

Comment: We need a balanced conversation on forests

Brian Butler

AUGUST 31, 2021 06:00 AM



Logs are stacked at the Interfor sawmill in Grand Forks. A forestry union executive writes that critics of the industry are ignoring the many contributions it makes to the lives of British Columbians. DARRYL DYCK, THE CANADIAN PRESS

A commentary by the president of United Steelworkers Local 1-1937, which represents more than 6,200 workers, 75 per cent of whom are directly employed in the forest industry. I was extremely concerned by Anthony Britneff's Aug. 25 commentary "Move B.C.'s forestry jobs into other sectors," which suggested the transition of 40,000 forest workers into "non-destructive forest and value-added enterprises" (i.e. tourism). Not only was his statement extremely offensive to forest workers, but he ignores B.C. forestry's leading sustainable forest management practices and the industry's importance to workers, families and communities from Campbell River to Prince George to downtown Vancouver. The claims made by the writer downplayed the significance of the forest industry's role in sustainably producing low-carbon

products needed domestically and worldwide, and its significant impact on supporting good jobs for British Columbians and their social services.

He also played on the public's fear of forest fires, with unsupported claims of young forests being more susceptible to fires, and calls the annual allowable cut "grossly inflated," which isn't true.

Without these jobs, families would suffer economically and emotionally, with immeasurable impacts to their mental health and well-being. The writer does not even consider the many families who would not only suffer job loss in his ideal scenario, but would also be forced to move to urban centres, selling their homes for a loss, with the expectation that they might find minimum-wage jobs.

Without forestry, our municipal, provincial and federal governments would lose about \$4 billion in annual revenues to support health care, education, affordable housing and other critical services people in rural and urban centres count on. The writer also ignores the role sustainable forest management plays in keeping our forests healthy and biodiversity thriving and helping combat climate change and forest fires. Yes, the forest industry has shed jobs due to technological change — most sectors have. However, as the sector continues to adapt and evolve, it continues to employ more than 50,000 direct workers — from foresters, to loggers, to millworkers to biologists. It's also creating demand for new jobs from data scientists to drone operators and working to train existing and new workers for the jobs of tomorrow. The writer also mischaracterizes B.C.'s harvesting practices, ignoring the fact that B.C. has the strictest harvesting standards in the world, with more than 50 million hectares certified to international standards. That's more than anywhere in the world. Today's forest industry is not the forest industry of the 1970s, and comparing harvesting in B.C. with Brazil by way of misused data is nothing more than inflammatory rhetoric. The United Steelworkers will always defend members' right to work in our renewable working forests — forests that are managed with forever in mind so all future generations can continue to benefit from them. Our robust, sustainable forest management regime ensures we will have healthy, thriving forests — including old-growth forests to support a healthy environment, jobs and communities for all generations to come. There is no doubt there's an important dialogue happening right now across B.C. However, what we need is a balanced conversation, focused on facts, science and traditional knowledge — that looks at how we can collectively achieve healthy forests, a strong sustainable forest sector, good jobs for British Columbians and partnerships with Indigenous Peoples.

Let's move away from the damaging rhetoric and take the needed time to talk about how we can keep working together to ensure the forest industry continues to forge a positive path forward for all British Columbians' benefit.

Source: <https://www.timescolonist.com/opinion/op-ed/comment-we-need-a-balanced-conversation-on-forests-1.24354702>