



BC Forestry: In it for the Long Run

By Premier Christy Clark

BC is leading the country like never before. We're first in economic growth, first in creating jobs, and have the lowest taxes for middle class families. Our forestry sector is a big part of that. It's a key economic driver, a fundamental part of the economic and social fabric of over 140 communities throughout the province, creating over 65,500 jobs and supporting many more. But more than that—it's who we are.

For thousands of years, the people who called this magnificent place home understood they could live off the many resources the land provided, so long as they protected them. And so BC has a long history of protecting our land, air, and water while making a living from it.

That proud history culminated last year, when we passed legislation to protect the Great Bear Rainforest, covering 6.4 million hectares along our north and central coast—the world's largest intact temperate rainforest. The result of decades of work from First Nations, environmental groups and BC's forest sector, this agreement protects 85 per cent of the area's forests, still leaving some 550,000 hectares available to forestry. It means stability, economic opportunity and certainty for local communities, First Nations and forest companies, along with their employees, investors and customers.

The agreement has earned international accolades, including recognition by the Queen's Commonwealth Canopy Initiative. The Great Bear Rainforest was one of 20 forest conservation projects from Commonwealth countries to be recognized—and also the largest.

Leading the way with responsible, sustainable economic development is how we do things in BC. That's why

innovation has always been a vital part of our forestry industry. Just look at the 18-storey wood-framed student residence at UBC, or the Wood Innovation Design Centre in Prince George. Timber bridges are getting longer, and we're finding more ways to build with wood; consider polymers, bioplastics, and greener adhesives.

And as the forest industry develops new products, we're helping you find new buyers by opening new markets overseas.

It's a proven strategy. In 2003, we established a lumber trade office in China. Thirteen years later, lumber exports to China have increased by 2,000 per cent. We're also investing \$5 million to open doors for BC wood products in India, which has one of the world's fastest-growing workforces—and fastest-growing demand for new homes. We're working hard to make sure they build those homes with wood.

Growing markets in China, Japan and eventually India keeps mills running, people working—and reduces our reliance on the US market.

This is particularly important given the expiry of the 2006 softwood lumber agreement. Over 50% of Canada's softwood lumber exports come from BC, and we need to make sure our interests are protected.

We pushed this to the top of the federal government's agenda. Whenever anyone representing the provincial government meets with a federal official, we talk about softwood. We've been persistent, insistent—and urgent. To their credit, the Prime Minister and Minister Freeland have listened, and have been working overtime with US officials. Together we will continue to fight for Canada and

BC as he continues to negotiate in good faith with the new administration.

The baseless accusations of American producers have not shaken our belief that producers and consumers on both sides of the border will be best served by fair managed trade. We are ready and prepared to vigorously defend BC's interests.

A fair deal on softwood is particularly important in BC's rural communities, many of which rely on a single industry for a significant proportion of jobs and economic activity. An expired trade agreement, or low commodity prices, can be devastating. That's why in October I promoted Donna Barnett to Minister of State for Rural Economic Development. She's delivering the \$75-million Rural Dividend, and is providing insight on ways the provincial government can help foster more economic growth, be it through investment or simply getting out of the way.

It's one thing to plan for growth, and another to plan to benefit from it. That's why we're ensuring British Columbians have the skills they need. Because right now, more people are retiring from the workforce than there are younger people entering it. As a result of retirements and economic growth, we are expecting almost one million job openings in BC by 2025.

Through the Canada BC Jobs Fund, we will continue to support training opportunities for young people interested in forestry-related careers. Some of the recently funded programs include heavy equipment operator training delivered in partnership with the Interior Logging Association.

With the country's leading economy and record job growth, there has never been a better time to be a British Columbian. Forestry will continue to play a vital role in ensuring we continue to lead. ♣