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FORESTRY

Forestry report: Sustainable forest management has deep roots in British Columbian economy

While B.C. ships mostly raw logs and sells less than \$350 million in finished wood products, the annual sales of value-added wood products in [Ontario and Quebec] is close to \$2 billion

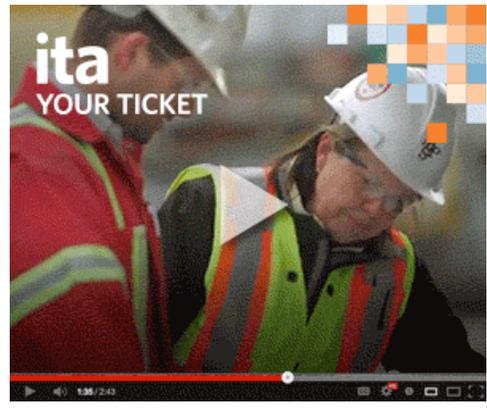
By Connie Linder and Tre Trefethen
Tue Jul 2, 2013 12:01am PST

Logging in B.C. boasts some of the longest commitment to sustainability of any modern industry in the province, with the government having regulated allowable annual cutting levels on public lands and the replanting of harvested areas since the 1940s.

However, logging companies worldwide have historically been criticized for a number of sins against the environment, for clear-cutting that deforests vast tracts of land, damaging riparian zones along river banks and causing soil erosion and desertification; for harvesting of old-growth and rain forests, which contributes to global warming; and for polluting the environment through hauling logs to the mill as well as transporting wood products to end-users.

Though the logging industry has shown a disregard for ecology in the past, modern developments in forestry management and government regulations that emphasize a stewardship of forests have led to dramatic improvements.

Increased government oversight into logging in B.C. creates a fear that more regulation will lead to loss of jobs. Employment levels in the forest industry are measured in terms of the number of cubic metres of wood needed to sustain one full-time job. Since the logging industry in the province relies mainly on export of raw, unfinished logs, B.C. requires close to 1,200 cubic metres to support one full-time logging industry employee. Reducing the allowable number of trees felled in this model would necessarily mean less profit and result in job cutbacks.



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In contrast, Ontario and Quebec, both provinces with smaller log harvests than B.C., generate one full-time forest industry job on just 205 and 298 cubic metres of wood, respectively. The difference is that, while B.C. ships mostly raw logs and sells less than \$350 million in finished wood products, the annual sales of value-added wood products in these two provinces is close to \$2 billion dollars (2010 figures).

Re-tooling the logging industry in B.C. to diversify the products it sells will require investment in both the facilities currently in use as well as in the infrastructure to support the changes. This will need to come both from the logging industry itself as well as from government and will take time. Where a financial opportunity exists, however, the forestry industry has shown a willingness to invest in the future.

Until recently, trees infested with the pine beetle were thought useless and left to rot. With advances in technology and improvements in the sensitivity of milling equipment, some of these logs can now be used to make quality, finished wood products for export.

Another way companies are exploiting beetle-infested trees is by using the dead wood to create wood pellets that can be used for energy production and also possibly as animal feed. Wood-pellet producers use logging waste left in the field, sawmill residues and dead trees to create renewable, carbon-neutral solid biofuel that can be exported or used locally to replace traditional, less-clean energy sources.

Canada burns 58 million tonnes of coal every year, most of it in the 19 coal-fired power plants that account for 17% of Canada's GHG emissions. Much of the coal used in these power plants is low grade, with energy content similar to wood pellets, and although several organizations are making efforts to switch power generation over to cleaner burning fuels, so far Canada has not embraced wood pellets as an energy source. On the other hand, the EU, which has committed to a 20% reduction of greenhouse gas levels by 2020, "co-fires" wood pellets with coal in its power plants, a process with the potential of making nearly up to 100% savings in GHG emissions. As a result, nearly 90% of wood pellets produced in Canada are shipped to the EU instead of being used at home.

British Columbia currently accounts for roughly 65% of Canadian wood-pellet production and so shipping the pellets to other markets represents a huge resource to B.C. logging companies. One issue with this is that in most cases dockyard facilities are not able to handle transport of wood pellets. To boost the success of this market, investing in upgrading dock facilities would support increased export of B.C. wood products.

Sustainable forest management is based on protecting the ecology while maximizing the use of the underlying resource. Although government and industry have improved their stewardship of the forests, enhancements to infrastructure and product diversification would boost the overall sustainability of this market. •

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The Terminal City Club
Jul 09 12:00 pm



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Boathouse at English Bay
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CME & BCIT School of Business - Difficult Conversations/Conflict Management

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