

**Premier Gordon Campbell
Pine Beetle Announcement
Prince George, BC
June 25, 2001**

It's important for us to recognize how important forestry is. 15% of our total provincial GDP comes from the forest industry. It's of vital importance to the communities, and the people and the families that live in the north of our province. It provides jobs. It provides stability. And it provides the lifeblood for critical health services, education services and the public services that all of us demand and expect.

Today, our forest industry is under threat. British Columbia is currently facing the worst mountain pine beetle epidemic in Canada's history.

The pine beetle today infests over 500,000 hectares of our forests. And the infestation has quadrupled in the last year alone. It now covers 5.7 million hectares. That's equal to two times the size of Vancouver Island. If we were in Europe it would cover the entire country of Ireland. It's a huge impact and it could affect 25,000 families in 30 communities across the North.

It's estimated that the infested timber has a value that exceeds \$4.2 billion. This morning the Chief Forester announced that the annual allowable cut for the Quesnel timber area will be increased by 908,000 cubic metres to help battle the epidemic. That's an increase of 38% over what has been the traditional annual allowable cut.

I want to underline that the epidemic not only threatens the jobs and livelihoods of First Nations and families and communities throughout the Cariboo and the North – it threatens the revenues that support our health care, education and public services across this province.

We must address this problem quickly. Therefore today, I am announcing two specific initiatives that we are going to undertake so that we can act quickly and decisively, and start to get this epidemic under control.

First, I have appointed a Northern Pine Beetle Task Force of our Caucus. It will be chaired by John Wilson (MLA for Cariboo North) and the MLAs who will sit on it will be Pat Bell (Prince George North), Dennis MacKay (Bulkley Valley-Stikine) and Paul Nettleton (Prince George-Omineca).

The members of our task force will work with people in communities across the north and throughout the Cariboo to ensure we understand the impacts of the beetle from the ground up, and to listen to the recommendations of people in those communities so that we can move forward quickly. It will report directly to the Minister of Forests and will ensure he and his Ministry are addressing this issue in a manner that's aggressive and straightforward.

It's crucial we recognize that this is a multi-front war. It is not just the pine beetle that we have to think about. We have to think about how we harvest, where we mill, and about the impact on the international trade situation that we're facing today.

We are joined here today by Greg Jadrzyk, president of the Northern Forest Products Association. A year ago, we said to the members of the NFPA and the Cariboo Lumber Manufacturers Association that it was important for them to come forward with their plan of action.

Greg and his team have worked beyond what we could have expected and have come forward with some comprehensive recommendations that will be considered by both the task force and the Ministry. By working together, we can create a forest health action plan that will work for every British Columbian and I want to thank Greg for his leadership in this regard.

One of the critical aspects of this entire effort is that we're all going to have to work together. I have written to federal Minister of Environment David Anderson with regard to the task force that we've put together and the efforts that we're going to undertake. I've also sent the letter to the chair of the Alliance Caucus for British Columbia, the Chair of the federal Liberal BC Caucus, and the two New Democrat MPs.

If we don't coordinate the efforts of industry, and of good sound science, we will not succeed. I have given this onerous responsibility to my Minister of Forests Mike de Jong. The Minister is going to initiate a process not just for the task force, but also for the technical and the scientific expertise we need to ensure we have an action plan that will work and that we can execute aggressively.

Mike is here to explain that process.

Presentation by Minister of Forests

Before I tell you about the second part of the action plan that we are developing, I want to emphasize a couple of things that the Premier has said.

We are committed to working together with communities and all of the stakeholders for whom the implications of not dealing with this problem would be great. We understand that we have to move quickly and that's why in just the second week of our term we're here in Prince George initiating the plan that we are talking about today.

The Ministry of Forests has hired R&S Rogers Consulting, along with the task force the Premier has announced today, to engage in a public review and develop an action plan. R&S Rogers has already begun the process of gathering the information we will need to create and table the action plan that we're referring to today.

To develop a strategy for dealing with this enormous infestation, the Rogers team will assess its potential implications from a number of different perspectives. There will be questions around market and export capacity. There will be implications as we proceed for Softwood Lumber Agreement discussions with our American neighbours. There will be implications around the issue of log exports, of milling capacities, of transportation infrastructure, of fire protection.

All of those are components of the plan that we intend to develop, and that R&S Rogers will be providing recommendations on in concert with the caucus task force. They will identify options that are most viable and comprehensible for managing all of the potential business implications over the next number of years.

What we want to emerge in short order is a forest health management plan. We in government will use those recommendations as the basis for making informed decisions as infestation evolves.

Coordinated with the caucus task force, R&S Rogers' first step will be to consult with stakeholders, including licensees, First Nations and also mayors of those communities involved. They will then develop a draft strategic plan and I will have that plan for review by August.

In addition to the consultation meetings that the caucus task force will be initiating, Rogers will then hold three workshops in August, to present their recommendations and draft plan to primary stakeholders in the Cariboo, Prince George and Prince Rupert forest districts. Following those workshops, Rogers will develop a final strategic plan and we will have that in hand by mid-September.

I also want to express my appreciation to Greg Jadrzyk and his team for the work that they have performed in preparing the comprehensive set of recommendations that have been presented to the Premier and I today.

I am looking forward to working with the task force on an ongoing basis. I know that the R & S Rogers team will be doing so. At the end of the day, it is us, the members of the Government Caucus, who are accountable for ensuring that an action plan is arrived at that deals with this effectively and responsibly.

Concluding remarks by Premier Campbell

The caucus task force will be visiting a number of communities over the coming weeks. They will be meeting in Smithers, Burns Lake, Houston, Vanderhoof, Williams Lake, Horsefly, Alexis Creek, 100 Mile, Fort St. James and Quesnel and if there is a necessity to meet in other communities they will do that.

We want to get out and hear from people on the ground. We want to hear what they're facing, and we want to hear their solutions.

In addition, the Minister is going to ensure we get the technical approach that we need to deal with this in an appropriate manner and turn the tide on the pine beetle.

I want to leave no illusions: this is a desperate fight. The pine beetle does not care about our legislation, or about parks or our commercial forests. The pine beetle is frankly paying very little attention to what we're doing today. But we have to bring this epidemic to a halt. We have to get it under control so that people in the north and throughout the Cariboo have long term security in their jobs and for their communities, and so we can build the bright economic future we need in this province.