

Grade 11 student, South Peace Secondary (Dawson Creek)

Today I'm here to talk to you about careers in forestry and to answer the question "Where have all the workers gone?" When you look into careers in forestry you find more than enough job possibilities. As the Association of BC Forest Professionals website says, '1 in every 5 jobs in B.C. is directly or indirectly related to forestry'. Looking through the list of jobs, you can see that over 600 jobs can be classified under the title of Registered Professional Forester or Forest Technologist. Each of these jobs has a different task to keep the industry in tiptop shape.

As in any industry, there are pros and cons for working in or entering into forestry work. (Table 1) The pros include 'a constant means of employment', meaning that there are always jobs available. You also have a wide variety of places where you can work in forestry. The major con is that no one knows what working in the forestry sector involves.

Table 1. Pros and Cons of Working in Forestry

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Great career choices	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Most jobs are found in rural areas or in small towns
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Constant means of employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sometimes need a degree and work experience to get a job
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Up-to-date equipment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No one knows what entering forestry involves
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Give continuing care to our forests	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work as a team	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide services for people around the world	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wide variety of places to work around B.C	

Forestry offers some very interesting careers. You can get a good salary, work outdoors and work as a team. So, you must be wondering why students aren't choosing forestry? I decided to perform a survey to find out. The results weren't very encouraging.

The survey was short and sweet. I asked six questions to six students chosen by teachers in each of 20 classes, for about 120 surveys in all. By the end of the week, I had the results. Eighty-four surveys were returned and showed the following results.

Of all returns, 45% were male and 55% were female. Of the males, 26% considered forestry as a career option while 37% of the female did. As to interest in forestry, 16% of the males said they were interested in forestry while 22% of the females said they were interested. This seems to indicate that more women in the North would be interested in the work that Professional Foresters and Forest Technologists perform.

When I asked if they would be interested in forestry, I also asked why they would or why they wouldn't be interested. Here is what I found:

- Of the 16% of males that said they would be interested, said it was because they like to work outside and study environmental problems. The majority of the other 84% said they weren't interested, even though most of them didn't know what Professional Foresters or Forest Technologists do.
- Of the 22% of females interested were also concerned about the environment and like to be outside. The majority of the other 78% said they didn't know what it was, have another career in mind or don't like being outdoors.

What makes students turn away from the forestry sector?

*Every action has an equal and opposite reaction
(Sir Isaac Newton's third law of Motion)*

To get into a job as a forester or forest technologist you need the following:

Career as a Professional Forester

- Bachelor of Science degree in Forestry
- 24 months of work experience needed after you successfully receive a Bachelor's degree
- Must write and pass a registration exam

Career as a Forest Technologist

- Two year forest technology diploma
- 24 months of work experience after receiving your diploma
- Must write and pass the exam for a Forest Technologist

Competing against those two careers are the trades, which are continuously promoted in our school, and (I think) throughout the North.

Career in Trades

- The trades section which is one of the most promoted areas in our school
- Begin training through school, and college courses paid for by the school
- Can train part time during school with the co-op program or transition to work
- Can go straight to work after graduation

The dilemma to consider: with trades and transition to work programs, students are less likely to go to university. In trades they can get high paying jobs and have their courses paid for by the school. Which one would you pick?

School takes a great deal of our lives so what better place to start getting students to consider new things? When asked, 60% of the students from my survey have never seen anything to support forestry at school. The other 40% saw it mostly from a career fair in elementary school. If the only information the students have is 6 years ago, how will they know what is out there? And how can forestry be considered a career for students when most of them only have a stereotypical view of it?

Summer job potential in Forestry (representing a test run) includes:

- Firefighter: competition is fierce, most positions are filled by people from the year before
- Contract Firefighter: must join a private crew, meet contractors' and Ministry's standards
- Tree planter: join a private company but no clear indication of who to contact
- Co-op program: if you are already in a co-op program, the Ministry of Forests might hire you

These are a few of the summer jobs in Forestry that students might be able to try. But what would persuade them to apply? According to the Ministry of Forests website, applicants have a very small chance of being accepted as a fire fighter or for a Co-op program. In order to be a tree planter you have to go to the Western Silviculture Association's website where it's hard to find your way around.

I've spent a lot of time on the Ministry of Forests and the Association of BC Forest Professionals websites and read about forestry careers. On the Ministry website, my first impression was that forestry is the hardest career in the world to get into and that a newcomer won't have much of a chance.

The ABCFP website is great because it provides a lot of information but it has too many words and doesn't have pictures of the job that matches the careers. However, there may even be too much information to start with when a person needs a little bit of information at a time.

Ministry

- Informative but negative
- Concentrates on the difficulties of getting into the field

ABCFP

- Wonderful use of quotes
- Too much information all at once
- All work and no play makes Jack tired

A few other problems:

Pine Beetle : It's popular belief right now that the forest industry is doomed because of this insect killing our trees

Softwood lumber: The forestry sector is losing money and it has been doing so for years.

Habitat: There are also concerns about the Mountain Caribou habitat and population

Safety: the death tolls advertised on TV

Boreal Forest: campaign to stop harvesting the Boreal Forest.

And, future problems:

Retirements: the baby boomers start retiring in 10 years and will leave a shortage of workers.

All of these problems are focused on by the media and the forestry sector must counter these problems with real solutions.

What are a few possible solutions that I can suggest?

Start by meeting the students half way. We need direction, some place to start, something to think about before we look closely at forestry. Right now a lot of students have no idea what they are doing. As a group, we need to try different things before we find what we want. Forestry has to be present in schools, tour schools to provide accurate information, bring new ideas to B.C. and try to reach even the most Northern communities. Summer programs are also another option so students can try a career in forestry without a university degree or having to devote their lives to it. Some publicity in schools wouldn't hurt either – like posters explaining careers and listing opportunities available to students.

I think it would also help to redesign the website of ABCFP and the Ministry of Forests to make the careers sound more interesting. Start off with a short introductory paragraph to the job, complete with pictures, Make it interesting and lively. If they are interested, have clearly labeled links to guide them to other information they need to know about the job, schooling or salary. Try not to say things to scare students away. We realize that it may be hard to make it in any job and that we don't have a great chance of being accepted into things but it shouldn't prevent us from learning about the career.

Try not to say things to freak the students out. Avoid negative words like, MIGHT (find work or be accepted) and FIERCE COMPETITION. We realize that it's hard to make it in any job and we don't have a great chance of being accepted into things but such restrictions shouldn't prevent us from learning about a career.

Teenagers aren't known for their attention spans. Information should be where they can see it, even if they aren't looking for it. Give clear steps on how to get into forestry and put it somewhere where it's easy to find. If they are interested in a program or just have some questions, have someone who they can call or e-mail.

The last result offered by the survey may be the worst. According to my survey the number one reason why students aren't entering forestry as professional foresters or technologists:

- 58% of the students didn't know what they are or do.
- 83% said they were just not interested

On the survey those students who knew what Foresters and Forest Technologists are, added that they:

- are more interested in conservation work
- would rather survey the land
- are too small and couldn't meet the physical requirements

From the survey it is safe to say no one actually knows what a Professional Forester or a Forest Technologist does. To continue flourishing in the forestry sector we have to be ready for the future where all workers will be in demand. So in looking towards the future there is this motto to follow: *In British Columbia, forestry is everybody's business.* I say you need to make sure that it is.