



THE WOODLOT COMMUNICATOR



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Kids learn real-life skills on woodlot

By SARA GRADY

There are 867 active woodlot licenses in British Columbia, and they provide much more than timber. Many play host to students of all ages exploring environmental sciences, with topics ranging from a very general introduction to the forest, to specifics such as silviculture and natural resource management.

At a woodlot licence in Lumby, students are given a unique, hands-on education in a 600-hectare “classroom,” and acquire skills they’ll use whether they pursue a career in forestry or not. Arguably one of the most picturesque forests in BC, Woodlot #1908 on Trinity Valley Road is a working venture run by the staff and students of Charles Bloom Secondary School (CBSS), with the assistance of a professional forester and career logger.

The CBSS Forestry and Trades program has been running since the 70s, and was given permanent roots in 2002 with the acquisition of the Crown woodlot license. Grade 11 and 12 students from five high schools in School District 22 vie for 16 spots in this coveted



Students from Charles Bloom Secondary School in Lumby get hands-on training in all aspects of forest management thanks to Woodlot license #1908.

trades program, which runs from September to January every year.

Students spend three days a week in the woodlot, learning worksite safety procedures, chainsaw operation and maintenance, heavy-duty equipment operation, and team skills. The remaining two days are spent in the school’s well-equipped shop learning WCB safety procedures and furniture-building skills and techniques.

With a high premium on safety, all students are taught St. John’s First Aid before heading into the bush. This training, coupled with their real-life experi-

ence handling chainsaws, cats and skidders, means their resumes pack a punch when they graduate. And the students know it.

Making a good impression on the dedicated teachers and industry professionals who run the program results in rock-solid references that give these young people an edge in a competitive workforce. Applying for an apprenticeship or a spot in a post-secondary trades or university program is that much easier when applicants can prove they have already built a strong foundation in the forest.

Charles Bloom Principal, Ken Gatzke, bursts with pride when talking about the program, and rightfully so. This woodlot classroom is an innovative use of a Crown resource, giving kids real-life skills today that they can use far into the future.



A day in the life of a woodlot logger

By SARA GRADY

It's not often I get an email from someone in my time zone before 5:00 a.m. But for Cariboo Country woodlotter Creole Dufour, 4:00-4:30 a.m. is earmarked for handling correspondence, so that's when he confirms our pending interview. When we finally connect over the phone, it's 7:00 p.m. and his workday is just winding down.

Creole's days are long because this time of year he's pushing hard to complete work on the woodlot before spring break-up will make logging roads impassible. The window starts to close mid-March, and by April that window is firmly shut.

And while 4:00 a.m. seems like an early start, the drivers he's contracted to bring the last of the prior day's cut down the mountain are making their trip at 3:00 a.m.

This serves two purposes. First, they'll be at the mill when it starts accepting deliveries at 6:00 a.m. If you miss the 12-hour window for dropping your timber, you've potentially missed the opportunity to sell it at all. And second, Creole and his crew won't meet these fully loaded trucks coming down as they're heading up the narrow, winding roads. He'll stay in constant radio contact with the truckers throughout the day, but precau-



Creole Dufour takes a tree down the hard way — by hand. Creole and his crew work long days through the winter to bring the harvest in from his Cariboo woodlot.

tions like this give an extra measure of safety.

By 5:00 a.m. Creole will be on the road prepared for a day of hand-falling. He'll have durable winter clothes, snowshoes, wedges, spare chains, a back-up chainsaw, fuel, shackles for his skidder, and safety gear packed in the truck. He likely won't meet a logging truck on the road, but at this time of day he'll watch for moose, which can do as much damage to a driver as they can to themselves in a collision.

Once onsite he'll warm up the skidder and loader, then do a visual safety check, ensuring all

the equipment is in good working order. If it's still too dark to start falling trees, he'll skid timber out to one of the landings.

Once the rest of his crew arrives they'll go full tilt until 4:30 p.m., assuming nothing breaks down. If a piece of equipment needs repair and they haven't got the replacement parts, someone has to make the 2-hour round-trip into town and back. Ideally they intercept one of the logging trucks by radio and have the parts brought up, minimizing the down time.

At the end of the day, Creole will conduct maintenance on his

chainsaws, replenish his supply of wedges, and gather any parts he might need for the loader or skidder the next day. And he's ready to start all over again. He'll go seven days a week until break-up.

The days are long, and the work is demanding, both physically and mentally. But Creole loves the challenge. When problems crop up he just has to "logic things out," he says, since "they're all problems we can solve." As with any situation that arises when managing a woodlot, he believes that new challenges simply call for new solutions.



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