

TLA History (Long History)

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The Truck Loggers Association was formed to give the independent loggers a collective voice in the changes taking place in society and the forest industry, as well as to share information about newly developing logging machines, methods, and technology.

From the very beginning, committee discussions and convention topics have included forest policy, labour relations, safety, and the latest developments in logging. The annual TLA convention, started in the first year of the association, has helped make the people of British Columbia aware of the value of the forest industry, and has drawn people together from all parts of the forest community in a friendly setting. Those who may strongly disagree on one subject often work together to solve a mutual problem. TLA conventions, with a few minor exceptions, have addressed serious questions with dignity, but have always allowed time for camaraderie and fun.

The need for a voice

By 1900, forestry had overtaken mining to become the most important industry in B.C. In 1910, a Royal Commission on forestry recommended the establishment of the Forest Service, but it was the 1930s before government and industry recognized that timber was a crop.

Although government forest policies have evolved over the past 100 years — from the outright sale of timber and land with no further government control or charges to the present system of the sale of cutting rights with many controls and charges — their basic objectives have not changed. These objectives are: to derive the maximum revenue from the forest, to provide jobs in B.C., and to ensure the stability of communities.

During the 1920s, the lumber industry boomed primarily by supplying lumber to house a rapidly growing U.S. population. This market collapsed in 1932 when the Americans placed a duty on Canadian lumber. Most mills and logging camps closed, some of them permanently. The government policy had failed: forest revenue was down, jobs were lost, and communities were abandoned. The public was disillusioned and worried.

By 1934, the industry was getting back on its feet, and many men were once again working in camps and mills. In 1936, the Forest Service published a report, *The Forest Resources of B.C.*, written by a forester, F.D. Mulholland, that was the first attempt to inventory the forests of the province. The report was based on past recovery records, existing timber cruises, and a great many educated guesses. In hindsight, it appears the report was extremely conservative, but that is due to the utilization standards of the day. Most of the steep areas and three quarters of the hemlock were considered inaccessible. None of the lodge-pole pine in the interior was included at all. The report correctly concluded that the industry could not continue to cut the best stands of Douglas Fir at the present rate. It pointed out the disappointment and failure of natural regeneration. The report recommended an increased focus on tree planting, improved fire protection, and reduction of waste.

By the 1930s, “born in Canada” loggers began to replace immigrants from Europe and Asia in the woods. Many of the immigrants were single men who came to Canada to make their fortune and then send home for a wife, but quite a number of them remained single and the camp life suited them. The work was hard but the food was good, and their fellow workers provided friendship that wouldn’t be found in a larger community. In those days, if you didn’t like one

camp you could easily move to another.

The younger loggers, many from the Canadian prairies, wanted more than just a job in an isolated camp. They wanted a nice place to raise a family, job security, and safe working conditions. Many of these people got out of the woods as soon as possible, others became active in the union, and still others became independent loggers.

Logging technology using steam donkeys and railroads developed rapidly on the Pacific coast during the 1920s, only to stagnate during the Great Depression and the Second World War. As late as 1950, many of the large companies were still using 20-year-old equipment and methods. The independent loggers or “Gypos” could not afford a railroad, and in any case most of their areas were too small and steep. They used A-frames, “cats,” trucks, and small, gasoline-powered donkeys. They were the leaders in innovation and the development of new technology.

The balloon tire, with its strong Rayon casing, replaced the hard rubber tire for trucks in the late 1920s. Diesel-powered “cats” (crawler tractors) with bulldozer blades came to B.C. in the mid-1930s, and by 1936 Mulholland reported there were 34 locomotives, 437 donkey engines, 68 cats, and 65 trucks on the coast. These numbers were to change dramatically in the next few years.

The new tires allowed trucks to travel at higher speeds and provided better traction for steeper grades. The bulldozer made it possible to build cheap roads. Loggers could now build roads closer to the timber to eliminate long yarding distances and cold-decking. This meant that they could use smaller, cheaper yarders like the 10-10 introduced by Frank Lawrence. Not only did these innovations make logging more efficient and safer, they also increased the forest inventory by reducing the volume of inaccessible timber.

1938 was the year of the great Campbell River Fire, which was started by a logging locomotive and quickly spread through the slash into the standing timber. The fire was so big and serious that men and equipment were conscripted from all over Vancouver Island and the Lower Mainland. For the first time, the Forest Service closed the woods and stopped all logging. The smoke was so dense that even as far away as Victoria and Vancouver the sun appeared as a red ball in the sky.

The public was frightened and demanded that the government do something. As a result of the fire, the government introduced legislation to permit the Forest Service to declare forest closures, and to pass regulations requiring slash burning and snag falling on logged areas to abate the fire hazard.

In the 1930s, most of the larger railroad logging companies belonged to the B.C. Loggers Association. The BCLA operated a hiring hall called the Loggers Agency, advised the government on forest policy and log-scaling and grading standards. It also provided its members with statistics on log sales and prices. Many BCLA members were also members of the Pacific Logging Congress and met annually with their counterparts from Washington and Oregon to discuss logging and new developments.

About half of the larger sawmills were members of the B.C. Lumber Manufacturers Association, which worked to establish uniform lumber grading standards and had considerable political influence. These sawmills sold their lumber through their co-operative, Seaboard Lumber Sales. The other sawmills, large and small, were either owned by H.R. MacMillan or sold their lumber through the H.R. MacMillan Export Company. They belonged to a rival organization — the

Western Lumber Manufacturers Association — which was dominated by MacMillan.

Small, independent loggers had no organization to speak for their interests.

The TLA's infancy

During the summer of 1939, loggers in the Parksville area discussed new regulations on snag felling and slash burning. Also discussed was the need for an association to express their concerns. Bert Welch of Olympic Logging in Qualicum took the lead and invited all the loggers in the area to a meeting. Only Wallace Baikie showed up.

By 1941, the effects of the war were being felt by the logging industry: equipment was in short supply, many of the best young men had joined the armed forces, wages were increasing, and prices were regulated. To make matters worse, the confusing new slash-burning regulation carried a \$5-per-acre penalty, and the costs of burning and snag felling were not permitted expenses under the income tax act.

In October 1941, Welch called another meeting in Qualicum. It was attended by 18 loggers, who agreed to form an association. A general meeting was held in Nanaimo in the summer of 1942 to elect officers and work out the details of incorporation. The name "B.C. TLA" was chosen, but it was unacceptable because of possible confusion with the BCLA. On May 4, 1943, the TLA of B.C. was incorporated.

A general meeting was held in Nanaimo shortly after. Welch continued as president, with Ole Buck as vice-president. Fred Adames was employed as secretary-manager and located in an office in Nanaimo. Following the business meeting, Mr. Bremmer, the wartime tire controller, spoke about rationing, and Jim Sheasgreen of Comox Logging spoke about salvage logging. This was followed by a general discussion about slash burning. (Author's note: I attended this meeting with my father. The discussion became so heated that Mr. Simpson of B.A.T. Co., now the Iron River division of MB, stormed out of the meeting in a rage). At the end of the discussion, the members passed a motion to present a brief to the provincial cabinet on "slash disposal and its effect on reforestation."

The brief was presented on July 17, 1943 — just six weeks after the association was formed! The delegates so impressed the premier, John Hart, that he agreed to include slash burning as a topic to be considered at the upcoming Royal Commission on forestry. During the fall of 1943, the TLA board held a meeting in Chilliwack and attracted many new members. To better serve these members, it was decided to move the office to Vancouver. It was also decided to hold a two-day convention in Vancouver in January 1944.

The first convention was attended by 60 delegates. Convention topics included tires, timber controls, the future of plywood, insurance, slash burning, and safety. The banquet speaker, Bruce McKelvie, spoke on "The History of Lumbering." The luncheon was sponsored by Wrights Canadian Ropes Ltd. and Marshall Wells. During the business meeting, three committees were established: log pricing, safety, and forest policy.

The second convention, held in Vancouver in January 1945, had more delegates and included some of the big names in the industry, including H.R. MacMillan, Harold Foley of the Powell River Company, Bob Filberg of Comox Logging, and George Meirose, the assistant chief forester. Convention topics included safety, forestry, and new developments in trucks. Finning Tractor sponsored the banquet, where the guest speaker was MP Gerry McGeer. The TLA was

now firmly established as a major advocate for the industry.

Setting the pattern

The TLA, with its annual convention, was formed at exactly the right time to participate in the many changes that took place in the forest industry following the end of the war in August 1945. Young men returning from the war were used to positions of authority and often had more formal education than their fathers; the industry was being completely reorganized and integrated; and large amounts of war surplus and new equipment became quickly available.

Perhaps the most influential element of change was the Sloan Commission, which had been established in 1943, with Justice Gordon Sloan as its sole commissioner, to inquire into all matters generally relating to or connected with the forest resources of the province. The Sloan Commission heard from 293 witnesses. Welch presented a brief on behalf of the TLA and several other directors presented individual briefs.

The Sloan Commission's report, published in December 1945, made 13 recommendations, including reducing logging waste, increasing government revenue from the forest, managing the forests on sustained yield, and increasing fire protection. It specifically recommended the granting of perpetual tenure to companies in areas where they agreed to manage the forests. It also recommended setting aside other areas — Working Circles — that would be managed by the Forest Service and logged by independents.

The government quickly accepted Sloan's recommendations, and passed legislation authorizing the Forest Service to grant Forest Management Licences (later called Tree Farm Licences). The first was granted in 1947 to Columbia Cellulose, a New York company that agreed to build a pulp mill at Prince Rupert, and a second to Crown Zellerbach, of San Francisco, in 1948.

The issuance of these licences caused immediate concern to TLA members. Both of them violated the principles set out by Sloan and both were issued to non-resident American companies. In addition, FML #2 included timberland on the Jongstone Strait islands that had already been included in a public Working Circle, and was easily accessible to small loggers. The public became concerned and the media hinted at "friends in high places." Thus began the great debate over forest tenure. Loggers, being optimists, carried on and hoped for the best. But it was not to be.

The reorganization of the industry resulted from changing utilization standards, consolidation, and integration, as well as from the desire of some companies to get enough timber to obtain an FML. In some cases, the mill and its owner simply became old and tired and sold out. Before the war, market loggers, large and small, sold sorted logs to the independent sawmills located near Vancouver and Victoria, and also exported logs to the U.S. and Japan. Other sawmill and pulp mill owners had their own timber and logging operations. Some were as large as Victoria Lumber Company at Chemainus and the Powell River Company. Others were small, portable tie-mills located in the woods. They skidded their logs directly to the mill, then moved the mill when the skidding distance became too great.

During the war, the local pulp mills and the U.S. mills in Bellingham began to buy low-grade pulp logs, then chips made from sawmill waste. After the Bloedel pulp mill at Port Alberni and the HARMAC mill in Nanaimo came into operation in 1943, sawmill chips became an important commodity; mills were forced to install expensive whole-log barkers and waste-wood chippers to survive. At this time, many independent sawmills went out of business, greatly reducing the

number of customers for the market loggers. In addition, the Forest Service now began to enforce utilization standards so that all loggers were forced to log pulp logs, regardless of whether or not there was a market for them.

Just before the war, many business people fled from central Europe. Some of them came to B.C. and invested in the forest industry. Among these were the Koerner brothers, who bought sawmills and pulp mills and formed Alaska Pine, and John Prentice and Poldi Rentley, who started Canadian Forest Products.

In 1945, the H.R. MacMillan Export Company bought several companies, including the Victoria Lumber Company with its vast timber holdings. In 1946, a financial group from Ontario, led by E.P. Taylor, bought four large B.C. companies and formed B.C. Forest Products. Crown Zellerbach, which had been granted FML #2, bought Pacific Mills at Ocean Falls, Canadian Western Lumber, and Comox Logging.

This consolidation and rapid increase in the growth of the larger companies further limited the free market for logs. The market logger had become a marginal supplier to large companies who controlled most of their own timber supply. If the logger signed a sales agreement with a large company, he had security, but at their price. If he remained truly independent, he might get a better price for his logs, but he had no security and would have difficulty getting bank loans. Many of the independents gave up and sold their timber rights, others continued to log as contractors.

As soon as the war was over, equipment and fuel became available. War surplus depots opened all over the country, selling trucks, jeeps, tires, engines, and many items that had been unobtainable only months before. V-8 Cadillac engines built for tanks were for sale for \$100; it was cheaper to buy a new engine than fix the old one. Also, many former war factories moved into the domestic market, and they were eager to build new products and machines. TLA members took full advantage of this bonanza, readily sharing information and technology with the larger companies during the annual convention and through site visits.

The hemlock looper infestation on southwestern Vancouver Island in 1946-47 damaged 50,000 acres of timber. That forced Bloedel to open a truck camp at Sarita River, and B.C. Forest Products to move into trucks to salvage the timber in the Caycuse Valley. The damming of Campbell River and the Skagit River required massive new logging operations to harvest timber ahead of the rising water. These were exciting times for machinery manufacturers and enterprising loggers.

In 1953, Clare Smith, logging manager for the Powell River Company, was a director of the TLA, and as late as 1955, Don McColl, logging manager for the MacMillan companies, was a director. In January 1955, the government announced the second Sloan Commission on forestry. Now the division between the TLA and large companies over timber tenure came into the open. TLA member Gordon Gibson, an MLA, and the TLA's counsel, Larry Eckart, led the fight and made it public. All the major companies resigned from the TLA. Bob Banks, the manager of the new MB camp at Sarita River, thanked the TLA for its past help and then dramatically walked out of a convention meeting.

Not surprisingly, employees from large companies continued to contribute to convention camp management seminars and share information. Senior executives still attended the luncheon to hear the Minister of Forests.

So really, not much changed: The TLA represents contractors and the few remaining independents, and the Council of Forest Industries (COFI) represents the majors on the subject of timber tenure and harvesting rights. On other matters of mutual interest, TLA and COFI people work together.

The early years of the TLA set a pattern that's still followed today. Holding an annual convention in Vancouver was a brilliant idea. It, more than anything else, has made the B.C. public aware of the importance of forestry. The program has always been and continues to be a mix of technical, forest policy, and human relations topics, while still allowing time for socializing and fun. Young foremen, older executives, people from large and small companies, union leaders, and government officials, many of whom may strongly disagree with each other on some topics, find that they have a strong mutual interest on other topics. The suppliers and service industry have also played a leading role right from the beginning, and the convention has given their salesmen an opportunity to meet people at all levels in the industry.

The present members should be grateful that their early directors had the foresight to develop an association based on such sound principles, that it can confidently represent loggers in all the challenges facing the forest industry today.