

# Quesnel Future of Forestry Think Tank #3 May 2-3, 2023

## Report



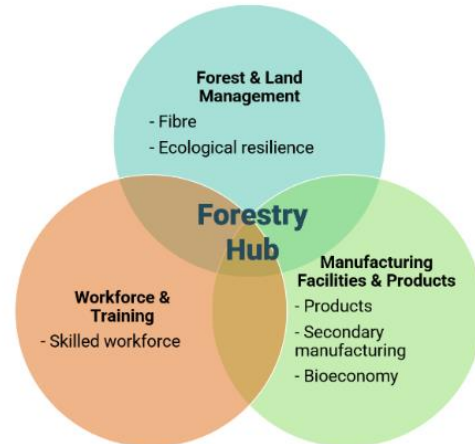
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## **Introduction**

Are we witnessing the end of BC forestry as we know it? Do we finally have the impetus to innovate our way to a more resilient future for BC's forests and the communities that are so dependent on them? These were the questions that guided the discussions at the 2023 Quesnel Future of Forestry Think Tank (FFTT), hosted by the City of Quesnel's Forestry Initiatives Program and Three Rivers Community Forest. This was the third FFTT hosted by the City of Quesnel and it blended catching up post-Covid with a focus on advancing the initiatives and conversations which previous FFTTs had stimulated (link [here](#), scroll down).

Fifty-five people from industry, First Nations, government, academia and non-profit organizations gathered in Quesnel to discuss how to further advance the forestry hub in Quesnel and the North Cariboo. The speakers, panels, and whole group discussions reviewed what is currently underway and made new commitments to action across the three domains that the FFTT has been advancing since 2018: improving forest and land management, reinventing manufacturing facilities and products, and redeveloping the forestry workforce. See [Appendix 1](#) for a list of participants and their contact information.



## **Presentations and Panels**

During the 2-day event, all speakers delivered brief presentations and then served as panelists to "set the scene" for the World Café style structured group work that followed. The objective of the World Café sessions was to garner as much information from the whole group as possible to assist Quesnel, one of BC's most forest dependent communities, to tackle the challenges confronting its traditional forest sector and to enable the City and its partners to seize any opportunities available to reinvent the region's forest economy.

The presentations, panels and group work were divided into four separate, but interrelated, topics: 1) how to improve forest and land resource management to ensure ecological resilience; 2) how to reinvent forest products manufacturing to produce more advanced products from the full range of available forest fibre; 3) how to retrain the workforce to enable these new forest practices and products; and 4) how to synthesize all of the Think Tank learnings in order to advance the concept of Quesnel becoming a forestry innovation hub. This brief report summarizes the presentations, panel discussions and the World Café group work sessions. To view copies of the full presentations, please click the presenter's name (speaker biographies can be found [here](#)).

### **1. Forest and Land Management**

The key focus of the first FFTT in 2018 was the need to start landscape level planning in order to stop the cycle of large-scale disturbances that the land base in the North Cariboo was experiencing. This initial discussion led to Quesnel becoming one of BC's first forest landscape planning (FLP) pilots and [Josh Pressey](#), Regional Executive Director MOF Cariboo Region, gave

an overview of the BC government's recent initiatives around these FLP pilots and how this process is intended to advance reconciliation and ensure landscape resilience. He discussed the components of each FLP process, which include meaningful reconciliation, resilient landscapes, competitive markets, fair returns on assets, and sustainability and stewardship. Josh outlined the government's commitment to innovation in forest landscape planning and MOF's continued interest in playing a key role in Quesnel's FFFT process.

## **2. Manufacturing Facilities and Products**

The Quesnel Forest District was one of the hardest hit areas during the Mountain Pine Beetle (MPB) outbreak and the massive wildfires that followed, both of which have reduced the long-term sustainable annual allowable cut (AAC) from the Quesnel TSA. While BC's forestry industry is experiencing a dramatic decline in sawlog availability, there is significant potential to reinvent the sector to meet the growing demand for innovative forest products to address climate change and global environmental challenges, such as the increasing demand for mass timber construction and the emerging movement to regulate an end to single use plastics.

A common theme across the speakers on the manufacturing panel was that the Province's focus on moving from "volume to value" in BC's forest economy has initiated a dynamic shift in the conversation about what constitutes "value" from BC's forest fibre. [Sandy Ferguson](#) highlighted the opportunities for collaborative investments through First Nations partnerships, mill asset repurposing, reinventing supply chains, and maximizing fibre flows and utilization.

[Alex Boston](#) noted that there is an emerging opportunity to utilize offsite (or prefabricated) mass timber and wood frame construction to manufacture housing, not only to utilize renewable materials but also to maximize a shrinking labour force. An offsite and mass timber production model will not only facilitate an economic transition to a different construction model, it is also a way to support affordability, rapidly increase supply, and address climate change.

[Tim Caldecott](#) and [Gustavo Oliveira](#) echoed the imperative to produce more value with less fibre. Tim highlighted the importance of utilizing off site building methods and panelized modular to expedite construction with fewer workers. Gustavo presented a variety of non-conventional high value products already on the market and potential opportunities for Quesnel to diversify beyond traditional wood products.

## **3. The Workforce**

Given the significant labour shortage across all trades and the difficulty attract workers to the forest sector, labour shortages are being experienced throughout the industry; from contractors and carpenters to harvest machine operators and forest professionals. Panelists were asked to address the question of whether the vision of the forestry industry in Quesnel can be achieved without retraining the workforce, how to address the challenges with retooling a workforce, and what a community needs to do to attract a workforce.

[Amy Reid](#) and [Emily Colombo](#) spoke about what specifically the City of Quesnel and the Province of BC are doing to attract and retain workers in smaller, remote communities. Amy talked about the City's communications around the advantages of living in a smaller city (work life balance and cost of living) and telling that story to attract and retain a workforce. Emily

discussed how employers need to consider alternate measures now that the job market has changed so drastically, such as becoming an “employer of choice” by creating an attractive workplace culture, increasing business efficiencies to take pressure off of the workforce, and attracting workers through skilled-worker immigration programs.

[Dominik Roeser](#) and [Douglas Jamieson](#) shed light on the challenges facing post-secondary institutions. Both agreed that in order to train the next generation of workforce in Quesnel, a forestry-focused curriculum was imperative. These modernized training programs must include digitization and AI technologies, experiential learning, a focus on forest health and sustainability, and incentives to attract students to these programs.

#### **4. Bringing it all Together: The Forestry Hub**

[Jukka Matikainen](#) described the forest bioeconomy in other countries such as Sweden and Finland; countries that are the benchmarks for climate-smart forestry in action. Examples of different biomaterials and potential for lignin and cellulose-based products were presented by [Matyas Kosa](#) including cellulose-based fully biodegradable material that can be used in regular plastic processing equipment like 3D printers. While these products show potential for the forestry industry, there needs to be a faster way to move from aspiration to action, and [Bob Simpson](#) highlighted the need to accelerate innovation in automation to respond to the lack of workers in the sector by using Quesnel as an incubator for alternate building processes (modularization and mass timber) to respond to the provincial construction needs (housing, schools, assisted living, hospitals, etc.).

#### **Forestry Hub – Turning Ideas into Action**

The following are the key commitments and actions that the host organizations of the Think Tank, **City of Quesnel Forestry Initiatives and Three Rivers Community Forest**, will advance. See [Appendix 2](#) for a detailed list of commitments and actions by the participating organizations.

##### *Forest and Land Management*

- Continue to engage in and drive participation in forest landscape planning, LiDAR acquisition for the Quesnel TSA and land based research opportunities (such as Silva 21).
- Continue to evolve best practices in forest management to support forest and landscape resilience as well as a forest economy through partnerships and collaboration with industry, First Nations, the Province, and Finland.

##### *Manufacturing Facilities and Products*

- Continue to support exploration of solid wood manufacturing opportunities such as prefabricated mass timber and wood frame construction.
- Continue to support exploration of bioeconomy options working with Foresight Canada on better utilization of biomass and competitiveness of supply chains.

##### *Workforce and Training*

- Develop the business case to make Quesnel a training centre for partial cut harvesting machine operator training, working with College of New Caledonia, Finland and other partners.

#### *Cross-cutting commitments and actions*

- Continue to advance reconciliation with First Nations through the Three Rivers Community Forest and the Think Tank process.
- Continue to facilitate and advance collaboration within the forest sector in the North Cariboo.
- Sign an MOU with Finland and other partners to advance knowledge exchange and develop business partnerships.
- Identify opportunities to use artificial intelligence to enhance all aspects of the forestry hub.

#### **Acknowledgements and Commitments**

The City of Quesnel appreciates the ongoing involvement of and support from the Provincial Government for its community-led Think Tank process. We were very appreciative of the efforts MLA Doug Routley made to open our third Think Tank; as Parliamentary Secretary of Forests and Chair of the BC Forest Worker Supports and Community Resiliency Council, MLA Routley has been a strong advocate for community-led processes and his encouragement and support were appreciated by the attendees.

Similarly appreciated was the fact that BC's Minister of Labour, MLA Harry Bains, took the time to attend and to speak at the Think Tank. His reminder to think about worker safety in everything we do was timely and important as we seek to re-invent the regional forest economy. The attendees also valued the insights that long time forest advocate, Garry Merkel shared with them as the Think Tank's dinner keynote speaker. Garry's reflections were timely, thoughtful, and stimulated proactive dialogue.

The City of Quesnel will continue to lead the FFFT process and actively engage with all the partners who are making this process possible. Between now and the next Future of Forestry Think Tank in 2025, the City will facilitate ongoing dialogue in each of the three streams (Landscape, Manufacturing, Workforce) in order to advance the initiatives the City is committing to for each stream.

Finally, the City would like to thank all of its partners and collaborators for helping us continually energize the grassroots movement here in Quesnel; our collective efforts are creating a more just and ecologically sound future for the planet and for the next generations who call it home.