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For Immediate Release

Trench Society Meets New Forests Minister on Grassland Restoration File

The Rocky Mountain Trench Natural Resources Society met with Forests and Range Minister Pat Bell in Cranbrook last week to discuss ways to improve grassland restoration in BC.

The minister was receptive to Trench Society recommendations that would make restoration projects more financially viable.

Society directors said ecosystem restoration involves logging marginal sites which require a different set of rules from traditional industrial logging.

Directors suggested levying stumpage fees appropriate to low-value timber, using stumpage to fund restoration, and investigating potential bioenergy uses for the wood.

They also urged continued government funding for ecosystem restoration programs. The East Kootenay program, now in its 10th year, is the model for similar initiatives now being launched around the province.

“We’re very much on the same page with this,” Bell told the Society, a coalition of nine East Kootenay hunting, ranching, environmental and wildlife organizations. “We all want a better way to deal with grassland restoration.”

Bell said greater utilization of wood fibre once considered waste or debris is one of his goals as BC’s new Minister of Forests and Range. Formerly Minister of Agriculture and Lands, he was appointed to the forests portfolio in June.

Bell said he wants his ministry to move away from one-size-fits-all policies by giving forest district managers more flexibility to implement solutions that answer particular needs within their districts.

District Manager Tony Wideski is already putting forward ideas to make grassland restoration in the Rocky Mountain Forest District more economically viable, the minister said.

“We were encouraged by what Minister Bell had to say, and impressed by his grasp of our challenges,” said Trench Society Coordinator Dan Murphy. “Tacking restoration logging on to the existing regulatory framework is more like hammering a square peg into a round hole.”

Bell, who came to the meeting with a good understanding of the ecosystem restoration program in the Trench, gave credit to East Kootenay MLA Bill Bennett for championing the restoration cause.

“Back in Victoria we all know about the problems of forest ingrowth and the need for grassland restoration in the East Kootenay,” he said. “Bill has been talking about it for the past seven and a half years.”

The Trench Society took advantage of the Minister’s visit to introduce him to Galloway Lumber’s Job Opportunities Program (JOP) crew which is currently thinning trees on the Society’s Waldo North grasslands restoration project near Jaffray.

Galloway Lumber was forced to close its Jaffray sawmill a year ago when the US housing market collapsed. The company was recently awarded a JOP grant to hire some of its laid-off employees and put them to work on restoration projects.

The \$26.25 million Job Opportunities Program is one of three new programs developed by the province to support BC forest workers during the ongoing downturn in the industry, but it is only a short-term fix, Bell told the crew.

The long-term solution is to find new markets and new uses for BC forest products. He said expanding lumber exports to the huge market in China is a key priority and he will lead a trade delegation there this week.

Visit www.trenchsociety.com to learn more about ecosystem restoration in the Rocky Mountain Trench. Visit www.cd.gov.bc.ca/cdt/ to learn more about the Job Opportunities Program and the Community Development Trust.

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PHOTO FOLLOWS ...



Bell Wideski JOP crew.jpg

Galloway Lumber's Job Opportunities Program crew drove to town last week to meet Forests and Range Minister Pat Bell, at center, and Rocky Mountain Forest District Manager Tony Wideski, at left. The Galloway crew is working on a grassland restoration project near Jaffray.

Trench Society Member Organizations

- Cranbrook Archery Club
- East Kootenay Wildlife Association
- Kootenay Livestock Association
- Rocky Mountain Naturalists
- Southern Guides & Outfitters Association
- The Land Conservancy of BC (Kootenay Region)
- Wildsight (formerly East Kootenay Environmental Society)
- Windermere Farmers Institute
- Waldo Stockbreeders Association

Each member organization appoints a representative to the Board of Directors.

Trench Society Board of Directors

- Chair: Peter Davidson, Cranbrook, Rocky Mountain Naturalists
- 1st Vice Chair: Bill Coy, Dutch Creek, Windermere Farmers Institute
- 2nd Vice Chair: Dave Quinn, Kimberley, Wildsight
- Treasurer: Bob Bjorn, Wycliffe, Waldo Stockbreeders Association
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- Don Lancaster, Mayook, Kootenay Livestock Association
- Kathryn Martell, Kimberley, The Land Conservancy
- Andy Pezderic, Golden, East Kootenay Wildlife Association