

Logging a concern in Lake Country

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Small scale logging economics for Crown land timber are getting in the way of an attempt by three Lake Country residents to protect their community from falling dead trees killed by the pine beetle that could become a fire hazard.

Gord Keen says has been logging, off and on, since he was 16, and he would like to clean up the dead and dying pines from Crown land around Lake Country while the trees can still be used for lumber products.

He has talked to Kelowna's urban forester Ian Wilson about a woodlot and a sorting ground to deal with the pine program, using what wood was still viable for lumber, to start a small mill, and send away what's only good for pulp and chip the rest.

Keen says what's happened in the Kamloops area where the mountain pine beetle went through in the past two years was a shame.

He feels more smaller scale log salvage could have been done.

Such timber salvage in the wake of pine beetle infestation has to be undertaken before the wood becomes too dry to be manufactured as lumber products.

However, Keen says the stumpage rate is so high and the market price for logs so low that it would cost him money to do the logging.

There's no flexibility. Although (the Ministry of Forests) agreed to reduce the silviculture costs, they insist an arborist must be brought in to evaluate the property first, and even then there's no guarantee I'll get the timber rights, Keen said.

Rick Lake is owner of a quarter section of land and the Swiss Village Resort on Wood Lake. Lake says he's been selectively logging trees on his property as they succumbed to the insect pests.

"I was able to meet the situation, but now I'm surrounded by public forest that's infested, said Lake.

I applied to log it to protect my property. There are weekend bush parties in there so I'm concerned about fire.

Lake Country Mayor James Baker says it makes sense to have loggers come in and remove the pine from Crown and other public lands while it is still marketable timber to reduce the fire hazard as those pine trees die.

It would help to protect the community and would save us money, Baker explained.

It costs us \$1,200 to have an arborist come in to take down a tree (which has the

potential to be hazardous), so it makes sense to have loggers do it instead.

As far as forest practices and regulations are concerned, Baker notes the pine beetle infestation is a once-every-200-years event, saying that has to be given special consideration from a timber harvest standpoint.

Baker says there's even a local mill willing to handle the ponderosa pine, even though it is not considered a commercial species.

Baker said Lake Country has embarked on a Wildfire Protection Plan with the forests ministry, but he says he'd rather see the wood sold for some timber value before it dries out so much that it remains only usable for burning or chipping.

Ron Racine, Okanagan-Shuswap Forest District manager, says they realize there's been a downturn in the lumber market while there are plenty of beetle-infested logs out there that could be salvaged.

He says the ministry is reviewing tenure usage in small scale salvage logging.

Racine says they have adjusted their funds for silviculture costs, even though there hasn't been as much natural regeneration in salvage logged stands as they'd expected.

We're looking at other options, he said.

One possibility might be an intermediate salvage licence, since a larger operation would allow the fixed costs to be written off.

He suggested anyone interested in log salvage but who finds it uneconomical to talk it over with forest service staff. But Keen says he's done that, and there doesn't seem to be any room for flexibility.