

Interfor transfers forest tenure to Simpcw First Nation



Interfor and the Simpcw First Nation have completed the first direct transfer of a forest tenure to a B.C. First Nation since the introduction of the provincial government's Bill 22.

The province in early 2020 approved the transfer of two timber harvesting licenses in the Vavenby area — from Canfor to Interfor, which acquired a combined allowable annual cut (AAC) of approximately 349,000 cubic metres per year for its mill in Adams Lake for \$60 million. The transfer was a result of Canfor closing its mill in Vavenby, near Clearwater, in July of 2019, leaving about 175 people unemployed.

On Wednesday, Nov. 24, Interfor completed a subsequent transfer of the forest tenure to the Barriere-based Simpcw First Nation, which acquires 40,000 cubic metres of the AAC.

"This is a precedent-setting agreement that sees a First Nation acquire tenure as a result of a transaction such as this," Simpcw interim band manager Rhonda Kershaw told KTW, noting the agreement will help to ensure stable employment in the North Thompson Valley.

Interfor chief forester Stuart Card told KTW via email the transfer "makes sense economically for both parties and contributes to the overall interest in fostering reconciliation and opportunity for Indigenous nations in B.C."

He said the deal has no impact on the company's employment and would not disclose the terms of the transaction, noting it is a private agreement between Interfor and Simpcw.

"This transfer is good news for the Adams Lake mill as it contributes to the certainty of wood fibre coming to the mill," Stuart said. "There is no employment impact whatsoever. Adams Lake is a great mill and it is business as usual."

According to a joint press release from the band and the company, Simpcw and Interfor have been in discussions regarding the agreement since 2019, when Canfor announced its agreement to sell its harvesting licenses in Simpcw territory and the Kamloops timber supply area to Interfor.

The agreement also provides for the development of a stewardship agreement within Simpcw territory in connection with Interfor's operations to facilitate joint stewardship of the land and resources and a long-term business relationship.

The provincial government approved the transaction under the Bill 22 Forest Amendment Act process, which requires all tenure transfers be approved by the province's forestry minister.

Simpcw Chief Shelly Loring said the landmark agreement is part of a shift that needs to happen.

"Redistributing forest tenures to title holders and creating solid relationships with licencees provides for collaborative strategic planning and management of the resources in a way that recognizes and respects our mutual rights, values and interests," Loring said in the release. "We've worked extremely hard to reach common ground with Interfor and the result will see tenure in our hands and long-term economic opportunities and benefits to our community, people and to the North Thompson Valley."

Card said Interfor is proud to support the growth of Simpcw's forestry operations.

"This tenure transfer reflects Interfor's support for ongoing progress on reconciliation in British Columbia," Card said

Simpcw holds numerous tenures in its territory through its economic development corporation, Simpcw Resources LLP.