

SALMON ARM OBSERVER

Column: Shuswap tree-growers support provincial reforestation

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Tree seedlings are lined up at the PRT nursery yard in the Shuswap. (Jim Cooperman photo) While the two facilities in the Shuswap that produce seeds and the three that produce tree seedlings for re-stocking forest lands only represent a small percentage of the local economy, they do play a major role in supporting the provincial forest industry. Government regulations stipulate that all logged cutblocks and much of the forest land burned in wildfires must be planted with seedlings produced from tree stock

that is best suited to the site, thus there is an ever-increasing demand for seeds and seedlings. The forest service created the Skimikin tree nursery in 1973, and two years later Maarten Albricht was appointed to set up a seed orchard at the site. After moving to Tappen from Victoria where he worked in the ministry's inventory division, Maarten's first task was to obtain the best spruce tree stock possible. In mid-winter the tops of the selected trees were shot off and branches grafted on to 3-year old seedlings and first grown in greenhouses, until planted in the orchards in 1979. It took 15 years before these clones or ramets produced seeds for planting.

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There are now four tree species grown on 13 orchards in the 79-hectare property, including spruce, white pine, lodgepole pine and Ponderosa pine. As well, there are research trials, a yellow cedar hedge that produces cuttings and an experimental plot of coastal red cedar that is being tested for reproduction performance in the interior. The full-time staff of two and seven auxiliary staff look after the planting, irrigation, weeding, pruning, disease prevention, pollinating, storage and cone collection, for which 10-60 cone pickers are employed depending on annual production. The seed orchard is part of the provincial tree improvement program managed by the Forest Genetics Council of British Columbia with a goal to increase the volume and value of future forests. There are 18 staff from the Kalamalka Research Station near Vernon who also utilize the Skimikin orchard for breeding and progeny testing to produce trees with improved growth and yield, better branch formation and disease resistance. All the cones produced in Skimikin and all other orchards are shipped to the Tree Seed Centre in Surrey, where the seeds are extracted, stored, tested, certified, and shipped to tree nurseries all over the province. Skimikin seeds are used to grow trees in the Bulkley Valley, Peace River, Kootenay and Quesnel regions and younger orchards will produce seeds for the Thompson

Okanagan, Nelson and Prince George areas. When the forest service sold off all the provincial tree nurseries in 1988, it also tried to sell the seed orchards, but without success. PRT eventually purchased the Skimikin nursery, which is now one of 15 operated by the company, including one in Armstrong. This year Skimikin produced 15-million container seedlings for spring, summer and fall plantings and has a goal of 17-million for 2019. Forest companies purchase the seeds they need from Surrey and contract the nursery to grow them.

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The nursery's nine full-time staff look after the planting, growing, thinning, watering, packing and storage of the spruce, fir, lodgepole, white pine, cedar and hemlock seedlings. Upwards of 45 part-time staff are brought in for the thinning operation and the lifting of the seedlings out of the Styrofoam containers into boxes that are kept in cold storage rooms. The nursery's greenhouses are lit up and heated during the winter to force the seedlings to continue growing. In 1988, two South Shuswap families, the Barnards and Hamiltons, started the Sorrento Tree Nursery and two lodgepole pine seed orchards on 150 acres on a bench above the highway. Today, the successful business employs 15 full-time and 25 seasonal staff to produce seeds for the Bulkley Valley and the Central Plateau regions of the province, as well as 16-million Douglas fir, spruce, lodgepole and cedar seedlings. With the area of forest lost to wildfires increasing and the push to plant more trees to combat climate change, there is a shortage of greenhouses in the province. The Shuswap's newest operation, Mt. Ida Nursery, will help fill the growing gap as it ramps up to produce millions more, much-needed fir, pine, larch, cedar and spruce seedlings at its facility near the Salmon Arm airport. There is some irony surrounding the success of tree nurseries, as the need for seedlings is increasing because climate change is burning up forests faster than they are being replaced and clearcut logging diminishes natural regeneration. As well, as the climate changes, growing conditions change and trees are moving north. Given that one-day the Shuswap will be more like Northern California, there is definitely a need for more research.

SOURCE:- <https://www.saobserver.net/opinion/column-shuswap-tree-growers-support-provincial-reforestation/>