



INCREASING FOREST SERVICE ROAD SAFETY IN THE NORTH

Over the years, forest service road (FSR) safety has come a long way with making improvements such as more pull-outs, wider road surfaces, standardized radio calling procedures and the Resource Road radio channel system. However, driving to and from remote worksites is still widely considered to be one of the most dangerous aspects of the job for log haulers. While road improvements continue, the injury rate has not decreased proportionate to the associated investment. There were 45 serious injury claims recorded by BC log haulers in 2017, up from 39 in 2016 and 27 in 2015. TLA member Jeremy Kuharchuk of Blue Valley Enterprises Ltd. in Vanderhoof, BC, suggests three main factors that will increase forest service road safety: 1) increased maintenance, 2) a lower commercial speed limit, and 3) user education.

1) Increased Maintenance

Given the extensive use of FSRs throughout the year in the North, they are often under maintained. Kuharchuk points out that, licensees are “extending seasons and hauling year-round on roads that were not built to handle it.” FSRs need to be upgraded, constantly maintained, and not left in a state of disrepair once hauling is complete. Improved maintenance may include realignment, widening and improving road surfaces; erecting proper signage at the start of all roads, sharp curves, and pull-out areas; and increasing the amount of routine maintenance by employing more grader operators to keep these roads drivable year-round.

In the summer, heavy dust accumulations have been a leading cause of serious motor vehicle incidents on FSRs, yet there are still heavily used main roads that are extremely dangerous to drive on due to dust. A common and effective dust-control measure is the application of calcium chloride, which is typically only concentrated at the beginning of FSRs, popular recreational routes, or

around bodies of water. The safety of FSR users does not appear to be a priority when considering where dust control measures are applied.

2) A Lower Commercial Speed Limit

The Forest Service Road Use Regulation of the *Forest and Range Practices Act* of BC states that the speed limit on FSRs is 80 km/hour unless otherwise posted. Unfortunately, many road users appear to disregard this speed limit and seem to avoid penalty due to lack of enforcement. The RCMP is a rare sight on FSRs, leaving the duty of speed enforcement in the hands of the Forest, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development’s Compliance and Enforcement Branch (C&E) and road marshals employed by local licensees. About a decade ago, the C&E were given approximately 10 radar guns to enforce the more than 400,000 kms of resource roads in BC, an insignificant number to ever make an impact. This lack of enforcement is leaving FSR users with uncertainty about whom to approach with issues, or concerns.

Kuharchuk suggests speed limits should be reduced to not only discourage speeding, but to “force licensees to increase cycle times.” This would reduce a lot of the pressure on log haulers to meet deadlines, and would prevent them from being forced into such unsafe driving habits as speeding and taking unnecessary risks on the poorly maintained FSRs.

3) User Education

In recent years, the BC Forest Safety Council and various FSR Safety committees have provided excellent online resources and information related to forest service road use and safety. Companies must undergo annual safety audits and accreditation procedures to ensure they are operating in compliance with current BC safety laws and protocols. However, these resources and protocols are not always properly relayed to

the workers that are driving these roads daily. Pre-work safety meetings should be held daily to assess the road conditions and other potential hazards, evaluate driver fatigue and to open the floor for safety concerns that workers might have. While many companies do conduct pre-work safety meetings and routine equipment inspections, the importance of road user education should not be understated and these standard safety procedures should be a regular occurrence across the industry.

TLA member Rob Ubleis of Ubleis Logging Ltd. in Fort St. James, BC, notes that many roads are so unsafe that he has witnessed valuable, young workers opting to leave the industry to avoid having to work in such an unsafe environment. During a time when our workforce is ageing and replacements are more difficult to find, we should ensure forest service road safety measures are implemented to make the industry more attractive to new and young workers, and keep the roads safe for all users.▲

Paul Schuetz has spent more than 20 years working in the Northern Interior forests with Industrial Forestry Service Ltd. His experience in timber cruising, road engineering and crew management give him unique insights into contractor issues in the north. If you have an issue you want to bring to the TLA, call Paul at 250-564-4115.