

UPDATING AND MODERNIZING THE FORESTRY SECTOR

By Katrine Conroy

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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,



Photo courtesy of the NDP

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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

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. 🌲