



Bob Simpson MLA Cariboo North Media Release

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Independent MLA Calls for Fundamental Changes to Forest Management

In light of the mountain pine beetle epidemic and the timber supply crisis in the interior of the province, the Independent MLA for Cariboo North called on the government to make fundamental changes to the way BC's public forests are managed.

"One hundred years ago, we established the BC Forest Service and an independent Chief Forester to manage BC's largest natural asset for future generations. Today, both the Forest Service and the Chief Forester function have been virtually eliminated by the current government," said Independent MLA Bob Simpson.

In question period, Simpson challenged the Minister responsible to establish the Chief Forester as an independent Officer of the Legislature like the Auditor General or the Ombudsperson.

"A Chief Forester selected by and reporting directly to the Legislature, with statutory authority to ensure BC's largest public asset is being managed in the public interest, is the only way to protect forest management decisions from the politics of the day. It will ensure we are managing our forests as healthy, resilient, and adaptable ecosystems for future generations," said Simpson.

Simpson also called on the government to use the feedback and criticism it has received on the state of BC's forest inventory to create a work plan and assign resources to re-inventory BC's public forests. The Auditor General, Forest Practices Board, and the Association of BC Forest Professionals have all expressed concerns about the current forest inventory.

"BC's first Chief Forester told the government of 1913 that 'comprehensive knowledge of the quality, condition, and extent of forest resources' is the foundation of good forest management," said Simpson. "We no longer have the level of comprehensive knowledge required to manage our forests, and that shortcoming must be addressed immediately."

The Independent MLA also called for changes to forestry legislation in order to restore a higher level of management and planning in harvesting activities.

“The lack of landscape-level planning by government is becoming a significant problem, and it's undermining the government's ability to protect a wide range of non-timber values,” said Simpson. “For example, I'm being told that in most areas in the mountain pine beetle zone we may have already logged in the protected areas (or 'forest reserves') that the government is going to ask permission to harvest through the new Standing Committee.”

The Independent MLA for Cariboo North said he believes the establishment of the Chief Forester as an independent Officer of the Legislature, a complete re-inventorying of BC's public forests, and the restoration of landscape-level planning in the *Forest Act* is the only way to ensure that BC's forests can and will be managed wisely for future generations.

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Best regards,
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