



Education the focus at Woodlot AGM



Chuck Bulmer of the Kalamalka Forestry Centre shares insight regarding soil conservation and the growing body of research available to improve silviculture practices in the province.

By SARA GRADY

When BC's woodlotters gather for their Annual General Meeting each fall, the intention is always to exchange ideas, learn from successes (and failures), and improve small-scale forestry practices across the province.

This year's AGM, hosted jointly by the Shuswap/Okanagan and Boundary Woodlot Associations in West Kelowna, put an even greater emphasis on the educational component. In addition to several informative field tours

highlighting issues specific to the region, education was the prevailing theme of both the Stewardship Awards and a highly successful panel discussion.

West Kelowna Mayor Doug Findlater and Westbank First Nations Councillor Brian Eli extended their warm welcome to the crowd of 100+ woodlotters, who were then shown the Woodlot Stewardship video, Education Legacies.

The video threw a spotlight on a broad cross-section of educational pursuits happening on woodlots around the province, from elementary school fieldtrips and youth summer camps, to

high school trades programs and post-secondary research and work experience.

A special honour was given to one of the Federation's greatest education champions. Shawn Flynn was named a Lifetime Member in recognition of his work at The School of Commonsense, a one-of-a-kind classroom built by students for students on Woodlot License 1479 in Port Alberni. Flynn and educator Ryan Dvorak have blended a Ministry-approved curriculum with project-based, hands-on learning for high school students who don't thrive in a traditional classroom setting.



Education Panel (L-R) Al Kolkind (Teacher, Rutland Senior Secondary), Martin Tooms (Teacher, Charles Bloom Secondary), Michelle Britch (Student, Charles Bloom Secondary), Jordan Benner (Woodlotter, Doctoral Candidate, Quadra Island)

Woodlotters took a break from the boardroom to visit family-owned Gorman Brothers Lumber Ltd., a sprawling operation that has survived and thrived during economic downturns and changing market demands since the 1950s. With an annual intake of roughly 12,000 logging-truck loads every year and over 400 employees, it remains one of the region’s largest employers.

After visiting the mill guests took to the woods and learned about the challenges of fire mitigation on a Westbank First Nation’s Community Forest nestled snugly in a densely populated urban setting. Having already been impacted by several forest fires on the perimeter, experts at Ntityix Resources took aggressive measures in the Rose Valley and Bear Creek regions to reduce risk of future interface fires, at considerable expense.

Field tours on Day 2 took woodlotters back into the forest, where they took part in detailed presentations about soil assessment, species selection – elaborating on a presentation made earlier in the day regarding silviculture and climate change – the challenges of maintaining a successful tree-planting operation, and the history of silviculture practices in the forests surrounding Silver Lake.

A brief stop at the scenic Silver Lake Camp included an intriguing demonstration of new drone technology – a drone equipped with a specialized camera capable of assessing timber density from the treetops – which woodlotters considered an appealing alternative for mapping on rugged terrain.

A great deal of discussion emerged from all the proceedings, but arguably the most engaging conversations came from the Education Panel. After hearing presentations from Al Kolkind (Rutland Senior Secondary) and Martin Tooms (Charles Bloom Secondary), who both run forestry programs, Jordan Benner, a woodlotter and doctoral candidate, and Michelle Britch, a student in Charles Bloom’s forestry program, the Federation was inspired to strike an Education Committee.

This Committee hopes to provide a conduit for collaboration among the many programs running independently around the province. By sharing their resources and knowledge, forestry education can be strengthened, and that’s great news for the woodlot program, and the industry as a whole.

During the Education Panel student Michelle Britch gave a moving speech lauding the benefits of forestry education that brought the audience to its feet. She concluded her speech with this poem:

*“ I travel the road least traveled,
and I know that this is true.*

*But there is really nothing else
that I would rather do.*

*Working in a man’s field may
not be easy to beat.*

*I know if I work real hard I can
sweep them off their feet.*

*My ethic is astounding, I wish
you only knew.*

*What this “little” girl can
really do.*

*I thank you for listening to my
side of the story.*

*But now I must pass on all of
the glory.*

*I must say one big thank you
for all of their time and care.*

*Martin Tooms, Tim Thorpe,
Lisa Marak, and Mrs. Doris
Squair.*

Michelle Britch
Charles Bloom Secondary School
Forestry Program Participant

You can review a sample of the informative **presentations** from the AGM here: <http://woodlot.bc.ca/annual-general-meeting-conference/> and watch the Stewardship video “**Education Legacies**” here: <http://woodlot.bc.ca/videos/>.



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