

The Time to Act is Now

United Steelworkers Campaign to Restore the BC Forest Sector

There is a crisis in the BC forest sector. Since 2000-01, there have been 39 mill closures and the loss of almost 20,000 direct forest sector jobs. There has been a 1,000-percent increase in the export of unprocessed logs over the past decade and a growing feeling that British Columbians are not receiving adequate benefits from our forests.

The BC forest industry is now saddled with a *Softwood Lumber Agreement* that will erode our US market-share by punishing efficiency, promoting raw log exports, destroying the value-added sector and creating continued uncertainty in the sector. And our number one industry has seen a steady disinvestment in many sub-sectors and an overall underinvestment in capital assets, manufacturing facilities, research & development, reforestation and industry infrastructure, undermining our ability to compete globally.

Compounding these difficulties are unsustainable forest practices, particularly in the harvesting of private lands on the coast and mid-to-long-term in the beetle-ravaged Interior regions. The trend toward contracting out, deregulation and de-unionization has generated a horrific record of serious injury, fatalities and lack of attention to safety, both in the woods and on our public highways.

To combat this crisis, the USW proposes action, *now* to:

1. ***Stop the killing*** in the BC forest sector through more inspections and better enforcement of safety standards; a committee to ensure that inquest and inquiry recommendations are acted on; and a legislated “day of mourning” when a forest worker is killed on the job.
2. ***Halt the flood of log exports*** by immediately placing an equivalency tax, equal to the difference between the average export and domestic price for logs, on all exports of raw logs regardless of whether they come from Crown or private lands and by improving the existing surplus test to ensure that logs needed in BC stay in the province.
3. ***Increase investment*** through the creation of a forest-sector investment fund using the revenue generated by the Harper-Bush border tax and the equivalency tax on log exports. The fund would promote investment in capital upgrading, research and development, industry diversification, workforce training, infrastructure creation and support for communities.
4. ***Restore the social contract*** including requirements for domestic manufacturing and local job creation in return for Crown timber rights and an “accountability clause” that requires companies to consider alternatives before closing operations.
5. ***Provide a skilled, trained and safe workforce*** through upside and downside worker training, more apprenticeships and a renewed commitment to forest worker skills upgrading and skills development.
6. ***Fight the Mountain Pine Beetle crisis*** by directing “uplift stumpage” and “extraordinary profits” into a future investment fund for community transition and aggressive reforestation.

Finally, we are calling on government to convene a broad-based, multi-stakeholder discussion on forest policy. All British Columbians have a stake in restoring BC’s forest industry.

