

Agroforestry *Update*

September 2007

*British Columbia
Agroforestry
Industry
Development
Initiative*

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Native Christmas Tree Producers at a Turning Point

With the start of the 2007 Christmas tree harvest drawing near, many producers are assessing this year's crop, and also wondering aloud if their industry has a future. The industry has a long history in the province, particularly in the East Kootenay, where culturing and harvesting trees has been done for over 75 years. The industry provides important economic, employment and land management benefits, however production challenges, land use policies and a lack of new entrants into the business have combined to shrink regional production by 95% in the past 4 decades from approximately 1.6 million trees in 1961 to 80,000 trees in 2006.

Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) is the primary species cultured in the East Kootenay, and unlike most producers elsewhere in the province who utilize plantation management on private lands, the majority of production in the East Kootenay is situated on

Crown lands. There are approximately 70 Christmas Tree Permits (CTPs) in the Rocky Mountain Forest District encompassing 10,000 ha on mostly dry, low-elevation, forests of which nearly 10% are located on power line right-of-ways.

Native Christmas tree management generally consists of removing competing vegetation (often overstory trees) and thinning, pruning and fertilizing the crop trees to improve their quality. Rather than killing the trees at harvest, most operations use a practice known locally as "stump culture" to regenerate crop trees. This is a technique that keeps the tree's root system alive so a new stem can grow and be harvested a few years later. The new stem is cultured from a lower branch retained from the harvest of the previous tree, creating a perpetual renewal of trees from the same root system. On average, 3 to 5 trees are cultured from the same

"stump" with some producers having harvested more than 10.

The industry has been hit hard by disease in recent years. In particular, Rhabdocline (*Rhabdocline psuedo-tsugae*), a fungi that causes browning of Douglas-fir foliage and ultimately needle loss has caused large production problems. Needle drop usually occurs the year after attack and results in a gap on the stem. Two or more consecutive years of attack can be very detrimental. Fertilization can reduce the impact because the tree becomes "bushier" and can hide the gaps. Otherwise, one must wait 4 to 5 years with additional pruning work to allow for adequate new growth to hide the gaps.

According to Charlie Willis of Kootenay Tree Farms, heavy Rhabdocline infestations put many of the region's producers out of business in 1995-96.

Continued next page

Christmas Trees *continued*

A reduction of the general prevalence of the disease and changes in production practices to prevent or slow the spread have improved the situation, but it remains a constant threat to the regional Christmas tree industry. In addition to fertilization to promote new growth, controlling vegetation around the base of the trees can lower the humidity and restrict the fungal growth. Likewise, good sanitation practices for pruning and harvest tools stops the spread from tree to tree. But if the right conditions prevail, years of careful

management can be wiped out in an infected stand.

According to the Kootenay Christmas Tree Association (KCTA), land use policies for Christmas tree permits on Crown land and specifically the stumpage rate charged on overstory trees removed to promote Christmas tree regeneration have also impeded the industry. As a publicly owned resource, the Province applies a fee on timber removed from CTPs as well as on the Christmas trees harvested. The issue at hand, according to Tom Quirk, president of the KCTA, is that the Crown

levies the same stumpage rate on CTPs as it does for other timber harvesting. This, despite the fact that logging costs are much higher in CTPs because the mature trees are scattered and the under-story trees (i.e. the Christmas tree crop) must be protected from harvesting activities. As a result, in most situations, it costs more in stumpage and logging costs to remove the overstory than can be recovered by the sale of the wood.

“We’re not opposed to paying our fair share,”

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“The industry provides important economic, employment and land management benefits, but production challenges, land use policies and a lack of new entrants into the business have combined to shrink the regional production...”



Charlie Willis of Kootenay Tree Farms demonstrates Christmas tree pruning at the recent Kootenay Agroforestry Tour near Cranbrook.

Christmas Trees *concluded*

“...these systems achieve a triple bottom line of economic, environmental and social benefits...”

says Quirk “but we can’t be expected to take a loss on timber removal.”

The KCTA has had dialogue with the Ministry of Forests and Range on the stumpage issue and, though not resolved to the satisfaction of the KCTA, industry and government are working to find an acceptable solution. For example, recently a silvicultural levy was removed from the stumpage rate because the CTPs are zoned for continued production of Christmas trees, not a return to a mature forest.

Demographic shifts and a lack of new producers entering the business have also conspired to shrink the annual harvest levels. According to Quirk “in the past, Christmas treeing was very much a family affair with multi-generations participating and with a strong ranch family component. Today, the ranch family is gone and many of the farmers today are in their 50’s.”

Despite the production challenges unique to Christmas tree growers and labour shortages that are plaguing most industries in BC, the markets and future prospects for the industry are encouraging.

The approximate 45

million-unit Christmas tree market in North America is strong and growing as consumers return to traditional choices and seek out natural products. The industry has done good job in informing consumers that petrochemical derived plastic trees are not an environmentally-friendly alternative to real trees. Moreover, chipping and mulching programs in most areas now allow for trees to be recycled at the end of the holiday season. The use of stump culture (meaning trees are not killed at harvest) is also a wonderful selling point and natural trees harvested after the first frosts are long lasting and fragrant. With further market development, native Christmas trees could command a greater price premium in markets where discriminating consumers will pay extra for the quality and the uniqueness of the product.

It is also important to recognize that the Christmas tree production methods and increasing adoption of agroforestry practices provide other social and economic benefits.

Because aggressive fire suppression and past forest

management, most of the low-elevation forests in the southern interior of BC have become vastly overstocked with trees, transforming open forests and grasslands into stagnant, closed forests at great risk of catastrophic wildfire. Christmas tree management can return overstocked forests to a more natural open state. A BC Agroforestry Industry Development Initiative supported demonstration project headed by Kootenay Tree Farms has shown 3 to 5 times greater forage in Christmas tree production sites than in unmanaged stands. The understory production gains benefit both livestock producers and wildlife. The open stands are also at a much lower risk for forest fire by reducing fuel build-up. They also create increased recreation opportunities. Native Christmas tree management can thus contribute to ecosystem restoration particularly where prescribed fire is not safe or practical to employ. And because of the profits generated from Christmas tree production, these systems achieve a triple bottom line of economic, environmental and social benefits at no direct cost to government.

Christmas Trees Contacts and Resources



*Compiled by
Diane Douglas, BC Ministry of Forests and Range*

According to the BC Christmas Tree Council, there are more than 450 Christmas tree growers in British Columbia. Many are members of regional Christmas Tree Associations in the East Kootenay, Thompson Okanagan and Southwest area of BC:

Kootenay Christmas Tree Association (KCTA)

for growers in the East Kootenay
Contact: Tom Quirk at artom@cyberlink.bc.ca

SouthWest British Columbia Christmas Tree Association (SWBCCTA)

for growers in the Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island.
Contact: Bryan Bouchir at bryan_bouchir@telus.net or 604.826.1624

Thompson Okanagan Christmas Tree Association (TOCTA)

for growers in BC's interior
Contact: Dale Myers at myershhouse@telus.net

BC Christmas Tree Council (BCCTC) includes representatives from each of the associations. There are no individual memberships in BCCTC. BCCTC hosts a web site that includes information on Wholesale trees and U-Cuts. The web site is in development and will eventually contain additional information.

www.bcchristmastrees.com

Ministry of Agriculture and Lands

For industry development support contact: Dave Woodske, Nursery Industry Specialist at David.Woodske@gov.bc.ca or 604.556.3044

For information on **Christmas Tree Permits, Christmas Tree Harvest on Crown Land** – contact your local BC Ministry of Forests and Range District office.

For additional information on the Christmas tree industry in British Columbia, please contact the BC Christmas Tree Council:

info@bcchristmastrees.com

Announcements and Upcoming Events

A reminder that next **deadline** for letters of intent and applications to the British Columbia Agroforestry Industry Development Initiative is **Wednesday, November 15, 2007**

Federation of BC Woodlot Associations Annual General Meeting

September 27 - 29, 2007 Port Alberni.

The South Island Woodlot Association is pleased to be hosting the 2007 Annual General Meeting of the Federation of BC Woodlot Associations and the Woodlot Product Development Council.

The theme of the AGM is "Steaming into the Future: Ride the Woodlot Train"

Discussions, workshops and tour topics include:

- * the evolution of the woodlot licence program and forest management from the first farm woodlots to the new woodlot licences of the future

- * the changing issues of today affecting woodlot licensees and private forest landowners such as species at risk, First Nations perspectives, fire protection, forest safety, recreational use

- * the emerging issues that will affect woodlot licensees and private forest landowners of the future such as climate change and carbon sequestration

The highlight of the event will be a trip through the Alberni Valley to the McLean Mill National Historic Site on a train pulled by a completely restored 1929 ex-logging locomotive. The fully operational steam-powered sawmill is the only one in Canada.

All woodlot licensees, private forest landowners and interested parties are welcome.

For registration contact Cathy McClary at the Woodlot Product Development Council

Phone: 1-888-925-9995

Fax: (250) 962-9199

email: cjmclary@shaw.ca

Ecological Restoration in Southeastern BC: Grasslands to Mountaintops

October 11 - 13, 2007 Prestige Inn, Cranbrook

The BC Chapter of the Society for Ecological Restoration (SER-BC) and the Columbia Mountains Institute of Applied Ecology (CMI) have teamed up to host this important regional conference on ecological restoration.

Southeastern British Columbia is a hotbed for ecological restoration. Twenty speakers will talk about new initiatives, restoration activities, and research in the region. Posters, displays, field trips, and opportunities for informal networking will add to the exchange of knowledge.

Themes to be covered at this conference include:

- *Restoration of grasslands and forests at different elevations

- *Rehabilitation of mine spoils

- *Restoration of wetland and aquatic features.

On October 11 conference participants will hear from keynote speaker, Wayne Choquette, about ecological archaeology and what it can tell us about sustainable land management. On October 12 a full day of presentations will be followed by a dinner and music. On October 13 presentations will continue until noon, when field trips depart. Time will be allotted for the short Annual General Meeting of SER-BC.

For more information visit www.cmiae.org

Announcements and Upcoming Events (continued)

Buy BCwild Tour, Conference and Public Market

October 12 - 13, 2007
Quesnel

Do you operate a business that provides a product or service that is derived from the forest or other wild areas of BC? Are you, or is your community, simply interested in pursuing new economic opportunities?

BC's wild forest lands provide a variety of high quality, eco-friendly, niche market product of interest to domestic and international consumers, varying from foods to medicinal extracts to floral, craft products and eco-experiences. Specific to rural communities, non-timber forest products (NTFP's) play an increasingly important role in economic development as the business opportunities for this sector grow.

Royal Roads University Centre for Non-Timber Resources and Quesnel Community and Economic Development Corporation invites you to participate in this conference in Quesnel on October 12 - 13, 2007.

Friday, October 12th starts off with a North Cariboo NTFP tour of three local

sites (sponsored by the North Cariboo Agriculture Marketing Association - *FARMED*) and concludes with an evening networking opportunity.

Saturday, October 13th kicks off with a public market (indoor vendor booths are available but limited in number so book early). The conference follows the close of the market and includes provincial success stories from entrepreneurs, information on assessing production opportunities, marketing and networking opportunities, forum discussion over dinner and NTFP displays.

Business experts will share their knowledge and experience to help you build your business and your community sustainably. Learn about a wide range of forest products from harvest to market, effective business planning, exploring new markets, and approaches to accessing resources. Join with other businesses and communities to review opportunities, market products and experiences, and explore ways of creating a strong voice for this emerging sector.

Registration is available at www.buybcwild.com

For additional information on the conference or tour, contact April Cheng at 250.992.3522, 1-866-QUESNEL (783-7635) or acheng@quesnelcorp.com

Call for Papers:

Western Red Cedar and Alaska Yellow Cedar: A State of Knowledge

June 24-26, 2008
St. Martin's University,
Lacey, Washington State

Please use the link below to view a preliminary call for papers for a meeting on western red cedar and yellow-cedar scheduled for next summer in Washington State.

The organizers would like to solicit presentations based on the conference themes and session topics, (listed on the conference web site):

[www.cfr.washington.edu/
research.smc/cedar/
index.htm](http://www.cfr.washington.edu/research.smc/cedar/index.htm)

Greencover Funding Supports Silvopasture Development

For more information on the Greencover Agroforestry projects in BC, please contact:

Lisa Zabek,

Agroforestry Coordinator
Greencover Canada TAC

Lisa.Zabek@gov.bc.ca

The BC Ministry of Agriculture and Lands in partnership with the BC Agriculture Council, with funding from the Technical Advisory Component (TAC) of the Greencover Canada program of Agriculture and Agri-food Canada, are developing silvopasture resources to help industry adapt to change brought about by the Mountain Pine Beetle (MPB) epidemic.

The MPB epidemic has been described as a ‘...catastrophic natural disaster, causing widespread mortality of lodgepole pine, the Interior’s most abundant commercial tree species.’ It is generally recognized that the epidemic affects not only forest ecosystems and values but also severely impacts the stability and long-term economic well being of many BC communities. This includes direct jobs created by the forest industry and their supply and service sectors, as well as the community service sectors and the tourism industry, which are dependent in part on the visual and recreational landscapes created by BC’s forests.

Because of the magnitude of this issue, addressing the epidemic has been identified as a provincial priority exceeding the scope of any one ministry. The provincial MPB Action Plan outlines an approach to mitigating the MPB impacts on forests, communities, and the provincial economy. It involves several government ministries, each of which has responsibilities to incorporate appropriate parts of the Action Plan into their annual Service Plans. Within the Action Plan, established sectors such as agriculture are being encouraged to operate at maximum capacity to aid in addressing projected economic shortfalls in the forest industries. Among the approaches identified is support of investment opportunities through diversification of products, and production systems. Agroforestry (including both silvopasture and forest farming practices) has been identified as a land use that can foster sustainable, integrated forest and agricultural management and diversify crops and products. Thus, it represents an additional production option for MPB affected areas.

Silvopasture blends tree and livestock production in an integrated system. These systems are designed to produce forest products over the long-term, while providing annual returns from livestock production.

Lisa Zabek, the Agroforestry Coordinator for the Greencover projects is overseeing the development activities. The program is working towards the development of a producer toolkit and mechanisms for silvopasture integration into agricultural land-use options. Projects include a synthesis of silvopasture information and resources pertinent to BC; refinement of a pilot silvopasture economic model to yield relative cost:benefit estimates of silvopasture in comparison to conventional forest and pasture management scenarios; identification and assessment of options for silvopasture to lessen winter feed constraints; and, support for a University of BC study to develop technical transfer materials on cattle use of thinned and fertilized lodgepole pine sites, and the related forage quality and quantity.

Contact Us

George Powell,
Agroforestry Initiative
Facilitator
agroforestry@uniserve.com

or:

April Anderson,
Agroforestry Initiative
Administrator
aaa@netidea.com

Visit us on the Web

www.woodlot.bc.ca/agroforestry/

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- 2) E-mail address
- 3) Organization or interest in agroforestry (optional)

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If you have suggestions for future editions of the *Update* or know of an event that should be included, please let us know.

The **Federation of British Columbia Woodlot Associations** administers the BC Agroforestry Initiative.



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