The British Columbia
FOREST SERVICE Newsletter

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O CHRISTMAS TREE!

Tradition supports family growers

In British Columbia, Christmas trees mean more than fragrant green boughs and a place to hang candy canes — almost $4 million a year more, in fact. And while it has experienced some ups and downs in recent years, B.C.'s Christmas tree industry is still growing.

Most of the 750,000 trees produced annually in the province come from natural stands in the East Kootenays, where the hot, dry summers and early frosts provide ideal conditions for growing Douglas-fir Christmas trees, says **Perry Horning**, woodlot forester with the Invermere forest district.

The Invermere and Cranbrook forest districts administer about 90 Christmas tree permits, allowing growers to harvest trees on Crown land. Permit holders pay stumpage fees for each tree they harvest, and are required to make improvements to the area every year. Christmas trees are also grown on large private stands in these districts.

Natural stand growers produce many of their Christmas trees through a method known as stump culture: a tree is cut with two or three branches left near the ground, one of which will grow into a new tree within a few years. "I've seen some stumps that have produced as many as 15 trees," Horning says.

Growers in the Thompson-Okanagan, Fraser Valley and Vancouver Island produce Christmas trees plantation-style on private land. The trees are planted as seedlings and harvested six to 10 years later.

Christmas trees are also being produced on B.C. Hydro rights-of-way throughout the province. It's a win-win situation: growers make money on the trees, and B.C. Hydro has the foliage under its power lines controlled.

Whatever method of producing trees they

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Season's Greetings

— from Gerry Armstrong

Christmas provides a welcome opportunity for me to share a few thoughts, not as deputy minister, but as an individual who has shared the ups and downs and remarkable achievements of the past year.

The Forest Service has undergone dramatic change in 1995. We have rallied to keep pace with the equally significant changes in the environment in which we operate. And, although there are challenges to be faced in the new year, this is the time to reflect on our accomplishments.

We should be proud of our achievements. In all my years with government, I have been proud of my association with dedicated and professional staff, but never so proud as I have been during the past two years witnessing the heroic efforts of the Forest Service. Take pride in that. Enjoy your triumphs.

Never underestimate the significance of what we are doing. On behalf of all British Columbians and people everywhere, we are ensuring the continued vitality of a valuable resource.

But for a short while, that can wait. As much as anyone, I am looking forward to setting aside the urgencies of the day to share the holiday with my family and friends.

Best wishes to everyone for a wonderful holiday.

New director to raise branch profile

One of the first hurdles for the new director of the resource tenures and engineering branch is to confirm the branch role within the Forest Service.

On December 8, **Jim Langridge** took over the director's position from **Bob Harding**, who has retired after 35 years' service.

Langridge notes that in the past the branch assumed a low profile, primarily providing advice and support to executive, and operational support to the regions.

But with a significant role to play in most of the ministry's high-priority initiatives — Forest Practices Code implementation, the Forest Renewal Plan, the timber supply review, the Small Business Forest Enterprise Program, and fibre supply — the branch has to become more proactive.

"We have to acknowledge that we have been performing an essential function for the ministry, and we have to ensure our role is clear in everyone's mind," Langridge says. "Then on a prioritized basis, we have to deliver the best service we possibly can."

He is confident that by focusing the branch's role, it will be better able to complement region and district activities. "The regions are responsible for all operational matters," Langridge says, "but we have to get the tools in place to enable them to get on with it."

"When the regions need support, they'll know where to come to get it," he adds.

A 20-year veteran of the forest sector, Langridge rejoined the Forest Service in 1989 after a 10-year absence. He first worked for the ministry as a forest assistant in 1968. After graduating from UBC in 1974, he joined the Forest Service full time as an assistant ranger in Creston. He attended the Forest Service training school at Green Timbers, then spent two years in Kamloops.

Langridge left the ministry in 1979, first to work for a small sawmill and later as a consultant. He rejoined the Forest Service and became acting manager of timber tenure, and was made permanent the following year.

B.C. Christmas tree industry "retooled"

It used to be that growing Christmas trees meant simply cutting wild trees, loading them on a truck and selling them in the Christmas tree lot on urban street corners.

But those days are long gone. Now it means everything from fertilizer to genetics for growers, and most importantly, market, market, market.

In the 1950s and '60s, close to two million Christmas trees were harvested yearly in B.C., mainly in the Kootenays. Markets included the prairies, United States and Mexico.

By the 1970s, however, the industry had begun to decline, because of the Canadian inflation rate and labor costs, and the increased use of artificial trees.

B.C.'s Christmas tree industry took another hit in the mid-1980s, when lower-priced trees from the U.S. were brought into B.C. by the large grocery store chains. The Christmas tree lots that had traditionally sprung up every December all but disappeared, and Christmas tree production in B.C. dropped sharply.

Now the industry has "retooled" and is making a gradual comeback. The number of growers is increasing, with about 50 having opened shop in the last five years, says **Richard Hallman**, a Christmas tree specialist with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Both natural stand and plantation growers are doing everything they can to produce high-quality trees, by using better growing techniques. New varieties, such as "grand fir" and "noble fir" are being produced for their "exotic" appeal.

A memorandum of understanding between the Ministries of Forests and Agriculture specifically addresses Christmas tree research and grower assistance.

Promotional campaigns are educating consumers. Many trees produced in B.C. are tagged, for example, so that buyers know they're getting a local tree. Pamphlets are provided containing information addressing environmental concerns, as well as safety tips and care instructions.

Growers are also coming up with a range of innovative marketing strategies, such as you-cut lots, where people can cut their own trees, have a sleigh-ride and hot chocolate, roast a hotdog, and even get a seedling to plant at home.

While B.C.'s Christmas tree industry remains under intense pressure, growers who produce quality trees and market astutely can thrive. And that's good news for B.C. growers and consumers alike.

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use, growers have one thing in common, says **Diane Gertzen**, special projects culturist with nursery and seed operations: they like growing Christmas trees.

"It tends to be a family-oriented business," she says, "and the growers really enjoy it."

Given the season that drives the entire industry, it wouldn't seem right any other way.

MOBILE COMMUNICATIONS

Technology takes office on the road

Only a decade ago, the new mobile communications system being tested in the Campbell River forest district would have sounded like something from a Buck Rogers comic strip.

For the past several months, Campbell River compliance and enforcement staff have been motoring around in vehicles equipped with a leading-edge communications system.

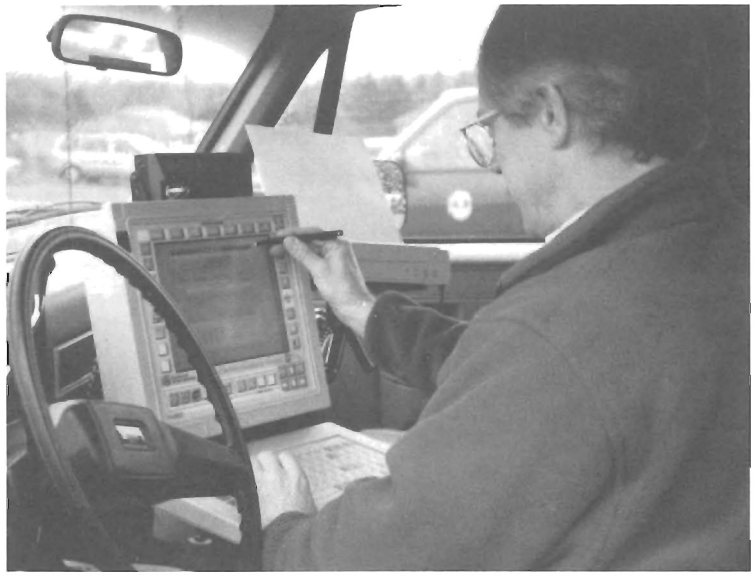
Consisting of a customized two-way radio, laptop computer, global positioning system (GPS) receiver, fax capabilities and a printer, the set-up turns every truck into a high-tech operations centre.

For example, the system gives staff the ability to display and complete various Forest Service forms on the laptop computer, transmit them via radio to the district headquarters, receive the approved form back from the district office complete with the district manager's signature, print the form, present it to the forest contractor and fax a copy to the contractor's head office — all in a few minutes and without leaving the vehicle.

"The only thing wrong with this is it's 10 years too late," said Compliance and Enforcement Officer **Bob Smith**, who has been with the Forest Service for 23 years. "It has the potential to save us a pile of time so we can do more inspections."

Smith and other district staff have been testing the system since last spring. Despite a few minor bugs and some key features which have yet to come on line, the set-up will revolutionize the way field staff do their jobs.

The mobile communications centre (MCC) project got its start three years ago, when the technical and administrative services branch and regional staff began seeking ways to get more out of the Forest Service's extensive radio communications system.



Compliance and Enforcement Officer ***Lonn McMartin*** *demonstrates the high-tech mobile communications centre equipment.*

Two-way radio communications have been a cornerstone of Forest Service field operations for decades. For the system to work, the ministry had to build repeater stations to extend communications coverage in remote, mountainous terrain, and link mobile radios with district offices.

In the 1960s the Forest Service began installing a network of repeater sites as need and budgets allowed. Today, $18 million and 300 repeater stations later, the Forest Service owns and operates one of the most technically-advanced and extensive radio communications networks in North America, if not the world.

With that kind of investment and the potential of emerging technology, the system had to do more than carry a conversation. A province-wide review identified data transmission (as opposed to voice transmission) as a high priority for districts. There was only one problem: no one had yet come up with a way to enable such a system to carry both data and voice signals intact. The two signals would be constantly interrupting each other, resulting only in oral and digital gibberish.

The Forest Service decided to tackle the problem anew. It assembled a team of telecommunications experts to work with technical and administration branch staff and develop a solution.

The breakthrough came in 1994, with the development of a "voice priority half-duplex system." The advance meant that a voice radio transmission would automatically interrupt a data transmission.

Once the voice transmission is finished, the data transmission would resume where it left off.

"Others have tried and failed," said **Dave Miller**, coordinator of advanced technologies with technical and administrative services branch. "Our staff did it, and developed some world-leading technology."

The development put B.C. at the vanguard of mobile voice/data radio communications technology. It also opened endless possibilities for Forest Service applications, according to Program Manager **Larry Franklin**.

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Making Merry and Money for Christmas

It's that season once again, and the districts are decking the halls and making merry in their own special ways, from lighting a tree for charity to fetching Santa in a helicopter (not to mention dressing foresters in tutus). Here's a sampling of how some Forest Service districts are helping to ensure Christmas is a season of good cheer — for themselves and for those less fortunate.

Quesnel

Staff in the Quesnel forest district are lighting up the town — literally. The hugely successful Buy-a-Light campaign, organized by a local radio station for the Good Cheer Foundation, is putting lights on the town Christmas tree to raise money for needy families in the area.

District staff pooled their funds to "buy" a string-and-a-half of lights — 55 lights at $5 apiece — for the tree. They also challenged all other government employees in town to do even better. As well, they are filling a large box in the office with food, gifts and other donations for the Good Cheer Foundation.

Resource Assistant **Rita Casavant**, who has organized the district's contributions for this and other charity drives, says Christmas fundraising is especially meaningful when the money is staying in the community. "It makes you feel like you are helping your neighbours," she says.

Port Alberni

Stone sculptures have been in the news a lot lately, thanks to the one beside Jean Chretien's bed. In Port Alberni, a stone sculpture is playing the more positive role of raising money for charity.

*Office services supervisor **Sandra Rose** (l), sculptor Tina Massop (c) and auxilliary Carol Pitts.*

Donated by local sculptor **Tina Massop**, "Hitchin a Ride" will be raffled off at the district office Christmas party. The sculpture of a baby whale riding on its mother's back is rendered in polished, white "rainforest marble", a local stone which the artist searches out in the bush herself.

Massop, who apprenticed under nationally-recognized stone sculptor Babe Gunn, has been sculpting for 10 years. She is now an auxilliary office assistant in the district office.

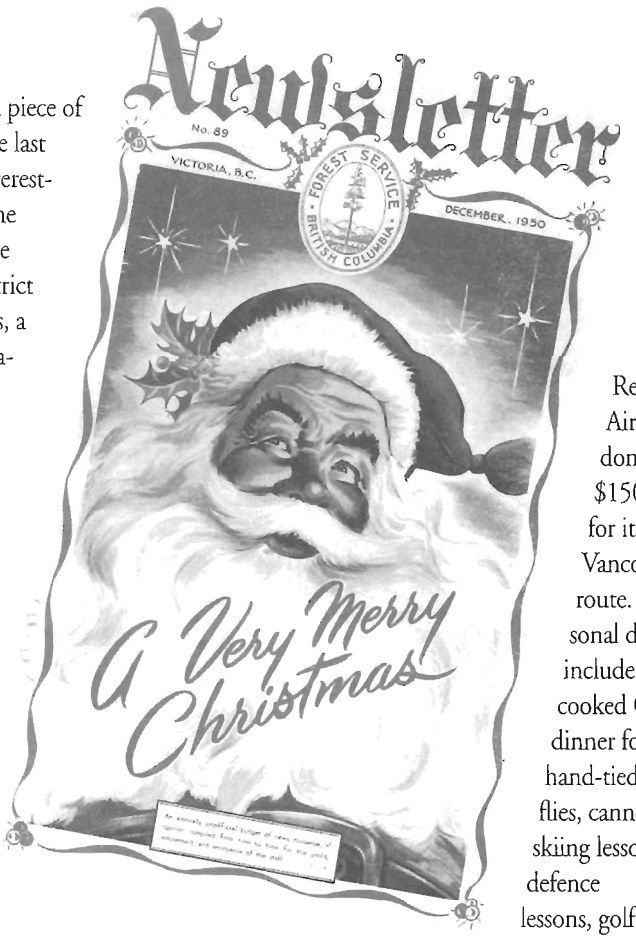
Proceeds from the raffle will be donated to the Salvation Army food bank. And someone will be getting a very nice — and useful — piece of local art for Christmas.

Salmon Arm

Salmon Arm is going against the tide this year. While most other districts have separate Christmas parties for adults and kids, Salmon Arm staff is putting it all together, with one big party for everybody. There will be Christmas tree decorating, Santa distributing gifts, carols, dinner and a dance. All ages are welcome.

It's not a new idea, of course. The last time the district had a family party was about five years ago, but this year, with an influx of younger staff with young children, it seemed the obvious thing to do, says **Sally Beldi**, small business forester. "And Christmas is for kids, after all."

Speaking of kids, this will be the fifth year that the district office has sponsored a needy family for Christmas. Staff will donate a Christmas food hamper and age-appropriate gifts to a single mom with four children.



Ghosts of Christmas Past: This color illustration appeared on the cover of the Forest Service newsletter in 1950. The text at the bottom says "An entirely unofficial budget of news, nonsense 'n' opinion compiled from time to time for the profit, amusement and annoyance of staff."

Vanderhoof

The auction block is a piece of birch. Everyday for the last month, something interesting has appeared on the block, which sits in the Vanderhoof forest district office. Farm-fresh eggs, a 50-pound sack of potatoes, moose steaks, homemade wine, an ugly oil painting, and even an offer to wash and wax your car.

Bidders place their bids on a list beside the block. And the money raised pays for the Christmas party, with any extra funds going to Santas Anonymous, a local Christmas charity.

This year's party will be almost as innovative as the fundraising, as it includes staff from every other provincial government office in the area. "It saves money," says auction organizer **Allen Cummings**, aboriginal forestry advisor, "and it's one less party for anyone whose spouse works for another ministry."

Kispiox

How do they do it? Last year, their office auction raised a whopping $4,700 for Timmy's Telethon. And this year, Kispiox has set its sights even higher, having upped the ante — and surpassed it — each year since they started the auctions in 1988.

Granted, $4,700 is hard to beat, but chances are, they'll do it. Here's how. Local businesses have donated five logging-truckloads of firewood (valued at $600 a load), 1,700 board feet of hemlock/spruce lumber, silver jewelry and exotic flower arrangements. Canadian Regional Airlines has donated a $150 voucher for its Smithers-Vancouver route. And personal donations include a home-cooked Chinese dinner for six, hand-tied fishing flies, canned salmon, skiing lessons, self-defence lessons, golf balls, and a block of yellow cedar.

With the complete list of items being shown on local TV stations, and an announcement sent out to other government offices and businesses, the forest district office should be packed as auctioneer **Charlie Willson**, Prince Rupert forest region management advisory team manager, builds the bidding to a frenzy.

Can they do it? And can any other district meet the challenge of topping their contribution? Find out in the new year. . . .

Revelstoke

Last year it was tutus. This year it's pointed ears. Office Assistant **Kari Melnyk**, who wrote, directed, and made the costumes for a 20-minute skit at Revelstoke forest district's Christmas party last year, is up to her tricks again.

"Twas the Night of the Party" is this year's offering, and it's expected to bring the house down once again. Starring an all-male cast of 11 staff members — including a mustachioed Mrs. Claus — the show will include video clips of last year's tutued sugar plum fairies, back by popular demand.

Foresters in tutus and pointed ears? Maybe Kari could get a few other districts organized next year. . . .

Here's a sample of the script being performed in Revelstoke, which consists of narrative and stage instructions (in italics). Recognize the names?

The children were nestled all snug in their beds,
While visions of sugar plums danced in their heads.

Play video

. . . Santa whistled and shouted and called them by name

Leave stage, put on pants

Bubba, Ragnar, Grump, Snoot, here's Smedly, Gus and Zane.

Elves to line up in rows, dance to "Short People"

The sleigh's almost ready, all shiny and new,

Head elf to say: Make way for Rudolph and Santa too. Santa to lead Rudolph on to stage and hand over to Smedley; Rudolph to make a fuss, snort and deposit little presents behind; Grump to follow Rudolph with a shovel.

Managers tackle code questions

A senior managers meeting in Vancouver November 29 and 30 tackled some of the tough questions posed by the Forest Practices Code and its implementation schedule.

"The meeting focused on the things we have to do in the next few months to bring the code in on target," said **Al Gorley**, executive director of Forest Practices Code implementation. "That means implementing the code within the transition schedule and without serious disruption to the fibre flow."

Gorley noted that either goal could be accomplished fairly easily, but achieving both poses some considerable challenges. At the meeting, district, region and branch managers got together to come up with some workable solutions.

Participants were divided into seven focus groups, and each group was assigned a topic area to study and develop recommendations for action plans.

The topic areas were:

- **Review and approval process**

  This group looked at ways to streamline the review and approval process under the code.

- **Decision support needs**

  District managers will need geographical, technical, policy and legal information and support to make decisions for which they are responsible under the Forest Practices Code.

- **Dealing with higher level plans**

  This group examined how and under what circumstances requirements of higher level plans, such as land and resource management plans, should be incorporated as code requirements.

- **Defining substantial compliance**

  Although the code implementation schedule says that all forestry operations are to be in substantial compliance by December 15, district managers can apply some discretion to ease the transition. This group looked at how that discretion should be applied to ensure province-wide consistency.

- **Implementation of guidebooks**

  If guidebooks are taken at face value and applied in all situations, the results may be unacceptable. This group examined how to permit some interpretation of guidelines without compromising objectives.

- **Dealing with allowable annual cut impact**

  Government policy is that the impact of code implementation will not exceed six per cent of the AAC. Forest Service managers need to know how that goal applies to individual districts and what assumptions are necessary to achieve it.

- **New role of district managers**

  District managers will have to reorganize their workload and support system to fulfill their new responsibilities under the code.

"The meeting produced at least a couple dozen good, solid suggestions" said Gorley. "Given the discussion, we're all confident we can meet the objectives in most areas of the province. But I wouldn't be surprised if we have a few rough spots."

The results of the meeting will be used to develop workplans, which should be available by the end of December. Executive will track progress, and call another senior managers meeting for next spring if necessary.

Forms catalog goes digital

The Forest Service forms catalog is now available to all staff on Office Vision.

The catalog, which lists all Forest Service forms numerically and alphabetically, is used as a reference by staff and the public to identify and order copies of the appropriate documents.

To access the electronic catalog through Office Vision, users should type BBFORMS at the prompt. Both the numeric and alphabetical version will appear.

The beginning of each document lists the codes used throughout the catalog. For forms available from the sponsoring branch, users should contact the appropriate section of that branch.

For more information or instructions on how to download electronic forms, contact **Gail Robertson** at 387-5409, fax 387-5714 or e-mail GPROBERT.

The electronic catalog replaces hard copy versions that were updated twice a year and mailed to offices throughout the Forest Service.

The electronic version will be updated weekly to indicate the last date of revision. Users are encouraged to check the list frequently to ensure their existing supplies of forms are not obsolete.

The forms catalog is also scheduled to be introduced on the Internet, which will support key-word searches.

*— Submitted by **Pat Megson**, coordinator, forms management/mail services, information services branch*

Mystery tour marks end of reorg

Members of the Kamloops regional office celebrate the end of the Forest Service reorganization with a day in the woods.

Just before lunch on a bright, sunny October day, Kamloops forest region staff left their desks and boarded buses bound for a mystery destination.

Organized by the regional advisory committee, the tour was a celebration of the end of the Forest Service reorganization — and the end of the uncertainty for another year. The committee felt this was a time for renewal, after a year of wrestling with staff reductions and changes in job responsibilities.

The buses drove out of the city, through the grasslands of Lac Du Bios and Douglas-fir forests, amidst fall colors and roadside ponds full of migrating ducks. The mystery destination turned out to be the Isobel Lake Interpretive Forest.

The passengers left the buses and walked around the lake to a picnic shelter known as the "Forest Inn." The advisory committee was cooking up a storm, with Regional Manager **Fred Baxter** weilding a pair of hamburger flippers.

After lunch it was time for a scavenger hunt, with a forest ecology theme. Small groups of researchers, clerks, engineers and managers fanned out to guess the heights of trees and debate whether cattails were bulrushes or vice versa.

While the scores were being added up, the "reorg burial squad" took over, led by Smokey Bear. A time capsule containing a 1995 reorganization chart and other mementos of the occasion was buried in the ground.

Then a game of "forest charades" provided everyone with a few laughs and vivid memories: the sight of Senior Payroll Clerk **Karen Huls** imitating a fluttering Aspen tree, Regional Staff Manager **Gene Leduc** giving an emotion-filled impression of a snag, and Research Biologist **Fraser Russell** imitating a forklift truck.

Following award presentations and picture taking, everyone boarded the buses for the trip back to the city — refreshed and with a new view of their colleagues.

— Submitted by Alan Vyse, research forester, Kamloops forest region

Native plant forum packs house

Talk about an idea whose time has come. Three months ago, **Michael Carlson**, a research scientist at the Kalamalka Research Station in Vernon and **Diane Gertzen**, special projects culturist with nursery and seed operations branch, discussed getting some people together to talk about using native plants for regenerating damaged land.

They thought maybe 60 people would turn up. The native plant forum, held in Vancouver in November, attracted more than 275 people.

The introduction of non-indigenous plants to B.C. — such as purple loosestrife, Eurasian milfoil, knapweed and quackgrass — is in some cases choking out native vegetation and upsetting the natural balance, Carlson says.

Specialists from a wide range of fields are now beginning to use native plants — or plants that have been here since the last ice age — to restore areas damaged by development, logging and agriculture to a more natural, healthy state.

The benefits of using native plants range from water conservation in urban settings (because they require less water than non-native plants) to the improvement of salmon spawning and rearing habitats.

"There have been significant developments in the use of native plants for ecological restoration recently in Ontario and the U.S.," Carlson says.

The aim of the native plant forum was to exchange information about the uses of

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— Mobile communications, continued from page 3

"We're quite excited. This has the potential to really change the way we support staff in the field," he said.

In addition to accessing, completing and transmitting Forest Service forms, the system also lets field staff retrieve and display the Forest Practices Code, its regulations and guidebooks, and other ministry legislation and policies.

Another feature — currently under development by the information systems branch and the business design branch — will enable field staff to automatically download inspection reports and other field correspondence directly to the Forest Service's database. Expected for early 1996, the enhancement will relieve staff of the need to re-key the information at the office.

The GPS component adds a range of time-saving and safety features. The GPS receiver, a device the size of a credit card, uses satellite signals to pinpoint its location.

The location is expressed as latitude and longitude coordinates and is displayed on a map on the MCC computer monitor. As the unit moves — or as a field crew travels throughout the district — that movement can be tracked on the map. The signal can also be transmitted to district headquarters, enabling office staff to determine the crew's whereabouts.

Current GPS technology is accurate to within 100 metres. But a project is underway with BC Lands to reduce the margin of error to five metres or less. That accuracy will enable field staff to conduct preliminary surveys and verify boundaries at the touch of a button.

Technicians are also exploring a feature that would enable staff to take a photograph with a digital camera (which records the image electronically) and transmit the photo via the radio.

So far, the Forest Service has invested about $300,000 in research and development. Private sector partners have kicked in over $1 million, Franklin estimates. Based on the benefit to the Forest Service alone, the investment will prove well worthwhile.

The system has the potential to increase staff field presence by up to 20 per cent, and once direct entry to the Forest Service databases is on-line, that will go even higher, noted Franklin. A preliminary cost-benefit analysis indicates a potential pay-back of about 16 months.

"With these initial results, we are planning to extend the pilot prototype to other sites," he said. Further testing is already scheduled for the Prince George, Nelson and Cariboo forest regions.

Franklin emphasized the MCC concept is early in its development. Several drawbacks — including the inconvenience of mounting the units in the cabs of trucks — have yet to be resolved. "We're just now getting a sense of what the major issues are," noted Franklin.

Nonetheless, the potential of MCC is attracting considerable interest from other organizations. Already, the RCMP, the Workers' Compensation Board and other resource agencies have expressed an interest.

"In addition, under royalty agreements with co-developers, there is potential for significant revenue to the province from the sale of this technology," said Franklin.

Native plant forum

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native plants, find ways to develop a supply, and coordinate efforts in all areas in order to avoid overlaps.

Sponsored by four branches of the Forest Service (research, silviculture, integrated resource policy, and nursery and seed operations), the forum brought together people from several ministries, as well as professionals from a number of related disciplines. It was a packed day, with 34 table exhibits, four workshops and 15 volunteer speakers. The invited speakers were Susan Meyer, from the U.S. Forest Service Shrub Sciences Lab, in Utah, and Dana Bush, president of the Alberta Native Plant Council). Carlson calls it a "considerable success."

The forum ended with the formation of a committee which will meet in the new year to make plans for the creation of a Native Plant Council for B.C. The council would serve to disseminate information to those who are using and growing the plants, ensure that ecological principles are followed, and provide a forum for all native plant issues in B.C.

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