

Current Statistics ♦ October 2004

- **British Columbia's population stood at 4,196,383 on July 1st, an increase of 1.1% from a year earlier.** Alberta (+1.4%) again experienced the fastest population growth among the provinces, followed by BC and Ontario (both at +1.1%). The Canadian population grew 0.9% during the same period. *Data Source: Statistics Canada*

- **British Columbia's unemployment rate fell 0.6 percentage points in September, dropping to 7.1% (seasonally adjusted) its lowest level since the end of last year.** The improvement in the unemployment rate was due to strong job growth (+0.6%, or a net gain of 12,900 jobs) between August and September. However, the labour force shrank (-0.1%) for the third month in a row.

Jobless rates in the rest of the country ranged from 4.8% in Alberta to 15.9% in Newfoundland. The Canadian unemployment rate edged down (-0.1 percentage point) to 7.1%. As was the case in BC, job growth (+0.3%) was the main reason for the improvement, but this was tempered by a marginal increase (+0.1%) in the size of the labour force. *Data Source: Statistics Canada*

- **There were 610 consumer bankruptcies registered in the province in August, down from 684 in the same month of 2003.** Bankruptcies in the province have been declining throughout the year, continuing a downward trend that began in the summer of 2003. *Data Source: Industry Canada*

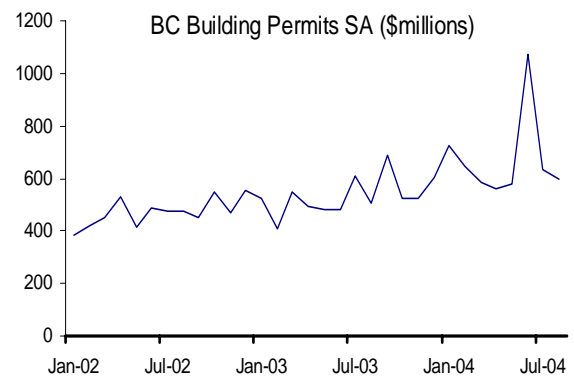
- **The number of business bankruptcies in BC rose to 74 this August, from 61 a year earlier.** More than half of the bankruptcies were in three industries: retail trade (16), construction (12) and accommodation & food services (9). Nationally, the number of bankruptcies increased 4.2% during the twelve-month period

ending in August, rising to a total of 595.

Data Source: Industry Canada

- **During the first eight months of 2004, the value of building permits issued in the province was 30.1% higher than in the same period last year.** Most regions of the province experienced a surge in planned construction projects, with particularly strong gains in the north. Year-to-date, the value of permits issued in Northeast (+67.4%) and Nechako (+48.6%) was up substantially, with Mainland/Southwest (+36.8%) and Thompson/Okanagan (+25.3%) also posting very strong growth. Building intentions in Cariboo (+19.9%) and Vancouver Island/Coast (+15.8%) have also been robust so far this year. However, the value of planned new projects in North Coast (-44.6%) and Kootenay (-5.6%) is well below 2003 year-to-date levels.

Data Source: Statistics Canada & BC Stats



- **After six months of growth, retail sales in British Columbia slipped 0.2% (seasonally adjusted) in August.** However, sales by retailers are 5.9% higher so far this year compared to the January to August period in 2003. Nationally, retail sales climbed 0.8% in August on the strength of robust growth in Ontario (+1.7%) and Quebec (+1.1%). The Atlantic Provinces combined for a 0.8% gain and sales in both the Yukon and Northwest

Territories climbed 2.2%. All other regions of the country saw small declines in sales.

Data Source: Statistics Canada

- **Wholesale sales in BC climbed 0.8% (seasonally adjusted) in August.** This was the third consecutive month in which BC has recorded an increase in wholesale sales, contributing to a significant boost of 8.2% in the first eight months of the year compared to the same period in 2003.

Wholesale sales were up in most regions of the country in August, with the exception of Quebec (-2.2%), Newfoundland and Labrador (-3.7%), PEI (-1.0%) and Yukon (-3.0%). The most significant increases were in Nova Scotia (+8.9%) and Alberta (+3.6%).

Data Source: Statistics Canada

- **Shipments of goods manufactured in the province increased 1.7% (seasonally adjusted) in August, following a similarly strong gain in the previous month.** The upturn was broadly based, particularly in the durables sector (+1.7%), where shipments advanced in all but one of the industries for which data is published. Machinery manufacturers saw shipments dip (-5.7%) after posting double-digit growth in July. Wood shipments (+2.0%) rose for the eighth month in a row, and shipments by computer manufacturers inched up (+0.2%) after posting losses in four of the previous five months.

On the non-durables side, shipments advanced 1.8% in August, largely due to solid gains in the two biggest industries: paper (+1.7%) and food (+3.4%) manufacturing.

Canadian shipments moved ahead 0.8% in August, reflecting robust manufacturing activity in most provinces. Saskatchewan (+8.6%), Newfoundland (+7.3%) and Manitoba (+6.6%) registered particularly strong gains. However, shipments from

Alberta rose only marginally (+0.2%), and manufacturers in Quebec (-1.8%) and two of the Atlantic provinces posted declines. Nationally, inventory levels increased as manufacturers stocked up on their products.

Data Source: Statistics Canada

- **BC product exports continued to soften in August, falling back 0.8% (seasonally adjusted).** This marked the third straight month in which exports have either been flat or declined. Energy (+7.3%) was the only commodity group to post an increase. Forest products, which account for the lion's share of BC's exports, fell back 1.4% after dropping 5.6% in July.

The downturn in the value of exports was largely driven by weak overseas demand (-3.8%) for BC commodities, especially forest (-8.2%) products. Shipments to the US, our most important trading partner, were 0.9% higher than in July. This was primarily due to US imports of BC forest (+2.5%) and energy (+5.1%) products.

Canadian exports edged down 0.4% in August, as shipments to the US slipped (-1.2%). Japanese (-6.7%) demand for Canadian products also slumped, but exports to other nations strengthened in August. Automotive (+1.5%) and agriculture & fish product (+1.3%) exports expanded, but international shipments of energy (-2.6%) and forest (-0.2%) products were down from July levels.

Data Source: Statistics Canada & BC Stats

- **BC's Consumer Price Index (CPI) rose 1.9% from September 2003.** Residents paid more for fuel oil (+17.2%), education (+10.6%), meat (+10.1%), gasoline (+7.6%) and electricity (+6.5%). Offsetting these increases were lower costs for non-alcoholic beverages (-5.8%), children's clothing (-4.5%), fresh vegetables (-4.0%) and natural gas (-3.1%).

Data Source: Statistics Canada