

VIEW FROM THE NORTHWEST: MARKETS, ELECTIONS AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT



Another year is well under way. Already we have made progress in two key areas. At the TLA convention in January, Premier Christy Clark announced her government's Contractor Sustainability Review of BC's timber harvesting contractors. Forestry contractors are based in our communities, hire local workers and purchase materials and supplies locally. Their stability contributes to the stability of rural communities. The ILA, TLA, and NWLA were instrumental in putting this issue in front of government and are delighted they have decided to act on it.

The second announcement by Premier Clark at the convention was the job training tax credit for on-the-ground training for BC's timber harvesting contractors. We are all aware of the—let's call it advanced average age of forestry workers. A recently retired friend called our logging crew a geriatric club in reference to that reality. We are all aware of the costs associated with on-the-ground mentoring of new workers and the announcement will assist in offsetting some of those costs as well as giving young workers a better chance at gaining experience in the industry. I hope this announcement will be acted on before the upcoming election.

Just prior to the the TLA convention opening, we had the opportunity to meet with Minister Steve Thomson. I feel it was a productive meeting with a good exchange of views. The main item I presented was the need to rejuvenate government and NWLA's joint efforts in finding solutions to the problems in the northwest forest industry. With contractors and government busy with hydro lines and pipelines for the last few years, the focus has been lost. A good starting point may be dusting off the 2006 Northwest Forestry Revitalization Strategy. Although the strategy is now over ten years old, it is still a useful document and could serve as a template for moving forward.

Speaking of the upcoming election, it is very important that we, as members of our respective organizations and as individual voters, make sure all the candidates are aware of the importance of the forest industry to rural communities and the entire province. The forest industry represents billions of dollars in economic activity in the province and much of that economic activity is in rural communities. The jobs in the forest

demand for fencing and decking materials both in the local market and elsewhere in North America. Cedar fencing and decking has long been a staple product for the small sawmill operators in the region. When cedar log prices are high, the end product becomes too expensive and demand dries up with consumers opting for alternative products. The economic benefit this industry brings to the region is often underestimated given

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industry are well-paid jobs comparative to some others and provide substantial revenues to both the provincial and federal governments. Maintaining government awareness of the issues that arise within the forest industry is important in order to continue the contributions the industry makes to the economy and lifestyles of rural populations.

Log markets in the northwest are holding fairly steady if not improving. Most local forestry contractors have a full season in front of them. The benefit of stable markets results in contractors having advance work booked rather than gaps in activities which is difficult to survive on a continual basis. Most loggers in the northwest are market loggers, relying heavily on reasonable prices being paid for round logs. The costs of operating in the northwest are high due to the mountainous terrain, low quality fibre content and distance from markets. Let's hope 2017 holds stable log markets so contractors and workers can relax and have a profitable year of continuous harvesting.

Cedar log prices have dropped off somewhat which should work to the advantage of the local small sawmilling industry. Springtime results in a spike in

that these operations are not highly visible. However, they provide a substantial number of jobs as well as a local market for certain timber types. The revenues generated from these operations stay in the region which is a benefit to the northwest economy.

In the late 1970s the NWLA became all but dormant. In the early 1980s I was heavily involved in resurrecting the organization. It was a lot of hard work. Building a membership, making contact with industry people and government. Enticing suppliers to get involved. Organizations like the NWLA can only survive with membership involvement. It is not good enough to just pay your annual dues and expect others to do the legwork. No matter what organization you're involved in, you have to stay engaged, involved and volunteer in order for it to achieve meaningful results. Support your association and it will support you! 🌲