

2020 Interior Spring Planting and Covid-19

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In collaboration with the BC Timber Sales and Western Forestry Contractors Association
- ISSUE:** **Delay of commencement of 2020 Interior Planting Season to week of May 4th due to COVID-19 pandemic virus.**

2020 represents the single largest planting program the province has ever managed. This year's planting program is estimated at 308 million trees in response to legal reforestation obligations, the 2017 and 2018 wildfires and the strategic use of reforestation to mitigate climate change. Starting this spring on, or around, the 20th of April 230 million seedlings were scheduled to be planted in the Interior over a ten-week period.

The COVID-19 pandemic is creating huge uncertainty for everyone involved in making the Interior planting season a success; the situation is fluid, and changing every day with new and increasingly stringent measures being applied to combat the potential threat of infection and protect the citizens of BC. One of the main concerns for all parties is that the reforestation season proceeds successfully by implementing all reasonable measures to ensure the safety of workers and the communities they work in.

Collaborative processes between government, BC Timber Sales, licensees and the Western Forestry Contractors Association are already underway to prepare for alternative COVID-19 adapted processes, including camp health and safety procedures, workforce support, communications, and engagement with municipal leaders.

In a normal year the start date for most Interior contractor operations would be between April 20th and early May. Starting immediately employers would begin mobilizing crews from around Canada, begin thawing trees, booking transport, and setting up camps or other types of lodgings.

With the above circumstances in play, it is both government's and WFCA's view that a clear message be shared by BC's Chief Forester, advocating for the successful implementation of the 2020 planting season, but recognizing that some flexibility may be required to determine the best course of action at this early stage of the season:

As Chief Forester for the Province of BC and with the support of BCTS and the WFCA, I am recommending that any planting not yet initiated, be deferred until the beginning of May to provide additional time to allow the preparation of a proper response to the COVID-19 pandemic I recognize that some planting is already under way, and my expectation is that these contractors continue so long as they follow the current Health and Safety requirements to help contain spread of the virus.

This deferral will allow companies and contractors to develop a proper response to all the factors that need to be considered including:

- Work to develop measures to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus and protect workers and communities, taking into consideration the unique facets of the reforestation industry in conjunction with Ministry of Health requirements.
- With up to 5,000 transient tree planters arriving in small rural communities, and their environs, it will be necessary to work with local communities to provide information on the health and safety measures being implemented.
- Reorganization of planting logistics around lost opportunities in early planting ground, cold storage and thawing, and transportation of seedlings.
- Administration issues around contracts with regard to start dates, production rates and completion.
- Identify the anticipated cost increases associated with the additional measures to protect workers and communities and determine how these can be managed.

More guidance on how to address COVID-19 in field operations and camp standards will be forthcoming over the coming days and most importantly we will ensure timely communication with the silviculture contractors doing this work.

The interim start-up date will be reviewed on a regular basis with the intent to provide contractors, industry, and Government some security around not setting plans in motion that can not be delivered due to extended problems caused by the virus.

Yours truly,



Diane Nicholls, RPF
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