

DAVID ELSTONE: FORESTRY, ADVOCACY AND GETTING THE JOB DONE

By Brenda Martin



Photo: TLA Staff

Being a mountain biker, a forest professional and a TLA advocate, David understands that there are multiple stakeholders operating on the land base.

David Elstone, RPF, joined the Truck Loggers Association (TLA) in January as the new Executive Director after working for 10 years as a financial analyst for ERA Forest Products Research, an independent financial research shop, located on the Sunshine Coast.

“As an analyst, I viewed the BC forest industry from 30,000 feet, as part of a broader global industry perspective following world markets and trade,” said Elstone. “Now I’m standing on the stumps alongside coastal forest contractors. I’m excited about this opportunity to be a hands-on part of BC’s coastal forestry.”

Elstone studied forestry at the University of British Columbia, in part, because of his great uncle Alvin Fairhurst. “He was a mentor of mine,” said Elstone. “Uncle Al began his career as a forest engineer and ended it as a marine parks planner with the BC government. I spent

my summers sailing with my uncle and he showed me the rich history of the BC coastal logging industry and taught me the need for balance between conservation and resource development.” In fact, Elstone’s family has a fair bit of coastal forest industry roots. His mother’s family was involved in various aspects of the industry including logging operations, a small sawmill and a shake and shingle mill. “My great grandfather travelled up and down the BC coast and into Washington State following the logging work,” said Elstone.

The Journey to the TLA

Elstone started out timber cruising for Weldwood, compassing in Smith Inlet, Clowhom Falls and Squamish. “I spent a lot of time running around in the old growth, taking tree heights and diameters,” said Elstone. “I also worked for Canfor and stayed in the camp now used by Dorman Timber and frequented by TLA President Don Banasky.”

Later on in his career, Elstone had the opportunity to run his own company doing watershed restoration work, including landslide rehabilitation and erosion control. “That was fun work, managing a labour crew.” Elstone also helped manage TimberWest’s Forest Renewal BC



Photo: Shian Denny Photography

David spoke to the media several times during the convention and generated good media coverage for the TLA.

program in TFL 46 and 47, focusing on their enhanced silviculture program. “A highlight of that work was the aerial fertilization of the Douglas fir stands in Johnstone Straits,” said Elstone.

Elstone has already met with Premier Christy Clark and Minister Thomson on several occasions and he plans to continue to do so.

After Forest Renewal BC ended, Elstone knew what he wanted to do next. He earned a graduate diploma in business administration from Simon Fraser University to focus on the business side of the industry. “But to understand the industry, you have to understand logs,” said Elstone. So he also took a log scaling and grading course at British Columbia Institute of Technology and worked at the log sorts in Howe Sound to get on-the-ground log experience.

With aspirations still for the business side of the industry, Elstone joined ERA Forest Products Research where his passion for forestry and new-found love of data came together. “I filled the role of trying to understand forest product markets in US and Asia.” Elstone analyzed private timberland, log, lumber, OSB, plywood and fibre markets around the world and in doing so was able to understand the supply, demand and pricing of various forest product commodities. “Working at ERA gave me a solid understanding of the world markets and how everything is integrated together,” said Elstone. “Nothing operates in isolation in this industry.”

Providing a Return on Investment

Given his experience working with investors at ERA, it’s not surprising that Elstone plans to treat TLA members like shareholders. “I want to ensure every TLA member feels they are getting a return on their investment in the TLA,” said Elstone. “That’s my number one focus.”

To help him do that, Elstone has been on the ground meeting members and visiting their operations. At the time of writing, he’d already been out to see several operations on the Sunshine Coast, Fraser Valley and Vancouver Island. And he has several more lined up.

“I know I can advocate better if I have seen the issues and opportunities on-the-ground,” said Elstone. “The value of

putting a face to the challenge and hearing the stories firsthand can’t be emphasized enough.” So Elstone plans to continue to meet with members and walk their operations regularly over the next

several months. “I’m looking forward to our TLA Networking Event in Campbell River this April. It will give me a chance

to touch base with members I met at the convention and get a sense of what’s happening on the mid-Island.” Elstone also encourages TLA members to invite him out to their operations, or even just call him to give their perspective.

What He’s Heard So Far

So far, Elstone has found that “everyone has a unique take, but there are some common themes that are definitely starting to permeate.” The issues all fall under contractor sustainability: consistency of workflow, phase congestion, rate-related



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issues and more responsibility being downloaded onto the contractor, just to name a few.

“When I was running my labour crew, I employed laid-off loggers. I learnt that loggers are hardworking and innovative,” said Elstone. But what he hears and sees when talking to and visiting contractors is that innovation isn’t being rewarded and that is frustrating members. “It’s stunning that an entire section of the forest industry is working hard, finding efficiencies and innovating and they still can’t get ahead,” said Elstone. “When hard work and innovation are not rewarded, frustration inevitably builds.”

Where He Plans To Act

Elstone has already met with Premier Christy Clark and Minister Thomson on several occasions and he plans to continue to do so. He knows the value of making sure government officials are aware of the challenges facing TLA members and how it will affect the forest industry as a whole. “Advocacy is about making sure the people who make decisions know about your challenges and that you offer them realistic solutions.”

It’s also about building and maintaining your reputation. “At ERA, because we were selling a service, reputational capital was all we had. We had to rely on the quality of our data and research,” said Elstone. “This is also true at the TLA. As an advocacy body, all we have is our history and reputation and I’m lucky that the TLA has such strength in both. I’m committed to telling an honest story about coastal contractors and the challenges that they face in the industry right now.”

Between regular meetings with members, government officials and the Coast Forest Product Association executive, there won’t be many people in coastal BC that don’t hear his story. This is also true at a national level as Elstone was profiled in the Working Forest newspaper based out of Ontario and wrote the back-page “Final Cut” column for the spring issue of Canadian Forest Industries magazine.

Behind the Scenes

Elstone and his wife, Astrid Bradbury, have lived in Roberts Creek on the Sunshine Coast for the last 14 years. They have two children, Kate, who is 14 years old, and Marcus, who is 10. “I love the Sunshine Coast lifestyle,” said Elstone. “As a family, we enjoy being part of a

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Doug Sladey rebuilt this mountain bike trail in his cutblock as part of his commitment to the mountain biking community. It's this kind of community partnership that makes forestry such a great industry to work in.

semi-rural community. We get to have conversations like, 'As we ate lunch today, a momma bear and her cubs ate theirs from our apple tree just outside our kitchen window.' It just doesn't get any better than that!" David's wife, Bradbury, is a DJ—lining up the tunes for weddings and many community events on the Sunshine Coast.

Elstone is also an avid mountain biker. Being a mountain biker, a forest professional and a TLA advocate, he understands that there are multiple stakeholders operating on the land base. "When I visited the Sladey Timber operation, I saw a mountain bike trail in the cutblock. Doug Sladey had proudly rebuilt it as part of his commitment to the mountain biking community. It's this kind of community partnership and willingness to be involved that makes forestry such a great industry to work in." It speaks to the balance that Elstone's uncle taught him—a respect for varied interests, where logging and recreation can co-exist.



David can't stress enough the importance he puts on talking to members so he can really grasp the issues he's advocating about.

Membership Call To Action

Finally, Elstone wants to stress again the importance he puts on talking to members and seeing their challenges at the worksite so he can really grasp the issues he's advocating for on their behalf. "Nothing can replace on-the-ground experience and face-to-face conversation," said Elstone. Members interested in having Elstone visit their operations just need to contact him at david@tla.ca or 604.684.4291 ext. 1 and he'll find a time that works for everyone. 🌲

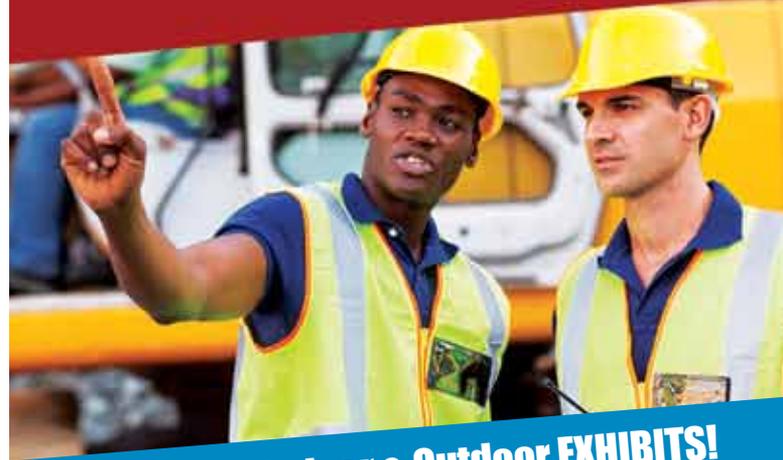
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