

WINTER FORECAST: SLOW TIMBER HARVESTING SEASON



I'll start with an update on the happenings in BC's northwest. Forest harvesting in the area has almost ground to a halt. The export market to Asia has ground to a halt. Most of our pulp wood was going to Howe Sound Pulp and Paper and they have a huge amount of inventory on hand due to the recent permanent closure of their newsprint machine. According to predictions no fibre from our area will be required until next year.

and in the United States. We had a hot dry start to our summer resulting in not only fires in the Interior but also on the coast. In the northwest of the province it was the driest summer in memory and there was even a small forest fire near Port Edward. Locals recall this as a first for the region.

Pine forests need fire to regenerate and, unless they threaten people or property, the current strategy has been to let those fires burn out naturally. The beetle-killed

At the time of writing, the threat of new major fires is rapidly diminishing as the nights cool off and the moisture content in the air increases. Even with the early start to the fire season we just exceeded last years' mid-August spending levels. To date passing the \$200 million mark. The individual number of fires is higher, largely attributed to the many lightning storms this year. Our most expensive year fighting fires was 2003, where the province spent in excess of \$400 million. That was the year of the McLure and Barriere fires. The costs only include the cost of fighting the fires and do not include the millions of dollars of lost property that occur with urban interface fires along with the human emotional toll.

A lot has been done in BC to mitigate the damage created by urban interface fires, especially in the wake of the devastating McLure and Barriere fires. Funding is available for communities to develop a wildfire protection plan. This program provides funding to communities to define and analyze the risks. Implement plans that recommend fuel modification projects and prioritize treatment areas among a number of other incentives. A few additional items that could possibly be added to the program are funding for education for homeowners to develop their own wildfire protection plan around their individual properties as well as an incentive for a reduction in house insurance premiums if a successful plan were developed.

Hopefully, the next haze that fills the air is the exhaust smoke from the harvesting equipment and logging trucks going to work and not the smoke from more of our beautiful BC forests burning. 🌲

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The ex-West Fraser sawmill in Terrace, purchased by a Chinese company still remains closed after two months. However, they have recently started to harvest their tenure but it's being shipped directly to Prince Rupert. I'm told there has never been so much lumber from Smithers and Houston sitting at the port in Prince Rupert waiting for shipment. (Note: Just before Truck LoggerBC went to print, Skeena Sawmills announced it will be reopening. Mill official Roger Keery said that full production should be kicking in the last week of September.)

That said, most signs still point to a very slow harvesting season this winter.

Switching gears, this summer was a challenge in my neck of the woods. Standing on my deck viewing Shuswap Lake during this past summer a smoky haze was everywhere—at times so bad I was unable to see across the lake. Looking upward, one could see the sun attempting to make a brilliant appearance; however, it became a red ball in the sky. Although I have never been to China, the view is reminiscent of many pictures I have seen of the pollution in their urban areas.

Our problem was not pollution but smoke from forest fires, both here in BC

pine forests in the BC Interior provided ample fuel for fires. After the fire season is over for the year, the Ministry reviews the damage and impact on our forests and begins assessing which areas should be replanted and which areas should be left to regenerate themselves.

I thought that it would be interesting to research the amount of fires caused by lightning versus those started by human carelessness and ignorance. Although these come in various forms, I view carelessness as not completely putting out a campfire and having it erupt after one has left. Ignorance on the other hand is starting a campfire during campfire bans or tossing lit cigarette butts out of your vehicle.

According to the Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations website, the current 10-year average, taken from 2004-2013, is 1,847 fires. Of these, 38.5 per cent (or 712) were people caused and 61.5 per cent (or 1,135) were caused by lightning. Given that the average cost to fight these fires was \$145.5 million, the 39 per cent people caused fires cost the taxpayer around \$57 million. Possibly more education or heavier fines are ways to reduce these costs.