

Steep Slopes – Climbing Higher



Presenters Dzhamal Amishev, Ken Dodd, Tyson Lambert, and John Ligtenberg at the Truck Loggers Association Convention in January.

Celebrating 75 years in forestry

By Gord Woodward

As it celebrates its 75th anniversary, the Truck Loggers Association (TLA) can trace its evolution through its membership rolls.

The organization began as a collection of small, independent logging firms. They chose the TLA name back when the coastal logging industry was transitioning its transportation methods from railroads to trucks.

Today? “We’re not just truckers,” executive director David Elstone emphasizes. “We’re the small to medium-sized business operators who are part of the supply chain of the B.C. forest industry, from stump to dump, to delivering the log to the mill.”

Independent harvesting contractors hold the bulk of the nearly 500 memberships spread around B.C. And at TLA meetings they may sit beside road builders, engineers, log brokers, suppliers, or truckers. Mills have signed up too. So have nine forest-dependent communities. “They all want to see a prosperous working forest,” Elstone says.

While membership has evolved over the decades, there’s always been one constant at the TLA: the

organization’s ethos. It advocates for sustainable forest management and opposes monopoly control of the woods.

Mechanization drives safety evolution

Education of members is also part of the mission, especially in the area of safety. “We strive to present the on-the-ground, real, and practical perspective of how safety management can be applied,” says Elstone.

The late W.D. (Bill) Moore, a TLA president in the 1960s, set the example by tirelessly campaigning for workplace safety. He attended conferences, called on industry executives, and even appeared in ads for WorkSafeBC (then the Workers’ Compensation Board). “His most important project was his work to promote loggers’ safety on the job,” his son, Patrick, said in a eulogy for his father.

The TLA also had a hand in the formation of the B.C. Forest Safety Council.

Today, the industry’s safety evolution has been driven by mechanization. Tethered-system machines have replaced some hand fallers on steep slopes. Steam donkeys and chokers are museum pieces. “Today,

almost everyone sits inside a machine,” Elstone notes. “The trend is to see fewer people on the ground.”

To reduce the risk of truck rollovers, crashes, and other hazards, firms need to emphasize five areas of focus: inspections, personal protective equipment, loading, driving, and the log yard.

“If you’re not a safe operator, you’re not going to be in business,” says current president Mike Richardson.

A voice for independents

An independent stump-to-dump contractor based in Campbell River, Richardson, appreciates the vision of the association’s founders.

“The TLA was formed because the independent contractor had no representative,” he says. At the time of its founding in the 1940s, logging equipment and workers were scarce due to the war, and new regulations on snag felling and slash burning were alarming the industry. Small operators felt squeezed by government and large forestry corporations.

As a result, a handful of independent loggers met on Vancouver Island to lay the foundation for what would

become the TLA. “It was time to change the direction our industry was going,” says Elstone.

Some 75 years later, the TLA has evolved to deal with today’s concerns. The coastal forest industry reaps roughly as much timber on Crown land as it did back in the TLA’s early days, but now more than 90 percent of the work is done by logging contractors.

And while logging trucks remain the public face of the industry, the TLA membership rolls show a much broader picture. ☺



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