

## Community forest license almost here Ministry putting final touches on agreement

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The Alberni Valley Community Forest Association will have access to timber very soon, according to Forest Minister Pat Bell.

On Thursday, Bell said his ministry was just putting the final touches on an agreement that would allocate 19,000 cubic metres of wood, annually.

"We are literally within a couple of days of being able to move forward on that," Bell said.

The minister acknowledged that the local group, which was formerly known as the Port Alberni Community Forest Association, is hoping to secure 22,000 cubic metres, within the same tenure.

"We're still challenged to get up to the full volume," Bell said.

That being said, the minister believes that with intensive management, such as pruning and thinning to encourage optimal growth, the tenure will support an increased harvest.

"We'll get up to 22,000 cubic metres over the next few years," he said.

Port Alberni Mayor Ken McRae met with the minister later in the day, and he's not going to argue over numbers.

"Our thinking is, let's get the 19,000 first," he said. "We're also looking at some of the timber that TimberWest has for sale in the (Bainbridge) watershed."

McRae said TimberWest has several parcels of land on the market, at a price of about \$9 million, which the association would like to acquire, to build up its stock of fibre. The mayor said Bell is supportive of the idea.

"We don't know how we're going to do it yet," he said. "But today, we had discussions with him on how it might be accomplished."

Under the terms of a community forest program, the harvesting is put up for bid, and the logs go onto the private market. McRae said in previous years, there were strictures that the logs had to go to local mills, but that system has been modified to avoid abuses. But 'local logs for local mills' is still the prevailing theme, he added.

"In some communities, they give local mills a two or three per cent break on the wood," he said.

McRae said revenues from timber sales would be directed to special projects such as community amenities, rather than going into general revenue.

"When the market gets better, it will bring in a fair bit of money," he said.

Bell's announcement is welcome news for the association, which is hosting the B.C. Community Forest Association annual general meeting on May 28 through 31. On Wednesday evening, not knowing that the license was imminent, Jack McLeman appeared before the regional board, with a request for financial assistance for the event.

Specifically, the city councillor called on directors to sponsor a bus to transport delegates on a tour of local forestry operations. McLeman said the community forest concept is growing in importance across the province, in concert with small-scale private woodlots.

"Along with First Nations forestry, it's one of the bright spots in forestry in the province," he said. "The community forest doesn't have to make that 20% return on its investment that those big corporations - like the ones I've worked for - seem to demand."

McLeman estimated the bus request would cost about \$600. Directors voted to support the request in principle, but called for a firm quote prior to final approval.

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