



Alkali Resource Management wildfire risk crew recently completed wildfire mitigation work on Woodlot Licences #587, 1694 and 1897 in the Cariboo Regional District.

BC's 2021 extreme wildfire season creates replanting challenges

Wildfire season is taking its toll on British Columbia's forests, and we're not out of the woods yet.

As of the end of July, over 3000 firefighters were battling 277 wildfires in the province. The blazes have already claimed 340,000 hectares of forest, with no signs of slowing down.

BC's woodlots have also suffered substantial losses. While it is difficult to assess wildfire damage while they are burning, the current best estimate (as of August 4, 2021) is 13 Woodlot Licences and approximately 5,000 hectares have been impacted.

Post wildfires, there will be much work to salvage any timber and rehabilitate the burned areas. Replanting has always been a priority for woodlot licensees – they're required to restock cutblocks so that the forest returns to its original state quickly – but it will be a bigger task over the next few years.

An unseasonably hot, dry spring and extreme summer were already threatening new plantings around the province. With another month to go and no sign of sustained rain or lower temperatures, it's going to be a rough ride for woodlotters who recently planted.

Finding seedlings will be a challenge...this year's seed crop is falling victim to the fires, as well.

It is important, now more than ever, that re-planting is done as soon as possible and

carefully for the maximum success rate. And retired silviculturist and woodlot licensee Dale Likes, RPF, has produced a "manual" that will help fellow woodlotters ensure that success.

Likes manages Woodlot License #1559 just east of Bear Lake along with his partner, Russ Martin. He enjoyed a 40-year career with Northwood Pulp & Timber/Canfor as a forest technologist, laying out cutblocks, supervising planting, harvest and road engineering.

While the scope of his job was broad, his main interest was silviculture, prompting him to earn his RPF designation in 1992. Over the course of his career, he saw planting scenarios played out on a large scale and came to understand the factors that led to robust seedling health... and failure.

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Tree planting pros in Boundary dig up a well planted larch to examine the roots and explain planting techniques.

“Roots collect the water and minerals required for growth and send it to the tops of the seedlings. The tops of the seedlings turn these minerals, combined with carbon dioxide, into sugars – photosynthesis – and send them to the roots.”

“This transportation system is critical to the communication between tops and roots. Stress causes breakdowns in these community systems and any loss of efficiency affects the entire



Dale Likes beside a spruce tree showing excellent performance due to being Class A stock and planted on a good microsite.

seedling. Repair of these systems is very time and energy consuming. The short growing season of conifers leaves little time for failure.”

According to Likes, seedlings are three communities working together for overall success.

“To begin, one should choose the best seedling for the site.” Species, size and genetics all matter.

Site selection (where the seedling is planted) is important, naturally, though in the wake of wildfires, the choices are limited. While a healthy, slow burning fire will leave minerals in the soil that encourage growth. The fast-and-hot burning infernos like those we’re seeing this year actually rob the soil of moisture and nutrients. This leaves a very inhospitable site for new seedlings.

Proper handling of the seedlings then is important to not shock them and correct planting techniques are crucial for seedling survival and performance.

Likes urges his fellow licensees to dig up any failed seedlings they find to assess what went wrong...and to consult with other colleagues if the cause isn't clear to them.

The forestry sector will have a tough hill to climb when yet another destructive wildfire season ends. With guidance from a veteran forester and woodlot licensee like Dale Likes, sharing his experience and technical knowledge in silviculture, BC’s forests should recover in time from this intense wildfire season...they’re in good hands.

By SARA GRADY AND DALE LIKES, RPF



Is this a result of a poorly planted Sx seedling? Excavate the seedling and look at the roots. Perhaps there was a weather event that effected its' performance? Perhaps it was planted on a poor micro site?

BC's woodloters would like to thank those tirelessly working on the front line of the wildfires, especially Wildfire Crews and Industry.

Some of our own woodlot licensees, friends and family may be among them.



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