

in 2019. BC's largest log export market, China, has been hit with huge volumes of low-cost, low-priced European spruce bark beetle-killed logs. Along with strong competition from New Zealand and Russia, this has caused BC log exports to China to plummet from 5.4 million m<sup>3</sup> in 2013 to 2 million m<sup>3</sup> in 2020 (-33 per cent from 2019). However, Australia (10 per cent of China imports) has been hit with a log import ban by China and there is a container shortage that is

limiting European log exports to China. With low inventories at Chinese ports, log (and lumber) prices have both been moving higher, allowing some price gains for exporters.▲

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## BURNS LAKE COMMUNITY FOREST

By Robin Brunet

**B**urns Lake is renowned for its rich First Nations heritage, world-class mountain biking trails, and aquatic recreation opportunities.

It is also a hub for logging and sawmilling, and on that score the village of just over 2,000 residents earned a special place in BC's forestry history in December 1998 by launching the province's first community forest.

Back then, the pilot project encompassed about 23,000 hectares of Crown land. Today, the Burns Lake Community Forest Ltd. (BLComFor) is 92,572 hectares in size with an allowable annual cut of 118,100 cubic metres of green timber—and it has the right to salvage an additional 72,951 cubic metres annually of dead wood ravaged by the mountain pine beetle.

The success of BLComFor and related logging activities has not gone unnoticed. Last year, the BC Council of Forest Industries ranked Burns Lake as one of the top 15 of 340 communities for industry spending, with \$7 billion worth of goods and services purchased in 2019 from about 9,900 province-based companies and Indigenous suppliers.

But there's a caveat to Burns Lake's prominence in the forestry sector. "Essentially, our community is surrounded by dead pine and other combustible fuels in constrained areas," says Frank Varga,

BLComFor's general manager. "Yet policy makers favour landscape heritage values above cleaning out the wood, doing controlled burns, and making us safer."

It's hardly news that Burns Lake is at perpetual risk of being engulfed by wild-fires. Over the decades its residents have endured summers of breathing in yellow-tinged smoke, waiting for evacuation orders as blazes inch closer to town, and then hoping in vain for policy change as politicians later tour the destruction from the safety of the air.

In fact, it could be argued that potential immolation has always dogged Burns Lake: it was originally named Burnt Lake by the Boreland Expedition in 1866, during the construction of the Collins Telegraph Line, after a massive forest fire swept through the area and charred the countryside.

Still, locals value their physical surroundings, and Varga is no exception. Trained as a forester, he lived in many communities throughout the province before settling permanently in Burns Lake 15 years ago. "I loved the region and the lakes, and then as now, it was a great place to raise a family," he says. "Plus, it's one of the most inviting communities I've ever known."

Shortly before Varga made Burns Lake his home, BLComFor had become the first organization in the province

to be offered a 25-year renewable forest tenure that replaced the original pilot agreement. Since its inception, it has accumulated an impressive roster of achievements, including providing the bulk of its harvested timber to local sawmills (Decker Lake Sawmill cuts sawlogs, while Pacific Timber cuts specialty products); spending over \$60 million on goods and services in the Burns Lake area; donating more than \$10 million to community groups, organizations, partners, and shareholders; and providing economic and educational opportunities for local First Nations peoples, including employment and training in forestry.

Varga says, "Given the fact we have so much dead wood due to the pine beetle—which caused a big restructuring of BLComFor five years ago—we're constantly looking for ways to maximize revenue. Four years ago we acquired FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) certification with an eye to the European market. So, while we have less volume of wood due to the infestation, its value has increased. Plus, we continue to focus our efforts in dead pine fibre utilization as long as the market supports the fibre profile."

Part of BLComFor's success is due to its structure. It is one of a handful of corporations governed by a board of directors chosen from the community who



employ a consensus-based approach to decision-making. Under this system, all company directors must agree on a course of action before it is undertaken, and this approach has helped build solid working relationships between the corporation's various partner groups (which include the Wet'suwet'en First Nation, Tsayu Tat'l'at Bin, Gilseyhu Honeagh Bin, and Laksilyu Tselh K'iz Bin clans, whose traditional territories are within the community forest).

Perhaps BLComFor's most famous achievement outside of resource management was its role in clearing land and designing and helping to build the Burns Lake Mountain Biking Association's network of trails within the community forest—which in turn led to the region gaining worldwide recognition as a mountain biking mecca. "Recreational development is one of our designations, and we also support the Lakes Outdoor Recreation Society, which manages two provincial parks and over two dozen forestry recreation sites and trails in the Lakes District," says Varga. "Our work in this regard boosts tourism, and today we're on many Top 10 North American bucket lists for skiing, snowmobiling, and hiking, as well as for mountain biking and hunting and fishing."

In many ways, the success of BLComFor as an effective area-based land man-

agement system makes government's continued focus on landscape heritage values all the more frustrating. Burns Lake's vulnerability to wildfires attracted province-wide attention most recently in 2018, when forestry consultant B.A. Blackwell and Associates Ltd. ranked it as among the top five communities at risk in BC based on the percentage of area of hazardous fuels.

Varga was quoted by news media at the time, "We need to recognize that drawing lines on a map and restricting forest management activities within those lines contradict our efforts for protection of property and human life in rural communities, and in a broader context undermine our efforts for true sustainable forest management."

He added that BLComFor was well equipped to support management strategies to mitigate fire risks such as prescribed burning, clearcut harvest, and fibre removal, all within a five to ten kilometre range around Burns Lake instead of the standard two kilometre range: "I just need the legislative support to do so. Until there is an appetite to make changes for the purposes of fire hazard mitigation, implementation will be limited."

Varga smiles ruefully as he recalls his plea. "The more things change, the more they stay the same, because I'm arguing

for exactly the same things today," he says. "Sure, the hills around us are pretty, but they're full of dead pine. We need to clear it all out, and then we need to do continued burns. What we're proposing is ecosystem restoration, which should take precedence over visual values."

As municipal leaders in other communities can attest, persistent lobbying efforts and other strategies have earned sympathetic lip service. "We, along with Burns Lake Mayor Dolores Funk, have gained a lot of support from Victoria, but so far it hasn't translated into action," says Varga. "And frankly, as we have this discussion in early 2021, I've exhausted all avenues in trying to get traction. I literally spend every day trying to come up with new ideas that might result in policy changes."

But like other proud Burns Lake residents, Varga has no intention of giving up the fight. "If anyone out there has ideas about what we can do next, I'm all ears. Meanwhile, we'll keep repeating our message about the need to be truly fire smart until someone is willing to work with us to make it happen.

"I just hope a summer of devastating wildfires won't be the catalyst."▲



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# UPDATING AND MODERNIZING THE FORESTRY SECTOR

By Katrine Conroy

Minister of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development

British Columbia's forestry sector has always been a cornerstone of our economy. The expertise and vision of the tens of thousands of people who work in the sector create economic ripple effects that benefit us all. That's why I was so pleased that one of my first speaking engagements since being appointed Minister of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development late last year was with the membership of the Truck Loggers Association (TLA) in February.

As you know, I come from a forest-dependent community and I have experience working in the industry—I was one of the first female power engineers in the province and the first woman to work in the plant at the Celgar pulp mill in Castlegar. While that background provided a solid foundation of knowledge of the industry, meeting with your members has enhanced my understanding of the importance of the TLA, its 500-plus member companies and the communities, First Nations, and workers they represent. We've benefitted from your input and expertise and have gained value from working together on shared priorities, including the Contractor Sustainability Review, which has been aimed at improving the overall competitiveness of logging contractors and licensees.

People like you are the reason behind this government's vision to modernize and diversify its forest sector. Protecting jobs in British Columbia's communities and ensuring the people of this province benefit when the province's resources are harvested are our priorities. This government is committed to putting people first. We're focusing on the people who live and work here as we move forward with transitioning to a new way of doing business in the forestry sector.

Shifting to a more resilient and diverse forestry sector will help people by creating sustainable forestry jobs across BC. A 21st century forestry sector will be a mix of large industry and independent manufacturers, producing a diverse mix

of conventional and innovative products and selling them at home and to all four corners of the globe. By building with BC wood products, we are ensuring a future for forestry in this province, and we are creating new employment and economic opportunities for future generations. This includes advancing the mass timber action plan with Minister of Jobs, Economic Recovery and Innovation Ravi Kahlon. British Columbia's forestry sector is critical to the success of our CleanBC plan—our strategy to combat the climate crisis and secure a better future for British Columbians. Mass timber will be a key part of this because it is a sustainably harvested, low-carbon product.

As we move to a more diverse sector, we'll continue to work with contractors,

**We've benefitted from your input and expertise and have gained value from working together on shared priorities, including the Contractor Sustainability Review, which has been aimed at improving the overall competitiveness of logging contractors and licensees.**

Indigenous Nations, industry, labour and other stakeholders. We'll need to hear the voice of the TLA as we transition. Its wide variety of members—whether harvesting contractors, sawmills, small tenure holders, or industry suppliers—have the experience and expertise we'll continue to seek as we go forward.

Navigating the new reality imposed by COVID-19 created challenges for the sector last spring and our government was quick to deliver relief to British Columbians and to businesses. The industry has progressed through a remarkable turnaround in the last year. The pandemic has certainly played a role in generating record lumber prices which have helped bring dozens of mills back online and thousands of people back to work. But as we focus on our recovery from COVID-19, we know we can't repeat the mistakes of the past. The ups and downs



Photo courtesy of the NDP

of this sector have impacted communities, companies, and workers and their families. We must create a more sustainable forestry sector that is innovative and responsive.

I appreciated the chance to connect with members of the Truck Loggers Association in February. It's a pleasure to chat with the people who are keeping our province's economy moving. I look forward to continuing to work alongside you as we take on the challenging work of updating and modernizing our sector to work for British Columbians. 🌲



## WHY THE NEW CSR REGULATIONS MUST WORK

TLA Editorial

**I**n the Fall 2014 issue of *Truck LoggerBC* magazine, the editorial *Logging Rate Negotiation: When David Meets Goliath* detailed the economic plight of BC logging contractors in the face of industry consolidation and the Timber Harvesting Contract & Subcontract Regulation (commonly known as Bill13) fair market rate test used by licensees to push contractors to the edge of insolvency prov-

ince wide. It was not only contractors who felt the pain; the plethora of suppliers that supported community based contractors also took a big hit when unsustainable rates pushed some contractors over the edge.

In 2016, the provincial government agreed to conduct an independent review of licensee/contractor relationships. Subsequent reviews of over 120

logging contractors' financial statements (representing 26 per cent of the annual provincial harvest) confirmed that contractors were in fact facing significant financial hardship.

In 2018, that work set the stage for the 13 recommendations for change. Facilitated meetings followed with contractor and licensee groups to find consensus on how to implement the





recommendations, resulting in the pathway for eventual change.

To say that contractor and industry representatives were on opposite sides of the table on many issues is not an understatement, as the future of licensee/contractor relationships province wide were debated.

Todd Chamberlain of the ILA noted: “there were lots of no holds barred

discussions around the table.” At issue were topics such as rate model use, Bill 13 arbitration procedures, a best practices guide, shared access to rate determination data, and, of course, the elimination of the fair market rate test in the Bill 13 regulation, which Premier Horgan confirmed in January 2019.

By 2020, a consensus was reached among the stakeholders for changes to

the regulation and rate test. As Chamberlain points out, “the discussions fundamentally humanized the issues for the stakeholders on both sides and with government, which led to an eventual agreement between parties.”

Despite the consensus, the final changes to the Timber Harvesting Contract & Subcontract Regulation have sat with government for more than a



year, although they have assured us it will finally be put into place this Spring. What remains to be seen is if the new regulation remains consistent with the consensus agreement between all parties at the table and, more importantly, heralds a new era in fair and transparent rate negotiations.

A lot of time has passed, and many might question if the CSR process—which has taken over five years to complete—is still relevant in a post-COVID-19 world where lumber demand and prices are at all-time highs.

TLA Executive Director Bob Brash believes that now, more than ever, changes to Bill 13 are critical to the continued success of the industry, but the majors may not see it that way just yet. “During this period of very strong lumber markets, contractors continue to be saddled with demands by many licensees for more rate reductions, even though current surveys and studies verify the current rates are not satisfactory for the long-term health of their business. In many cases, contractors are being forced to take rate reductions, or they’re told they don’t have work,”

says Brash. “We are hopeful that finally the new regulation will fix this kind of behaviour. All we really want is a fair and cooperative process recognizing realistic costs.”

Greg Main of Main Logging was at the table through the entire process to ensure that contractor perspectives were heard. “Personally, I am very ex-

the north still believe that an appropriate market rate is simply the lowest rate they can get, regardless of site conditions. That was never the intent of the market rate test implemented in 2004, but that seems to be how it was interpreted over the years. Even today, this approach has resulted in the need for continued costly arbitration for some contractors, which

**“We need to finish the process by ensuring we all cooperate—government included—in order to develop and share good data to support the rate determination process,” notes Brash.**

cited about the outcome since government has committed to implementing what we all agreed to in the regulation. It will benefit all contractors and not just those with Bill 13 contracts. There should no longer be a need for rate arbitration,” notes Main.

Since 2004, contractors working under the regulation have been regularly forced to accept lower and lower rates driven by the fair market rate test. Notably, some licensees in

was the stimulus for its eventual elimination in the coming new regulation.

Tim Menning of Hytest Timber in Williams Lake agrees with Main: “I never wanted a process that led to arbitration. I wanted a process that allows me to go to work for a reasonable rate and I think that is what our consensus recommendations will do if they are put into the new regulation.”

So, what does the new regulation mean for contractors?



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Fundamentally, if a rate dispute is deemed to exist, a contractor will now no longer be subject to an arbitrator's assessment of a fair market rate based on comparable rates put forward by the licence holder (typically the lowest rates a licensee could produce).

Rather, they will be subject to what an arbitrator believes to be the reasonable costs (plus profit) for a reasonably efficient contractor. This test is similar to what was used in the regulation prior to the 2004 change that created the fair market rate test. "The old [pre-2004] rate test allowed an arbitrator to make a balanced decision that was fair to all parties," noted one stakeholder. "It worked for 15 years and it will still work going forward in the new regulation."

While we all continue to impatiently wait for its eventual implementation, the new regulation will definitely require that contractors have a good handle on their costs as they will potentially be brought to bear if a rate dispute is to be settled via arbitration.

And while everyone at the table during the CSR process believed that data collection and sharing was a critical component

to an improved understanding of rates, government and industry are now reluctant to support initiatives that would deliver on that goal.

"We need to finish the process by ensuring we all cooperate—government included—in order to develop and share good data to support the rate determination process," notes Brash.

Rate negotiations are always based on three major factors: equipment productivity, hourly costs to operate, and site factors. The new regulation should provide all parties, and eventually an arbitrator, with the information needed to narrow the gap in terms of operating costs and, by extension, rates.

To this end, the associations produced a detailed equipment hourly rate sheet, which is a good first step in support of data sharing, but more data is needed in order for there to be full transparency in rate determination. "We are just not getting that cooperation yet and the contractors who worked to bring closure to this file say it is a disappointing outcome," notes Brash.

But what may be a sign of what is to come, some licensees in the southern Interior have already begun competing for

contractor services (specifically truckers) as the markets fluctuate, weather limits opportunities to fill log yards, and the new regulation is put into place.

"While it is good for short spells, in the longer term, rates need to be sustainable if contractors are to remain viable. The new regulation should make that happen. If so, maybe the industry and the rural communities where contractors live can finally see some stability again. That is what we need right now," notes Chamberlain.

John Nester of the NWLA also believes that the unnecessary delays by government to implement the consensus recommendations into the new regulation continue to harm local contractors as it has done for the past decade. "In the five years we have been in this process, the majors have seen a lot more good times than bad. However, contractors are still just hanging on. Without change to the regulation, even more may not survive."



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# A SKILLED, DIVERSE INDIGENOUS WORKFORCE IS THE KEY TO ADDRESSING “DÉJÀ VU ALL OVER AGAIN”

By Dr. Charlene Higgins

A new government brings with it a renewed mandate for every ministry “to create opportunities for Indigenous peoples to be full partners in the economy.” In Premier Horgan’s mandate letter to the new Minister of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development Katrine Conroy, one area of focus is on the transition of the forestry sector from a high-volume to high-value production, which includes increasing value-added initiatives to encourage fibre utilization in an era of declining timber supply.

These are not new goals or concepts. In response to the 2008 global economic crisis and its impact on the BC forest industry, the Liberal government established the 2009 Working Roundtable on Forestry “to consider the long-term future of the

forest industry, taking into consideration global changes, and to make recommendations for a vibrant and successful forest industry for future generations.” One of the goals was to move the industry forward by creating higher value from the utilization of forest resources. The 2009 roundtable identified six priorities and 29 recommendations. One of the priorities for achieving the vision of a “vibrant, sustainable, globally competitive forest industry for current and future generations” was that First Nations become full partners in forestry. In March 2009, the Liberal government released the *Generating More Value from Our Forests: A Vision and Action Plan for Further Manufacturing* report, which focused on four key priorities: maximizing the value extracted from our forests, growing trees, expanding

markets, and increasing the use of wood for construction.

There has been a political action plan and vision in place with a focus on “added value over volume” for over a decade, so why are we not further ahead? Our current forest management frameworks are still based on managing for volume first, several mills have shut down, the value-added sector has failed to flourish, and a major barrier to the introduction of new products and processes has been a limited, available and skilled labour pool.

Transition of the forestry sector from high-volume to high-value production that supports value-added and manufacturing initiatives will require access to a highly trained and skilled workforce. What steps can we take to address this potential barrier?





## Increased Participation of First Nations in the Workforce: Connecting First Nations Talent to Forestry Sector Opportunities

In 2018, the BC First Nations Forestry Council (BCFNFC) launched the BC First Nations Forestry Workforce Strategy. It was developed collaboratively with First Nations, industry, and the Indigenous Skills, Employment and Training Program (ISETP) delivery organizations as a long-term initiative to increase the participation and success of Indigenous peoples in the BC forestry sector through training, careers, and employment opportunities.

The aim of the workforce strategy is to achieve sustainable and meaningful career, employment, and business outcomes for First Nations peoples in the BC forestry sector through collaborative partnerships among First Nations, forest companies, ISETP, and the Forestry Council, while reflecting community cultural values, the *United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls to action.

First Nations can play an important role in the transition of the forestry sector. The workforce strategy outlines the goals, priorities, and actions to:

- Increase First Nations' participation and success in forestry related education, post-secondary training, and industry certification.
- Increase First Nations' awareness of, and interest in, forestry employment, qualifications, and career paths.
- Sustain forestry partnerships and connections focused on Aboriginal forestry and training and employment success.
- Recruit, retain, and advance First Nations in BC forest industry education and training, employment and careers, including job coaching and mentorship.
- Promote and provide support to First Nations for the economic development of their own forest companies and contractors.

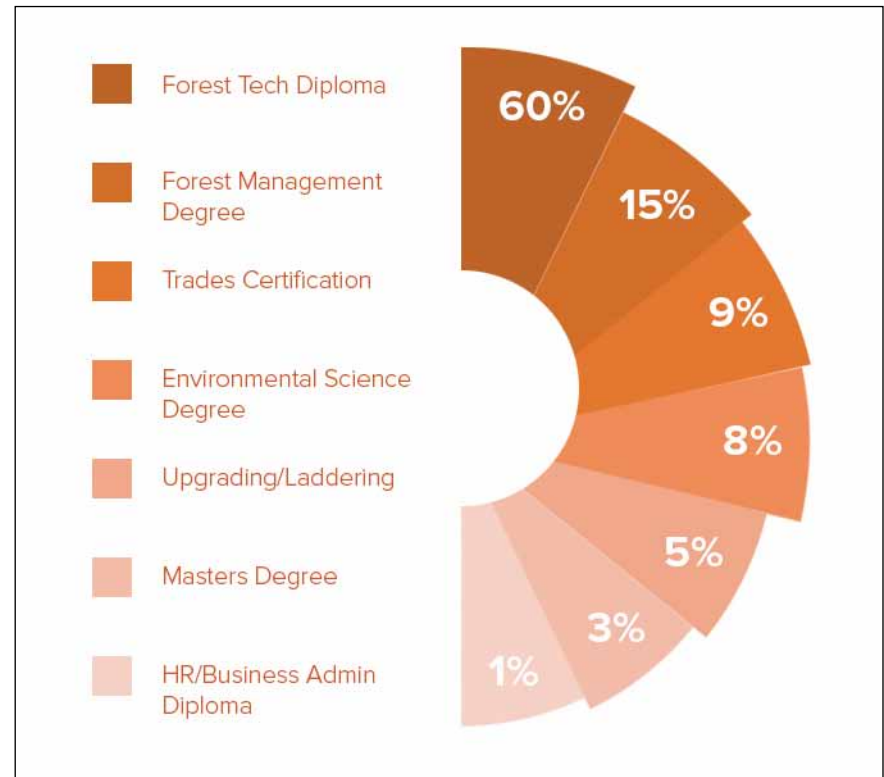
The workforce strategy, when fully implemented, provides a path towards the development of an available, and skilled Indigenous workforce.

## The Indigenous Forestry Scholarship Program (IFSP): A Forestry Workforce Powered by First Nations

The Indigenous Forestry Scholarship Program (IFSP) is an existing program that the BCFNFC, in partnership with the Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development has developed. The program is designed to grow and connect Indigenous

and laddering to gain the skills needed to access highly skilled jobs related to new value-added and manufacturing initiatives associated with a transition of the forestry sector from high-volume to high-value production.

Our relationships with First Nations communities, organizations, and individuals are the foundation and key to the success of the IFSP program and en-



Since the launch of the program in 2012, 80 Indigenous students have participated.

talent to BC forestry sector workforce opportunities. It is a work and study mentorship program that provides the opportunity for Indigenous students to access funding, and enter into forestry related training and educational programs, and includes mentored summer work experience in their field.

The BCFNFC takes a different approach to attracting Indigenous talent to the forestry sector by working directly with First Nations communities, organizations and individuals to promote, recruit, and provide mentorship for the students. Our work includes helping the students find appropriate pathways to work placements they are interested in, and providing continuous support to keep them on track towards their professional development and success. The IFSP also supports retention and advancement by providing opportunities for upgrading

hances our ability to recruit, mentor, and connect students with industry partners. It enables us to assist the student and industry partner in an effort to increase First Nations' success, participation, and the diversity of the workforce.

The IFSP provides an opportunity for major licensees, independent wood producers, and timber harvesting contractors to strengthen and increase partnerships with local Indigenous communities and to develop workforce initiatives that include training and employment opportunities needed to sustain a skilled workforce, especially in rural areas.

Investing in developing First Nations talent is a way to build an available and locally skilled Indigenous workforce.

To get involved in the Indigenous Forestry Scholarship Program, contact Karen Sorensen at [workforce@forestrycouncil.ca](mailto:workforce@forestrycouncil.ca) for partnership opportunities. 🌲



# ARE BC MILLS POISED FOR LONG-TERM SUCCESS?

By Jim Girvan

It has been a wild ride in the North American lumber markets over the past few years. Since 2019, we have seen lows below \$300 per thousand board feet for spruce-pine-fir (SPF) lumber and highs of close to \$950, with specialty grades and species way off the scale. Looking forward, analysts seem to believe prices will remain strong but in a commodity market, things don't always stay strong for long.

This leads to the question, are BC's SPF-producing mills presently poised to remain competitive compared to their Western Canadian counterparts when the inevitable fall in prices comes?

To answer this, we updated a Western Canada sawmill cost model for 2019 circumstances. We configured a sawmill margin curve that included all of the 70 remaining structural SPF sawmills in the BC Interior, Alberta and Saskatchewan that produce North American structural grade lumber and factored in all others from 2019's 20.2 per cent US import tax

rates. Of note, BC coastal mills and all mills in the Interior that produce primarily cedar products were excluded from the analysis.

curtailed due to poor competitiveness in the event markets fall.

Quartiles were assigned to each mill for the following key indicators: percent-

**BC's log costs are consistently higher, on average, than in other jurisdictions. Together with continued changes to forest policy in areas such as waste utilization (fibre recovery zones), a shrinking working forest due to habitat conservation, loss of timber from forest fires and beetle infestations and, of course, high stumpage, it is not likely that BC's relative position in Western Canada will change much.**

This approach provided a quantitative—albeit relative analysis—of log and sawmill costs, revenues, earnings and, in the end, relative mill rankings. It also included our insights into the structure of the industry as a predictor of which mills could be potentially shut down or

age shipments to US, delivered log cost, lumber from log recovery, sawmill cost, lumber revenue, and residual fibre value.

Each mill attribute was put into five categories in terms of their relative rating from one being the best performance or lowest cost to five being the worst performance

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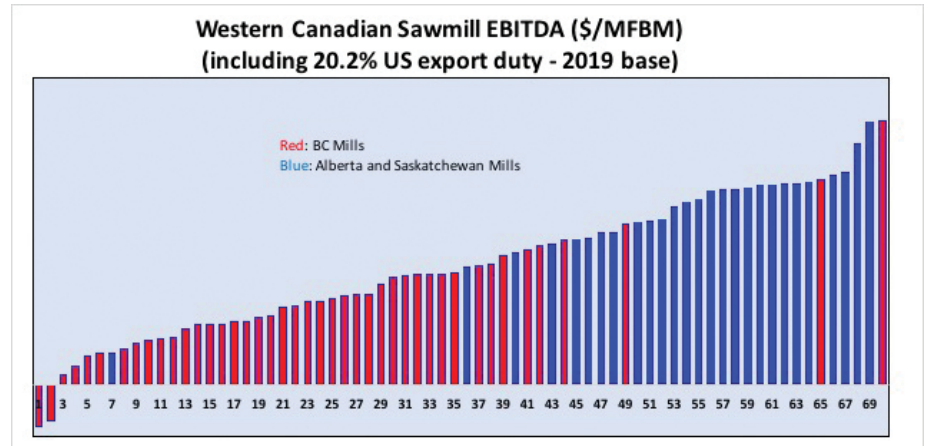
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or highest cost. The rankings from one to five were then assigned cost values based on cost and revenue data that were based on the team's best estimates. The data was extrapolated from the best sawmill down to the worst sawmill over the five cost categories with some specific individual mill data used to generate the benchmark results. The weighted costs and revenues derived from the quartile assignments then yielded an earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortization (EBITDA) calculation. The mills were then ranked according to their EBITDA.

The assessments of EBITDA results are the average for the year 2019. The lumber market prices in 2019 were relatively stable for lumber prices: W-SPF ranged from \$315 to \$385/mfbm. The results represent a relative ranking, assuming average annual prices, for both lumber and residual fibre during the year.

It is also important to recognize that given the methodology employed using



Courtesy of Jim Girman

averaged categories by sawmill attribute, the resultant EBITDA calculation for each specific mill may not match with actual mill results, as the analysis is relative to the large group of mills assessed. That said, in mid-2019 most BC Interior mills demonstrated a range of EBITDA between \$25 and \$60/mfbm while Alberta mills tended to show an EBITDA range of between \$50 and \$90/mfbm.

This suggests that both the relative mill ranking and the overall assessment appear reasonable. Given that mill curtailments did not occur in Alberta or Saskatchewan in the second half of 2019, the rising costs of logs in the BC Interior in the second half of the year resulted in many mills being curtailed due to negative margins, suggesting that the competitiveness of BC mills was very fragile.

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The figure on page 29 depicts the results.

In 2019, generally speaking, Alberta and Saskatchewan mills appear to be consistently more profitable than mills located in BC, primarily as a result of lower delivered log costs and more exposure to US and Canadian markets.

Why is this the case?

While it is important to review each of the five cost or revenue variables used to assess EBITDA, one only needs to look to delivered log costs differences between the three jurisdictions to find the key answer.

BC's log costs are consistently higher, on average, than in other jurisdictions. Together with continued changes to forest policy in areas such as waste utilization (fibre recovery zones), a shrinking working forest due to habitat conservation, loss of timber from forest fires and beetle infestations and, of course, high stumpage, it is not likely that BC's relative position in Western Canada will change much. And, in 2021, we have also been warned that BC stumpage charges will be moving much higher to reflect the strong lumber prices in the second half of 2020 and so far in 2021.

How can we ensure BC's mills move up the cost curve to be in the top quartile category in Western Canada?

Sawmill costs are already the lowest (on average in Western Canada, let alone the world!) so log costs and exposure to the US market are key. The good news is the US lumber import taxes have recently dropped to around 9 per cent from 20 per cent, but these will be reviewed by the US once again later in the year. Therefore, the focus needs to be on log-related cost reductions, something that is directly tied to BC forest policy. 🌲



## SERIOUS GAPS IN EMERGENCY MEDICAL TRANSPORT

By Robin Brunet

When a logger struck by an 18-metre fir tree and thrown down a hill was airlifted by helicopter within minutes of the accident being phoned in, he reached Vancouver General Hospital in under two hours. His rescuers said that without the airlift, he would have faced an eight-hour trip to a local hospital, and a few more hours

to reach a trauma centre: a duration that likely would have resulted in his paralysis, or death.

This accident occurred in 2019 in the relatively central location of Squamish, BC, which is served by TEAAM (Technical Evacuation Advanced Aero Medical), a non-profit airborne medics group. Transplant the same scenario to remote

areas of the province where hundreds of loggers work daily and no emergency evacuation coverage exists, and the potential for tragedy becomes acute.

The situation is even more frustrating when one considers that places such as Washington State or Alaska, with similar geography to BC, enacted legislation years ago to ensure that 99 per cent of



their population is within a 60-minute response time to a Level 3 trauma centre.

But the Truck Loggers Association hopes that 2021 will be a catalyst for change. "The recent closing of E&B Helicopters in Campbell River refocused attention on the issue," says TLA Executive Director Bob Brash.

Brash is referring to a company that provided air transportation and emergency evacuation services to hundreds of forestry firms since 1990; owner Ed Wilcock, who died in 2019, had worked in the forest industry as a camp superintendent and had been given a lifetime-achievement-in-safety award by the BC Forest Safety Council, citing his "understanding and appreciation of workers' safety in the forestry industry."

Bill Nelson, TLA president and a partner in Holbrook Dyson Logging located in Campbell River says, "E&B provided an invaluable service and its closure illustrates how we rely on a patchwork of public and private services, with industry required to provide and pay for its own solutions. What we need is a better helicopter emergency medical service [HEMS] network, and a service out of Campbell River alone would cover

northern Vancouver Island and adjacent mainland areas."

When the issue was studied in 2017 by the BC Forest Safety Council (BCFSC), BC Forest Safety Ombudsman Roger Harris said, "There are no technical or infrastructure barriers to the delivery of air ambulance within that critical first hour to any resident of BC, regardless of where they live. The decision by government not to provide that access is a choice."

While a lack of an air ambulance network can directly impact WorkSafeBC rates and First Nations communities, Harris pointed out that "Faster care results in better medical outcomes for the patient, which in turn results in lower cost to the health care system." It has been calculated that five or six bases in strategic locations could cover the entire province, with existing infrastructure being augmented by public and private assets, possibly even including some of military origin.

The TLA has been lobbying for this issue for many years, and fortunately there is a growing interest in communities across BC for remote parts of the province to be covered by HEMS. A contract was recently created to provide helicopter

medical transportation services on southern Vancouver Island, and government recently announced funding for Prince George to supply airlift services in the Interior. "Support has grown steadily ever since the BCFSC report, and we think now is the time to work with government to push the agenda further forward—especially since government is now engaged at a number of tables," Brash says.

The circumstances driving the call for action have remained unchanged since Ombudsman Harris published *Will It Be There? A Report on Helicopter Emergency Medical Services in BC* in 2017. His report stated that serious gaps in the provision of emergency medical transport threatens the medical outcomes of remote forestry workers who have little to no guarantee to timely medical response in the event of an emergency.

The report recommended that the provincial government guarantee timelines for all residents to be able to access Trauma 3 Level care, similar to other jurisdictions; review the *Emergency Health Services Act* to allow for flexibility when it comes to expanding the scope of practice and role of first responders in the transportation of accident victims; and







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Since then, various groups have discussed the issue:

- A 2017 UBC Centre for Rural Health Research report identified emergency transportation as the single biggest barrier to improving rural health outcomes.
- A January 2019 BC Provincial Health Care Partners' Retreat brought together over 600 health care providers, associations, and health authorities to discuss rural health care; HEMS was specifically identified as a gap.
- A June 2020 BC Rural and First Nations Health & Wellness summit, which included all provincial health authorities, health ministers, First Nations communities, local governments, and other groups, identified all of the gaps in medical transportation in rural BC; again, HEMS was the focus.
- In 2020, BC Rural Centre meetings have taken place at least three times and consisted of a dozen people from different medical and academic institutions focusing on transportation.

John Shearing, director of health & safety at Mosaic Forests, is one of many industry insiders who think establishing a comprehensive HEMS network is long overdue. "I've spent 41 years in the forest sector, including 20 years as a tree faller in remote locations, and during that time I have seen first-hand situations where rapid access to helicopter emergency evacuation service has made the difference between life and death," he says.


Shearing stresses that a HEMS network benefits everyone, not just loggers. "We have people in remote areas of our forests, whether working or pursuing back-country recreation—activities that are key to our provincial economy but have inherent hazards. Maintaining helicopter evacuation service and trained medical services to respond in case of serious injury is a crucial safety infrastructure that must be maintained on BC's coast."

Mayor Gaby Wickstrom of Port McNeill adds, "The need for a reliable emergency response mechanism for rural workers is paramount to achieve that 'golden hour' window, which assures workers will have the best chance of survival when a serious injury occurs, often many kilometres away from the nearest hospital."

Brash acknowledges that establishing a HEMS network will be a challenge. "We need to take this one step at a time. Contractors and communities have indicated their support, and the time has come to push such support to reality."

The cost of a HEMS network must be squarely addressed. "Success will depend on all parties supporting the program, including government," Brash says. "It will not be cheap, and there will be a need for all of us to contribute to some unknown degree in the future."

But the effort will be worth it, given the numerous studies showing that providing medical care to accident victims within the first hour of an accident taking place is literally life-saving and leads to far quicker recovery/rehabilitation. "Now's our chance to build momentum," Brash says. "We look forward to working with policy makers in making this goal a reality."▲



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# THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC VALUE OF OLD-GROWTH LOGGING

By Ian MacNeill

When it was released last year, the provincial government's Old Growth Strategic Review did not call for a moratorium on old-growth logging, but you did not have to be a meteorologist to see which way the wind was blowing. The report, *A New Future for Old Forests*, called for increased Indigenous involvement, more stringent compliance, updated targets and guidelines, the addressing of "immediate threats" in old-growth areas deemed at risk, as well as updated classification and inventory measures, among others. It led to the government "deferring" logging on 335,000 hectares of land. Predictably, conservationists said the measures did not go far enough.

What the report did not talk about much were the socioeconomic impacts further curtailment of old-growth logging would have on communities that rely on forestry for survival and where

old-growth timber makes up a significant part of the harvesting basket. These include First Nations communities that are developing forestry operations in their traditional land and see them as a way of promoting social and economic independence.

In fact, there seems to be a built-in assumption in the report that sooner rather than later old-growth logging will cease and communities that rely on forestry will "transition" to other activities. What these other activities might be is left unclear, leaving people like Ucluelet Mayor Mayco Noel feeling somewhat frustrated. "It's fine to have studies like this, but government also has a responsibility to come up with clear, consultative transition plans to get to their magic spot instead of just making bold statements," he says.

Communities are already getting squeezed by the inclement weather affecting

the forest industry, just ask Mackenzie Mayor Joan Atkinson. "Things aren't going well right now," she says, pointing out that three of the town's four mills are currently "in curtailment", and the job count is down from a normal of 650 to roughly 275 today. "We have the most skin in the game," she says. "If Canfor doesn't come back it will be a blip on a spreadsheet for them, but for us it will be devastating."

Devastating for several reasons, not all of them obvious. Financial hardship leads the way, obviously. The tax revenues flowing from the mills keep the town solvent, and residents need the jobs to pay their bills and put food on the table, but unemployment has its own insidious impact over and above dollars and cents. Studies show that crime and addiction rates tend to inch upward in lockstep with the unemployment rates, while at the same time shops and schools close,

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social relationships breakdown, and generational roots are severed as people give up and move away.

And while there is no shortage of discussion about how expensive housing costs are in urban centres like Vancouver, living in rural BC is hardly economical. High housing costs in urban centres like Vancouver and the rise of cybercommuting possibilities for many types of work are encouraging some city dwellers to cash out and move to smaller towns. "My house has increased in value last year by 9 per cent," says Ucluelet's Noel. "Others in the region have gone up by as much as 20 per cent." Additionally, food costs are often higher, a consequence of less competition and higher transportation costs.

What is frustrating for forestry professionals like Mike Copperthwaite, general manager of the Revelstoke Community

Forest (RCF), which is owned by the city of Revelstoke, is that critics of old-growth logging don't seem to understand that British Columbia has some of the highest standards in the world when it comes to forest management. "Everybody wants wood," he says. "But if it doesn't come from our world-class managed forests where we have so many rules and regulations, it's going to come from jurisdictions that don't have these rules."

He also points out that while 70,000 hectares of RCF's 120,000-hectare land base is treed, fully 50,000 hectares of that basket has already been set aside and will never be logged. "I have this conversation with people here all the time," he says. "I feel like they don't get it. Most of the old growth is protected, and if we have to stop logging it altogether, then we'd cease to exist as a company." What would also come to an end are the jobs

for residents and revenues that flow into city coffers.

Ironically, what access recreational users have to the backcountry is made possible largely because of logging. It is the logging companies that build and maintain the roads leading into the old-growth forests recreationists pine for. In the Revelstoke area, logging allows access to the spectacular Keystone Standard Basin, renowned for mountain biking and hiking. "We encourage people to go there, but if the logging stops the road will be deactivated and there won't be any access," he says.

Mayor Gaby Wickstrom of Port McNeill on Vancouver Island says eliminating old-growth logging would have a staggering impact on the northern Vancouver Island community. "If there was no more old-growth logging there would

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be about a 50 per cent reduction in the cut,” she says. “Imagine being a farmer and suddenly being told you can only use half your land.”

She also takes issue with the argument that unless old-growth logging comes to an end, there will be no old-growth forests for future generations to enjoy. “On the north island, 76 per cent of old growth is outside the timber harvesting land base. It has been set aside for parks and eco-reserves, so to say there will be no more old growth is simply not true.”

In the modern age of social media, it would be a mistake to assume that this is simply a fight between urbanites and people who live in small communities that depend on forestry for jobs and revenue. Powell River on the Sunshine Coast was built on forestry, but today the town is increasingly the home of “newer folks” with different ideas about the value of forestry, or the need to protect it going forward, says Powell River Mayor Dave Formosa. “The dynamics are changing and it’s getting difficult to gauge the will of the community,” he says, pointing out that when the subject of old-growth logging came up at a city council meeting it led to a split vote, with council deciding to not take a firm position without further information. Or to put it more plainly, arguments about old-growth logging have the potential to pit neighbour against neighbour in the very communities that are affected the most.

Nevertheless, despite its relative decline, forestry remains vital to Powell River’s economic prosperity. “The forest community is very important to us,” says Formosa. “Our community forest has been a lifesaver, and it has poured funds

into things that represent important values for us. It has also helped the community embrace forestry, because they see the good it does. A community forest is a beautiful thing.”

If there is one thing the strategic report emphasizes, it is the importance of getting information out to people who will ultimately vote to determine the future of old-growth logging, many of whom get their best views of them on television sets and social media websites. Providing some relevant information is John Walker, stewardship forester for the Williams Lake First Nation. He points out that forests age out, and when they do, nature tends to find a way to eliminate the old and make way for the new. Walker argues that the pine and spruce beetle epidemics were a result of too much old growth, and that the infestation was nature’s way of “resetting” itself. He adds that current management practices allow forests to gather too many fuels, the results of which are forest fires poisoning the air for urban and rural residents alike and threatening the very existence of communities unfortunate enough to be in their path. “A stagnant forest is not a managed forest,” he says. “Reacting, as we have been doing, instead of being proactive is not the way to manage.”

Something Walker liked in the report was its insistence that First Nations play a more important role in forest management. “First Nations have been restricted from the land base for so long, but before the area was settled, they controlled it, they were doing forest management, and the ecosystem was thriving, so getting some of those values back and incorporating plant assessment, and hunting, is extremely important.”

Dallas Smith, president and CEO of the Nanwakolas Council on Vancouver Island, personifies this kind of progressive forest management. He was a key architect of the Great Bear Rainforest agreements, and more recently participated in the inking of an agreement whereby BC forestry companies, including Western Forest Products and Interfor, as well as BC Timber Sales, agreed to abide by traditional laws outlined in the “Large Cultural Cedar (LCC) Operation Protocol.” The new rules make it easier for First Nations to identify and protect cedar trees deemed important for cultural activities.

Despite his bona fides as a conservationist, he is also concerned about calls to eliminate old-growth logging because it comprises an important component of the nation’s harvesting profile. “We work with companies and understand you can’t have a ban on old-growth harvesting because it would cripple the industry at a time when we are just starting to get some skin in the game,” he says, adding that in today’s social-media driven climate of anti-logging opposition, “it is difficult to be a conservationist and grow economically.”

There are social benefits to old-growth logging on First Nations’ territory as well. “Families want dad to be able to have a job and live at home rather than be working up north in a mine,” says Smith.

He looks forward to the increased consultation with First Nations the report calls for but is impatient for those consultations to begin. “The study paints a picture we knew had existed for a long time, but it does not discuss long-term solutions. And they did not talk to our chiefs, they just said we are going to defer activities in this area. In this day of UNDRIP (United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People) and consultation they should be having discussions with us before making decisions.”

The war of words about old-growth logging is not going to go away anytime soon. But discussions about the future of forestry in British Columbia need to be tempered with informed discussions about the kinds of impact old-growth logging would have on the people most affected and communities and First Nations that rely on forestry for their economic and social well-being. That is the best way to ensure a war of words does not turn into a war in the woods. ♣

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