

THE COLUMBIA VALLEY PIONEER

Tree planters get help with COVID-19 protective measures

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With an estimated 7,000 people planting trees across Canada, the federal government has committed up to \$30 million in emergency funding to help contractors cover the extra costs of COVID-19 protection.

The funds are aimed at keeping the Justin Trudeau government's reforestation commitment to plant 600 million trees on schedule, covering costs such as sanitizing stations, additional accommodation and transportation space and personal protective equipment, Natural Resources Canada said in a statement. B.C.'s annual program had more than 300 million of those seedlings scheduled to be planted in 10 weeks this summer, but the start was delayed to develop coronavirus pandemic plans. It got underway in May.

Measures ordered for industrial camps include spaced seating in trucks and buses, and physical spacing measures for camps.

"Faced with the challenges of both maintaining the manufacturing of essential products and ensuring seedlings are planted on schedule amid COVID-19, federal, provincial and territorial governments, together with industry, work collaboratively to quickly put in place measures to protect workers and communities," the statement said. "The government intends to work with the provinces and territories to deliver this funding, which will preserve jobs for forest sector workers, including approximately 7,000 tree planters this year."

In April, B.C.'s chief forester requested that any tree planting in B.C. that hadn't started be delayed until May. Contractors imposed two-week isolation for employees before they went out to work.

The B.C. government is carrying on its program through the Forest Enhancement Society of B.C., including fire prevention by removing fire-killed trees for fuel pellet production. Among them is a \$1.25 million grant to the Cheslatta Carrier Nation, to rehabilitate forest areas severely damaged by wildfires in 2018.

Work started in May on the south side of Francois Lake between Grassy Plains, Ootsa and Cheslatta Lakes, 65 km south of Burns Lake. "The wildfires of 2018 burned 75 per cent of the Cheslatta Community Forest and even more overall on the territory," said Ben Wilson, forestry coordinator for the Cheslatta Carrier Nation.

Source: <https://www.columbiavalleypioneer.com/business/tree-planters-get-help-with-covid-19-protective-measures/>