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Rethinking forestry in Quesnel

Quesnel remains one of the most forest dependent communities in BC, but with our surrounding timber supply taking the hardest hits from both the Mountain Pine Beetle epidemic and last season's wildfires, significant uncertainty exists about the economic future of our region. Fortunately, Quesnel is also home to one of the most integrated and diverse concentrations of wood products manufacturing facilities in the world, including many best in class milling and processing operations.

This combination of significant land base challenges and Quesnel's unique forest products manufacturing capacity enabled the City, in partnership with UNBC and CNC, to host a technical working session with our local industry, the provincial government, researchers, and key industry stakeholders to explore the future of the forest sector in our region. This two-day think tank session at the North Cariboo Community Campus was held in conjunction with a visit from the Minister of Forests, who toured some of our local mills before opening the event.

The main premise of the session was to explore the possibility of using Quesnel and its surrounding forests as an incubator for generating ideas about how forest management in BC can be adapted to address climate change induced challenges and how our manufacturing processes can be reinvented to take better advantage of the kind of fibre BC's central interior forests will provide in the future.

The focus of the structured discussions at this technical working session was to document specific opportunities to use Quesnel to accelerate research and development in the domains of alternate forest management and innovative manufacturing and processing of forest fibre. Over fifty people participated in the event, representing the Ministry of Forests and the Ministry of Environment, FP Innovations, Forest Enhancement BC, Forest Investment and Innovation, Forest for Tomorrow, Northern Development Trust, the Council of Forest Industries, UBC, UNBC, CNC, local First Nations, First Nations' training organizations, and our local industry.

The event was organized around four topic areas that were introduced by subject matter specialists prior to engaging participants in structured conversations designed to enable everyone to collaboratively explore any policy and practice changes that will be needed to ensure we can restore our forests to health and reinvent our forest sector to match our

future fibre supply. Participants were also asked to identify possible research projects, commercial pilots, new business opportunities, and new industry training programs that could be initiated in the Quesnel area in the short and medium term.

By all accounts, last week's Future of Forestry Think Tank session was well received by the participants and considered a successful and important starting point for reinventing our forest sector. The intent is to put all of the discussions, suggestions, and recommendations into a report to present to the Minister of Forests and then work with the Province and various funding agencies to turn the recommendations into action as soon as possible.

The final report from last week's technical working session will be made public as soon as it is available and public comment and feedback will be sought at that time.

The outcome of this two-day session will be to document specific opportunities to accelerate the reinvention of our forest management practices and manufacturing processes in order to address the current and emerging challenges confronting BC's forest sector.

This think tank session presents an opportunity for policy-makers, researchers, funding agencies, and industry to come together to define and describe collaborative projects that could be undertaken in the Quesnel area and would enable the provincial government to test new approaches to forest management and industry to experiment with new manufacturing processes.

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