

WORKING TOGETHER: GOVERNMENT, ADVOCACY AND TECHNOLOGY



It took a while but the provincial election results were eventually confirmed. It will be interesting to see if the three parties holding seats in Victoria can keep this province rolling. Time for them to put on their big girl and big boy pants, tackle the issues and not get bogged down haggling. One issue we're facing that affects not only BC but all of Canada is the softwood lumber dispute with the US and the infliction of duties. British Columbia's politicians need to present a united front on the issue and resist using it to beat each other up. A strong stance is needed to put the issue to rest.

As previously reported, government involvement in the Contractor Sustainability Review was announced at the TLA's Annual Convention & Trade Show this past winter. It is our hope that with the election behind us the review remains a top priority. I have a lot of confidence in George Abbott's ability to take the Review to the next stage and expect some of our local contractors will be contacted by him for interviews.

Locally, Ellis Ross was the successful candidate for the Liberals. In our meetings with Mr. Ross prior to the election, the NWLA stressed our support for LNG projects. The vast amount of equipment and manpower required for the development of the LNG industry has been and will be a substantial boost for Northwest contractors, suppliers, workers, retailers and the service industry. A relatively small natural gas pipeline has been supplying the Northwest for decades. Over that time, local contractors and workers have supplied services when major maintenance or upgrades were needed. It is hard to gauge the contribution this pipeline has made to the Northwest economy over the decades but I am sure it is substantial.

Another issue brought forward was the low-grade fibre basket in the area. In the past, there have been a number of international players looking for oppor-

tunities in this area, such as pellet manufacture and bio-energy. The NWLA encourages Mr. Ross to keep these possibilities top of mind. We want him to bring these topics to the table—and keep them on the table—in Victoria. If the entire timber profile is not being utilized, the result is a wounded forest industry limping along, trying to survive.

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One sector of the forest industry I want kept in the spotlight is the small sawmilling sector. These mills represent about 30 per cent of the sawmill jobs in the area. They are agile and adaptive in reacting to market changes and make a largely unrecognized contribution to the local economy. When government contemplates policy changes the possible effects on this sector need to be considered.

When I started out in the log hauling industry, five-axle trucks were the norm. Over the past 35 to 40 years the axle count has continually increased. More articulation points and more experience are now required to operate the hauling units. Licensees have been working to have nine-axle units accepted by government. It used to be left to the hauling contractor to determine the axle configuration that best suited the terrain and timber in the area. That is not always the case now. Some licensees require haulers to adopt a certain configuration, forcing them to invest in new equipment. Who gets the economic benefit for the investment? Is the contractor in a financial position to make the investment? Is the proposed configuration actually the best for the area? Does the change devalue current equipment? All these issues must be considered when contemplating this change.

It was with a great deal of interest I noted timber moving from west to east this winter. That has not been a common occurrence in the past. I would suspect the continuing changes in Interior weather and the effects bug kill has had on Interior timber supplies may be partly, if not totally, responsible for this opportunity. For market loggers and

licensees in the area, I hope the trend continues. More diverse markets tend to improve the value of timber as well as improve utilization.

In this issue of the magazine the article, "Sharing the Load: Streamlining Safety Program Administration" on page 16 should draw your attention. I don't believe the true cost of satisfying the safety requirements of the various entities such as WorkSafeBC, BC Forest Safety Council and numerous licensee requirements is fully compensated for in current rates. The man-hours required to satisfy the requirements add up when you consider how many different safety programs have to be followed. You also have to follow all the changes in the policies and incorporate them into your own program. Streamlining safety programs and requirements has the potential to save time and improve safety systems.

Finally, I would like to thank Wayne Lintott and the Interior Logging Association for hosting me at their convention in Vernon this spring. It was a superb convention and I would encourage NWLA members to plan their visits to the Interior around the time of the ILA convention next year. 🌲