



Reference: 260847

Feb. 2, 2021

The Provincial Tree Planting Program and COVID-19 Protocols

Dear Mayor / Chief and Council

It was my intent to reach out to the municipalities, indigenous communities, forest licensees and the planting contract community prior to the start of the 2021 planting season. The past year has been filled with new and challenging business processes focused on keeping workers and communities safe as the COVID-19 pandemic spread across the province. As you'll remember, last spring's planting season began as our knowledge of the pandemic started to unfold, and through an unprecedented season of collaboration by all sectors, we successfully planted over 300 million trees with close to 6000 tree planters and without a single confirmed case of the COVID-19 virus in our workforce.

The combination of Public Health Office orders and operating guidelines, along with the forest sector working collaboratively with government and local communities, was paramount in helping make the 2020 planting season successful. The forestry sector is currently preparing for the 2021 tree planting season again, to ensure community and worker safety with respect to COVID-19. Forest activities, including tree planting, continue to be designated an essential service during the COVID-19 pandemic. As an important part of the provincial economy and for environmental sustainability, every year the forest sector in BC engages in Canada's largest tree planting program to ensure that areas harvested or destroyed by insects and wildfire are replanted. The 2021 planting season will be equally significant to last year, with about 300 million seedlings scheduled to be planted.

The 2021 planting program will begin on BC's coast at the end of February and in the interior in about mid-April. Learning from our experiences last year, the forest sector response and safe delivery of the 2020 tree planting program, preparations began last fall and will continue through the tree planting season to ensure that the safety of our workers and the surrounding communities are our highest priority.

For the 2021 tree planting season our goals are once again to:

- Prevent the transmission of any potential infection from the silviculture workers to communities around the province; and
- Ensure that the planters are kept safe and healthy so they can complete another planting season successfully.

- Keep municipalities and indigenous community leaders informed of the planting as it moves with the spring openings.

To ensure that we can achieve our goals, as we did in 2020, please be aware of the following:

- Those working in the silviculture industry in the north of the province must follow the requirements of the new Provincial Health Officer (PHO) order, *Resource Sector Worksites and Industrial Camps in the Region of the Northern Health Authority* published as of January 12, 2021, <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health/about-bc-s-health-care-system/office-of-the-provincial-health-officer/covid-19/covid-19-pho-order-industrial-camps-northern-health.pdf> while the rest of the province is required to follow the pre-existing order *Industrial Camps – July 2, 2020*. https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health/about-bc-s-health-care-system/office-of-the-provincial-health-officer/covid-19/archived-docs/pho_order_industrial_camps_april_23_2020.pdf All workers will be required to follow the PHO orders as they are amended to address changing conditions.
- Along with PHO orders, there are a number of guidance documents available to the planting contractors, both from the Ministry of Health and the Western Forestry Contractors Association (WFCA).
- A key success factor in 2020, which will continue for 2021, is the commitment for government and industry to align and collaborate on delivery of the planting program. A critical piece of that commitment includes frequent and clear communication.

An essential part of that commitment to communication is to identify and resolve issues both within the planting programs and also, most importantly, to provide information to communities about what is happening as the tree planting season progresses. As with all good communication, it will also provide you with an opportunity to ask questions and provide details about local issues.

Outreach and communication will begin over the next few weeks as we approach the planting season in your area.

I have asked the Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development District Managers to be the point of contact for tree planting information for communities following on the success and effectiveness of the role they played in 2020.

In the interim, if you have specific questions please direct them to Shane Berg, Deputy Chief Forester at Shane.Berg@gov.bc.ca. With your assistance, I am confident we will accomplish similar successes in 2021.

Yours truly,



Diane Nicholls, RPF
ADM, Chief Forester
Office of the Chief Forester

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pc: The Honourable Katrine Conroy, Minister
Dr. Bonnie Henry, Provincial Health Officer