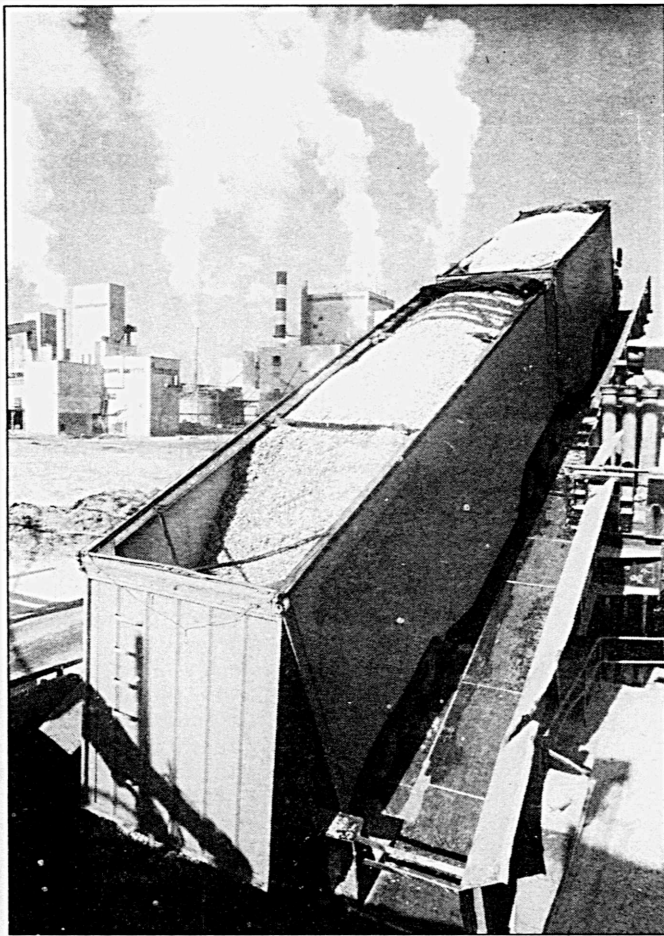




Pulp chips are dumped from a tandem chip truck as Prince George Pulp steams in the background.

Chief forester makes call on how axe bites

B.C.'s Forest Act says chief forester Larry Pedersen is independent.

The Minister of Forests isn't allowed to sway him when deciding how much wood can be cut in each area of the province or a number of other issues.

This doesn't stop companies, government agencies and a lot of politicians — from the municipal to the federal level — from trying to convert Pedersen as though he was Uncle Ben's rice.

Then what he says is interpreted by 4,835 people in the forest service, each of whom filters it, and by the media which often doesn't understand technical issues and has a unique point of view.

To avoid having his decisions changed or frittered away, Pedersen puts them on paper and makes them public, then puts on his flak jacket and acts as a spear catcher.

He also gets out and talks with people so they can hear what he actually thinks.

His job isn't to be popular, as his predecessor John Cuthbert said. It's to try to apply some logic and science to a highly political issue.

"Don't look to me as a guru who can give guarantees," he said.

"We're about minimizing risks in the decisions we make about the forest that

affect the environment and the economy."

People have an overwhelming desire to meddle in the forest. When trees are harvested, it changes the forest. If trees aren't harvested, the forest changes in other ways, on its own. These days you can't even look at a tree without someone telling you you're looking at it the wrong way.

Pedersen's decisions are based on analyses of various things. These, he says, are always based on not enough information, even though more than 7,000 billion bytes of computer space store forestry information.

But any analysis of anything is based on information which isn't complete, especially when one tries to predict the future. No one predicted the fall of the Berlin wall or the changes in Russia which have changed the world.

To provide a reality check, the forest service monitors lumber shipped, pulp produced, trees harvested, changes in the forest like fire and bugs plus is doing increasing work with wildlife.

These provide more information, so analyses are regularly refined, changing forecasts.

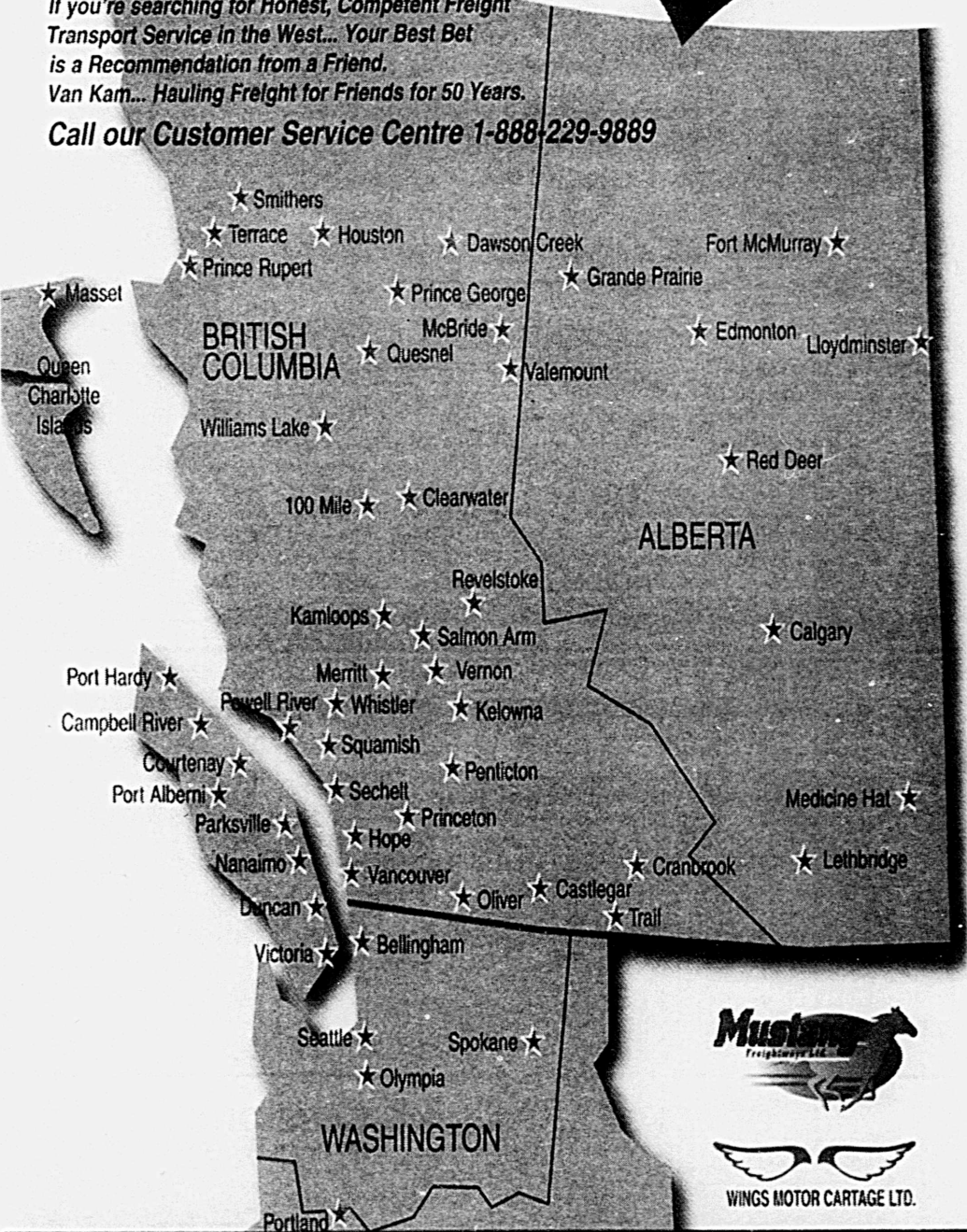
"That's why when we look at the harvest here in Prince George in five years, we may change the forecast," he said.



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