

Road Deactivation Worker Apprenticeship Program

Aubrey Brown and Cindy Pearce

The community of Revelstoke has banded together in organizing a workers' training program to assist displaced or under-employed forest workers to participate in Watershed Restoration Program (WRP) projects and other forestry activities in the area. As work on WRP is just getting under way in the Revelstoke Forest District, local workers have not had the opportunity to develop the necessary skills to be employed on these projects.

The training project has been organized by the Revelstoke Community Skills Centre (RSCC), a community-based organization with membership from workers, industry and the municipality. Management of the training program is by the Forest Workers Group sub-committee of the RSCC. In addition, support from the community is provided by:

- the Revelstoke Community Forest Corporation (RCFC), which manages the 100,000 hectare Tree Farm Licence held by the community of Revelstoke;
- Downie Timber Ltd., a major forest licensee in the Revelstoke area;
- the Ministry of Forests (Revelstoke Forest District) which manages the Watershed Restoration Program in the Revelstoke district; and
- local road deactivation contractors, including Sorenson Holdings Ltd.

To initiate the program, training applicants were invited through a public advertisement. The applications were screened by the Forest Workers Group sub-committee with final candidate selection made by the contractor doing the road deactivation work. Of approximately 14 applications received, nine persons were interviewed, and three were selected for training. The number of trainees was limited because of funding uncertainty earlier in the year, delays in the training project approval and because only three of the four approved WRP projects were deemed suitable for this type of training.

The training consists of a combination of theoretical (both self study and classroom instruction) and "on the job" training. The theoretical training was based on selected sections of the BC Institute of Technology Road Engineering Technology Program. The classroom portion was offered in seminar format in June 1997 (three evening seminars and a single three-day seminar) and was available at a nominal fee to others in the community not registered in the training program.

After completion of the theoretical training, the three selected trainees commenced "on-the-job" portion,

working with the deactivation contractor to obtain practical experience and the necessary field skills. Instruction and training were provided by both the contractor and by the project technical supervisor. Training was provided in:

- operation of excavators (under supervision)
- equipment characteristics, servicing and minor maintenance
- job safety and how to recognize and deal with hazardous work conditions
- methods of culvert placement and removal
- construction techniques to ensure compliance with environmental regulations
- recognition of field markings used in road deactivation field layout
- specifications for deactivation work such as cross ditch construction (depths, widths, methods of armoring, angle of skew, etc.)

The total estimated cost for the training of the three workers is \$6,000 for the theoretical portion, and \$38,000 for the "on-the-job" training; however, since the training is ongoing, final costs are not yet available. The training project, which is funded under the Forest Renewal BC worker training envelope, will bear the cost of the theoretical training and one half of the cost of the on-the-job training. The remainder of the on-the-job training costs will be absorbed in the WRP project cost.

Feedback from employers, employees, and trainers, is to date quite positive. The project will provide a small local workforce pool with skills necessary for WRP projects and will help to retain this type of work in the local community. Since WRP projects are just beginning in the Revelstoke area, the prospects for continued employment for the trained workers should be good. One of the trainees indicated that he was planning to purchase his own excavator and enter the deactivation business on completion of training. One suggestion for improvement was that the theoretical training should have been done during the winter when more time was available; however, this was prevented by delays in project approval.

Although this training project may appear modest in scope, it has a good organizational base, broad community support, and can be expanded as required in the future. This model may therefore be of interest to others in setting up community-based training.

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