



9 December 2020

The Honourable Seamus O'Regan
Minister of Natural Resources
House of Commons
Ottawa, Canada

Dear Minister O'Regan:

Re: Recognition of our federal government's commitment to reforestation and invitation to open WFCA 2021 Annual Conference 11 February 2021

These days, more than ever, governing looks like a difficult, if not thankless, task. I just wanted to write, then, in appreciation of our federal government's support for forests, reforestation, and the silviculture sector across Canada.

The Western Forestry Contractors' Association represents seedling nurseries, planting and silviculture contractors, and consulting foresters in western Canada. On an annual basis here in British Columbia we plant close to the majority of seedlings planted nationally. The additional demand created by the carbon sequestration projects supported by the federal Low Carbon Economy Fund (LCEF) has benefited us by stabilizing our sector, aiding us in recruiting and retaining seasonal workers, and, of course, it has begun restoring our landscapes under assault by wildfire, pests, and climate change. It has been a major benefit to our sector and our forests.

Strengthened by the LCEF program we were able to develop the capacity to successfully complete this year's ambitious planting program in B.C and Alberta, even as we dealt with the contingencies created by the pandemic. Nearly 30 million federally-funded seedlings were planted this year as part of British Columbia's 300 million annual total. We would like to think that some of our regional COVID-19 leadership contributed to the success of reforestation work across the country.

Regarding the pandemic, we understand our B.C. government has worked with their federal counterparts to arrive at a draft agreement under the Forest Sector Safety Measures Program. When signed this will help our sector with the increased costs this year of operating safely due to COVID-19. This national \$30-million program will assist all our recipients in dealing with costs incurred this year and put us in a stronger position to deal with the COVID-19 again in 2021. We appreciate this help.

When we spoke with you earlier this year we were glad to hear our federal government remains committed to its goal of planting 2-billion seedlings over the next ten years as part of its Nature-based Climate Solutions strategy. Now that funding for that goal has been announced in the recent Fall Economic Statement-2020 our sector can begin to make specific plans for nursery production, forestry worker recruitment, training, and retention, along with the other investments needed to help reach our government's goal.

Last week's announcement provides us with a promising long-term investment horizon and the prospect of continuing worthwhile work creating jobs, protecting forests, and mitigating climate change.

The Western Forestry Contractors' Association represents operations that do the on-the-ground reforestation planning, grow the seedlings, and plant them. As small and medium-size enterprises our sector will make the investments, develop the staff, and deliver many of the outcomes set by the Nature-based Climate Solutions commitment. We will be responsible for the safety and health of the thousands of mostly young workers who will be hired for the duration of this campaign. Reforestation and restoration are at the heart of we do as a sector.

The WFCFA has been working closely with provincial governments in both British Columbia and Alberta on forest policy and practice for the ongoing programs in those jurisdictions. Since March of this year when Natural Resources Canada held its first information session on the 2-billion tree commitment we have been working with planners within that agency offering our expertise and perspective. We look forward to continuing this work with all our governments in the spirit of collaboration the task before us demands.

We would like you to consider making the opening remarks for our Western Forestry Contractors' Association 2021 Annual Conference, Expo, and AGM. This three-day event will be held on a virtual platform on the 10th, 11th, and 12th February 2021. We hope to attract a few hundred of our members along with government and licensee participants mostly from the western provinces. Thursday 11th February will launch two days of presentations and on forest policy and practice including sessions on Nature-based Climate Solutions.

We are hoping you could make some opening remarks as the minister responsible for this strategy on the morning of Thursday. That would serve us well and create an opportunity for our federal government to be recognized for the reforestation work it has done to date and what it intends to do in the future. It is a very good story for our forests and forestry at a time when good news is particularly welcome.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Betts". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right from the end of the name.

John Betts
Executive Director
Western Forestry Contractors' Association

cc: Beth MacNeill, Assistant Deputy Minister, CFS
Dianne Nicholls, Chief Forester, BC MFLNRORD
Bruce Blackwell, President WFC
Hilary Travis, Senior Policy Adviser, NRCAN
Judi Beck, Director General, CFS