

EDITORIAL

The dry and the dead

The wildfires raging around Kelowna this week should make people in Prince George think about our relationship with the forests that surround us.

It is a relationship that most people took for granted until the mountain pine beetle infestation changed the complexion and landscape in and around the city.

We now know our eye-pleasing and abundant green spaces aren't necessarily forever. Parks, neighbourhoods, golf courses - they look different, and not for the better. It has taken a long time to get used to seeing tree-less scrub land where greenbelts of majestic pines once stood.

Dry, dead pines still surround the city and stretch hundreds of kilometres in every direction, standing as kindling for lightning strikes or a carelessly tended campfire.

Our recent hot, dry weather has prompted a campfire ban starting Friday in the Prince George Fire Centre ,covering the northeast-ern quarter of the province.

The forest fire hazard rating is moderate to high in most areas of the region, which means the forest floor is drying out and the potential for a devastating fire is growing.

All three wildfires that forced the evacuation of 11,000 people in West Kelowna this week were said to be caused by humans.

Don't think it can't happen here. The forests ministry says more than half of B.C.'s wildfires this year have been caused by humans - hence the campfire ban.

Cigarette butts tossed out car windows are another potentially deadly culprit and cause an estimated 10 per cent of B.C. forest fires.

In this city, as in most in B.C., urban forests are common and suburban areas encroach on forested land, providing an esthetically pleasing backdrop but leaving them vulnerable to fire.

As the ground dries out in the warm days ahead, it wouldn't take much to spark our own suburban inferno. Burning embers propelled by wind can easily land on trees, grasses and rooftops and spread like, well, wildfire. In Prince George, we eagerly await our midsummer heat waves but people must constantly be mindful of the power and unpredictability of an unforgiving, relentless beast.



Back to the 1960s

Looking at the future of the Central Interior forest industry, particularly the concept of a wood-based bioenergy sector draws one to Yogi Berra who said, "It's déjà vu all over again."

By way of a quick rewind, in the early 1960s Canfor chief forester Tom Wright told B.C. Forests Minister Ray Williston that only 25 per cent of the locally harvested wood volume actually made it on to a boxcar as merchantable lumber. The rest of the tree was wasted.

Williston contracted Larry deGrace of Industrial Forest Products to do a report on the utilization of wood waste in the Prince George area. The deGrace study eventually led to the establishment of the Central Interior pulp and paper industry.

On the way to writing legislation, which would give the pulp industry an economic basis, a number of problems were encountered. Stumpage calculations had to change, security of fibre and tenure were also issues of enormous importance to the old sawmilling mindset.

In 1963, forests minister Williston introduced his amended forest policy which included the weight of wood, as well as cubic volume, to the stumpage calculation.

On this Williston said, "For the first time in the history of the industry, mill operators would be paying stumpage for all wood in the tree. They would have to use all that wood or lose money on it."

By 1964, the pulp and paper industry was a fact of life in Prince George.

Now fast forward to our Yogi Berra moment, and the development of a forest-based bioenergy industry in Prince George. On this, Tim McEwan, president of Initiatives Prince George said, "There is a considerable amount of work that



needs to be done to realize the tremendous opportunities that the bioenergy sector has a part of securing B.C.'s energy future and realizing new export opportunities."

McEwan went on to say, "There are public policy questions to be considered and changes to be made. The complex matters of forest tenure and electricity pricing are examples."

Sound familiar? Sure does. As government did in the 1960s clearly it's time to rewrite forest policy and get on with the business of extracting the maximum amount of public benefit from our publicly owned forest resource.

It's interesting; Ray Williston was not a forester nor an economist. Prior to being elected, he was a teacher and later on our school superintendent. He was product of the 1930s depression and he grew up during those tough years in Salmon Arm. As a young man he served in the Air Force during the Second World War; most importantly he was sharp as a tack and he couldn't abide waste.

The determination and inherent intellect of Ray Williston sought a solution to waste in the woods and those same qualities and conviction found an answer.

We don't have Ray Williston, but we still have the necessity to maximize our forest resource for optimum return. We also have the Northern Bioenergy Partnership and the bright and collective

minds at UNBC, CNC, the Innovation Resource Centre, the National Research Council, the Aboriginal Business and Community Resource Centre, the Northern Development Initiative Trust and Initiatives Prince George on board.

What we need now is the determination in Victoria to address to requisite policy changes. This won't be easy. Forest tenure - like all tenure issues - is difficult to change. The economics of a viable bioenergy industry require, or at least imply, higher electricity and biofuel costs.

Given our current economic outlook, it's doubtful if a beginning bioenergy industry can extract subsidies from Victoria.

But all of the above do nothing to lessen the importance of doing the right thing and developing the best policy. In the gospel according to Ray Williston, waste cannot be tolerated; but more importantly maximum benefit for the resource owner - that's you and me - must be extracted for the public good.

Just as maximizing the return of the forest resource forever changed the Central Interior forest industry in the 1960s, it's time to address the reality of the 21st century forest industry. We know we have a dramatically changed market with our beetle-riddled and countervailed resource. We can do one of two things. One, hope for a return to the old days, a futile expectation to say the least. Or two, look at what we have, apply the best possible practices to maximizing the resource and get on with our bioenergy future.

Bruce Strachan is a former B.C. cabinet minister and Prince George city councillor. His column appears Thursdays. E-mail: brucestrachan1@shaw.ca

mailbox...

Dedicated tax needed

When is the government going to stop whining about the costs of health care?

There are piles of money going into the B.C. treasury.

Who remembers that long ago we had a Social Services and Medical Assistance tax?

The government had a dedicated tax and it looked after those who required the dedicated services, and then, "Blam!"

A certain government discovered all of this dedicated money and changed the tax to B.C. provincial tax. Then they had great quantities of money to distribute in all directions.

The pity of this is that subsequent governments still carry the tax.

It's about time the provincial tax is revoked and replaced with the dedicated Social Services and Medical Assistance tax.

But hurry. The health authorities need more money.

The people need more social and medical services.

Thomas Cole
Prince George

A gesture of such kindness

This past Sunday, my wife, Laura, and I participated in the annual Prince George Citizen Triathlon.

To our surprise, the committee presented us with a cheque of \$500 for the trust account at Integrus Credit Union we have set up for our daughter, Sarah Kelly. Sarah was tragically killed in a car accident this past April.

Laura and I have had a very hard year and want to thank members of the P.G. Triathlon Committee: Gail Millar, Keri Allen, Andrea Martin, Yvonne Parkinson, Stein Fladmark and Craig Sommerville for this kind and generous gesture. It is such kindnesses that remind us there are some great people in Prince George helping us through this tough stage in our lives.

Our hope is to raise \$10,000 for the trust account, and then hand the money over to School District 57 for a bursary in Sarah's memory.

Again, thanks so much for the support; Laura and I are truly blessed to live in such a supportive community.

Joe Kelly
Prince George

mailbox... your letters

Stopping unsafe choices

In the past few months The Citizen has published a number of articles regarding road safety and unsafe behaviour by drivers. Comments and statistics have been quoted from both ICBC and the RCMP.

I want let the public know that about 50 concerned volunteers in Prince George are doing their part to educate youth on how to prevent injuries and fatalities from unsafe choices.

Weekly, throughout the school year, these volunteers facilitate PARTY (Prevent Alcohol and Risk-Related Trauma in Youth) at PGRH. Volunteers include:

injury survivors, nurses, paramedics, physicians, RCMP members, spiritual care volunteers, teachers and concerned citizens.

Youth from Grade 10 and alternate education programs are targeted and come from Prince George and surrounding communities.

They spend the day listening to presentations, touring ICU, the morgue, chapel and Emergency and participating in experiential learning activities. The day lets youth know the consequences of their choices and their options for staying safe.

We are also developing a followup program for Grade 12 students that will be facilitated in early 2010.

The Prince George Safe Attitudes and Actions Society is the non-profit organization responsible for facilitating PARTY and it currently receives no funding from either ICBC or the Northern Health Authority, so any financial support would be appreciated. If readers wish to make a contribution, they can contact me at 250-565-2869.

Mary Jackson,
program facilitator
Prince George

Dastardly dumps continue

At 4:30 a.m. on July 18, a white dump truck (no door signs) beeps as it backs up to dump a horrendous load of big tires, roofing material branches, etc., on a driveway of property I own at 3505 Pierrero Rd. It then speeds off.

The manager of the Ponderosa Mobile Home Park calls the police twice, once as he leaves the office to climb the bank to the road to attempt to stop the truck, and again while viewing the truck as it speeds past him. He is unable to get the licence number. The truck turns right on Ferry Avenue and disappears.

Still no police. Have they no one on duty at 4:30 a.m.? If one had come, they

could have stopped the truck at Ferry and Lansdowne.

When one finally arrives he has no suggestion other than I should report it - from Quesnel. He does not leave a card or his name. I assume it is not important enough to bother with. He does not question the tenant who has now seen this truck dump garbage on that driveway twice, in May and today. They did not see it dump in October 2008.

Now, this newer model white dump truck, no door signs, must have new tires on it.

It obviously is operating in the city of Prince George. It has been used to dis-

pose of old roofing materials, tar, gravel, garbage. Captain Black cigars and No. 7 cigarettes are the driver's, or owner's, choice.

I have my suspicions but need proof, and someone knows who is behind the wheel of this truck and performing this vicious act. Does his wife, his mother, and any friends know? Someone with this mentality does not keep their wrongdoing a secret. They brag.

I need someone's assistance. If you can help me — please call collect at 250-991-0112.

June Geisser
Quesnel