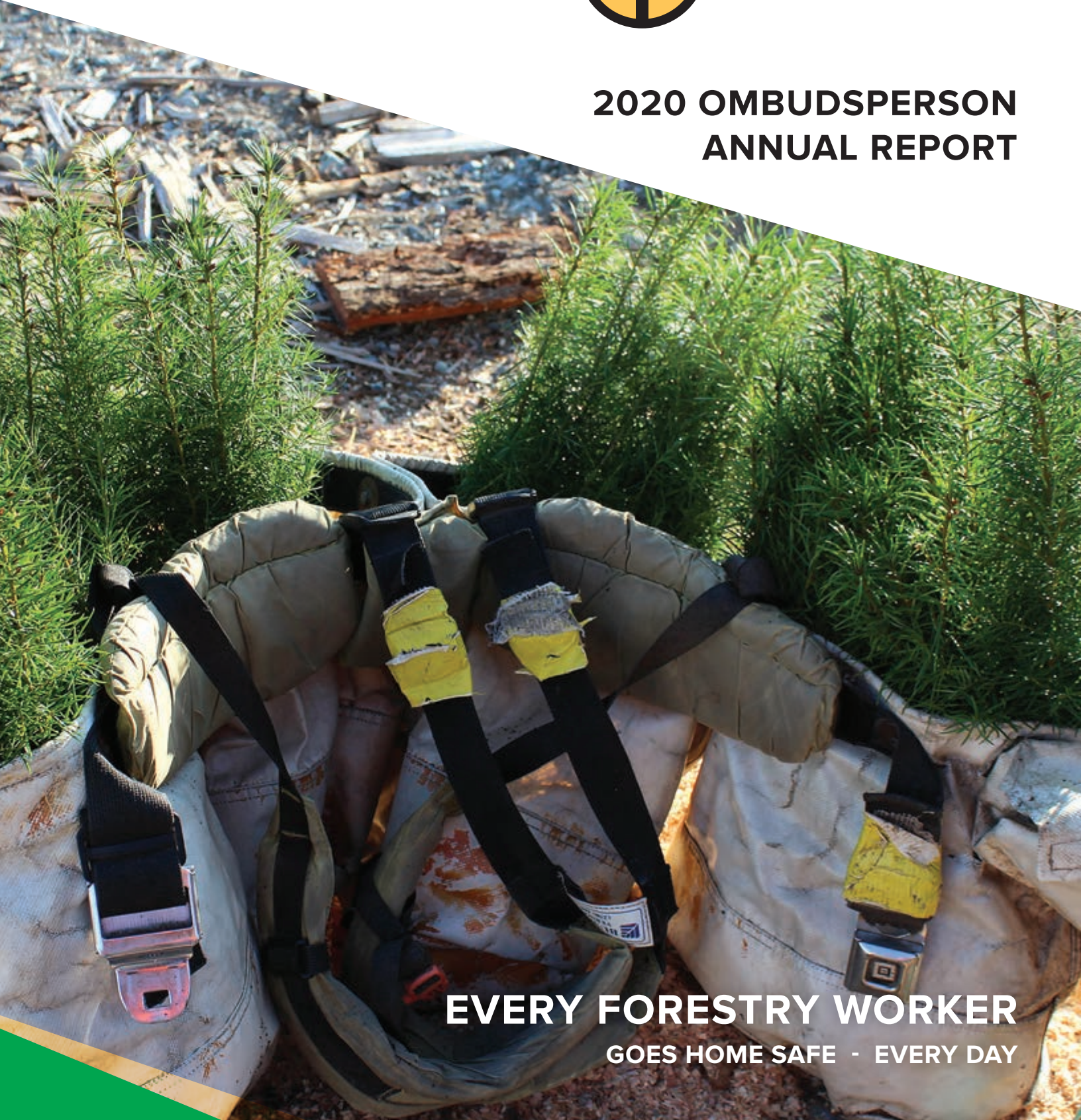




**BC Forest Safety**

Safety is **good** business

## **2020 OMBUDSPERSON ANNUAL REPORT**



**EVERY FORESTRY WORKER  
GOES HOME SAFE - EVERY DAY**



Photo courtesy of Replant.ca





# 2020 BC Forest Safety Ombudsperson Annual Report



## Covid-19 – A Double Edged Sword

Last year I opened my report with this observation; “For those who have believed that money comes before safety, governments and industry across the globe have made a clear choice to put economics on hold and put the safety of the population ahead of fiscal priorities.” We have now been in the grips of a global pandemic for over a year – at the same time - the lumber markets have been at record levels with the resultant heightened demand for fiber. At a time when the commercial demands and pressure on the harvest sector have been at unprecedented levels and the management of the workplace has never required a more discipline approached; these conditions have combined to create the potential for a perfect storm in terms of the wrong safety outcomes. But rather than a workplace that is more dangerous and riskier this combination has actually achieved the opposite result.

The processes for managing pandemic requirements, which requires significantly improvements in communications, planning and discipline are the changes the industry needed to adopt when dealing with the complex issues associated with Phase Integration. As a result, we now have worksites where a more intensive management regimes are in place for the daily planning, communications and scheduling around the spacing of equipment and people. Over the last year these factors have assisted in achieving a 10-year low aggregate injury rate across some of the most high-risk harvest occupations; falling, truck driving and silviculture. As the pandemic slowly eases, this change will serve the industry well for a long time to come, continuing to improve the safety outcomes for workers and their families in the forest sector.

## Year in Review

Over 2020 three issues dominated much of our office’s time and attention; HEMS, Resource Roads and Qualified Faller Training (QFT). The Ombudsperson Reports; No Longer the Road Less Travelled and Helicopter Emergency Response (HEMS) continue garner a fair bit of attention. HEMS especially is an ongoing file and our office has been brought in by a variety of groups, BC Rural Health Center and Ministry of Health, to participate in a number of events where rural medical emergency transportation was one of the topics. As well our office supported the TLA and WFCFA on their advocacy and efforts on behalf of their membership to advance and expand HEMS services across the province. Finally, our office was contacted by professional associations and groups to support their activities associated with improving helicopter emergency services in rural communities across BC. There have been some achievements and there continues to be incremental gains in terms of BC expanding HEMS services in the province and I would expect this trend to continue in 2021. As there is a greater recognition of the need for this service on the public side it will put in place the infrastructure, expertise and trained personnel to support the forest sector.

The Ombudsperson report “No Longer the Road Less Travelled” again became a focus with the release of the Auditor General’s (AG) report in 2020, which commented on the lack of government action regarding this file. The AG report generated a number of enquiries from media, local governments and the public where the lack of maintenance of resource roads had been raised. Our office participated in meetings with Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District, supporting their efforts to establish more prescriptive standards and funding for the Bamfield Resource Road. This participation has now resulted in changes to that road’s status. As well we responded to enquires from the Creston area regarding resource road maintenance issues on some of the forest service roads in the area. As the interface between the forest sector and the public increases this continues to be an area where our office receives and expects to see an increase inactivity and enquiries from both the public and industry groups.

Over the last year there were a number of enquiries to our office concerning Qualified Faller Trainer (QFT) training. QFT training had been on hold pending a request for a variance from WorkSafeBC to allow for more than 2 workers at the base of the tree in specific situations. Our office has some concerns with this approach, specifically the gap in the suspension of providing training while the WSBC variance issues are resolved that is compelling individuals and companies to look alternatives to acquire the QFT training. In our opinion this had the potential to undermine the integrity of the BC Forest Safety Council as the lead agency/ organization in defining and managing the training and certification of fallers and faller supervisors in BC.

A number of other issues that our office was involved in were;

- We were asked to support the Faller Technical Advisory Committee (FTAC) in the review and adoption revisions to this groups Terms of Reference. We continued to participate as an observer on FTAC meetings, supporting that organization and its members.





- Third-party Safety Certifications organizations (ISNetworld, Comply Works etc.) and their expansion into the forest sector was again raised by BCFSC members. This is still an active file and our office is considering to monitor and listen to concerns as they are raised.
- Our office receives a number of calls each year from individuals regarding their WSBC claims, which generally are outside the role of the BCFS Ombudsperson office, in most cases we refer these to WSBC for resolution.
- Our office receives enquiries regarding Safe Companies, Faller Certification, Training that in many cases we refer to BCFSC Staff who are able to address those enquiries.

## Outreach

This past year with Covid-19 our office limited its participation in events. We participated in a number of virtual events sponsored by BC Rural Health Care – Linked Sectors Advisory Committee regarding HEMS. Our office like everyone else is looking forward in 2021 to again participating in BCFSC Association member events.

## Preview of 2021

2021 is the year that most people are hoping for life to return to “normal.” Our office shares that desire but also recognize that the new “normal” will be different and not necessarily a bad thing. One benefit of the new normal may be some significant strides forward in how work site systems, communications and planning are managed. The use of technology to share information and communicate has become “second nature” to people across every age cohort. Change is never an easy thing and it usually takes a dynamic event to drive innovation - while the pandemic has been a global challenge, it has also driven change and innovation.

Our office expects that HEMS and Resource Roads and will continue to be on-going files for the Ombudsperson office in 2021. We are hopeful that at some time in 2021 there will be a return to some form of in-person meetings, conferences or events from BCFSC or its’ member associations that our office will be able to participate in. But if that is not the case we will participate virtually and as always, where our office is asked to participate in those events, we look forward to the opportunity.

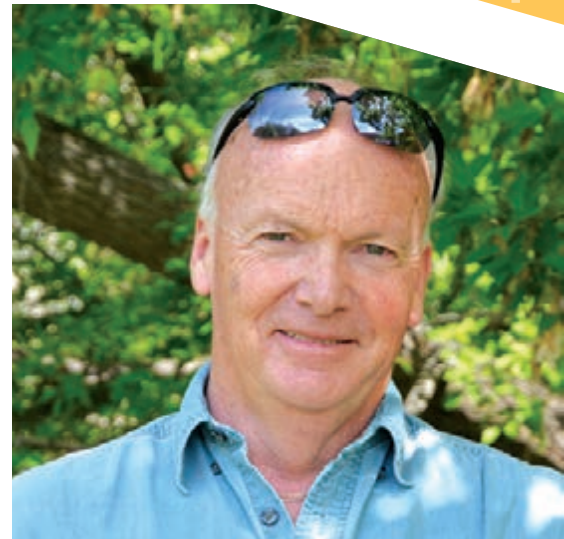
## About the BC Forest Safety Council

The BC Forest Safety Council (BCFSC) is the health and safety association for forest harvesting, sawmills, and pellet manufacturing in BC. The BCFSC works with forest sector employers, workers, unions, contractors and provincial agencies to support implementing changes necessary to eliminate fatalities and serious injuries in the forest sector.

Telephone (toll free): 1-877-741-1060

Website: [www.bcforestsafesafe.org](http://www.bcforestsafesafe.org)

Email: [info@bcforestsafesafe.org](mailto:info@bcforestsafesafe.org)



Roger Harris

## About the BC Forest Safety Ombudsperson

The BC Forest Safety Ombudsperson is part of the BC Forest Safety Council and is mandated to investigate safety concerns and provide recommendations for improvement.

The Office of the Forest Safety Ombudsperson provides a safe, confidential environment for the discussion of issues and facilitates an impartial and timely resolution of concerns.

## Contact

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Fax: 1-250-741-1068

Mailing Address:

Office of the Forest Safety Ombudsperson

BC Forest Safety Council

420 Albert Street

Nanaimo, BC V9R 2V7

Email: [harris@bcforestsafesafe.org](mailto:harris@bcforestsafesafe.org)

Website:

[www.bcforestsafesafe.org/Ombudsperson.html](http://www.bcforestsafesafe.org/Ombudsperson.html)

The Forest Safety Ombudsperson’s Office will endeavour to return all contacts within five (5) working days.







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