

Delegation: **The Honourable Doug Donaldson**
 Minister of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations
 and Rural Development

Discussion Highlights:

- **Interior Forest Sector:** The NCLGA identified the need for the Provincial Government to recognize, prioritize and account for Local Government and community needs/benefits, from the forest industry in their regions, and to ensure that public interest is first and foremost under Bill 22 decisions. The NCLGA also emphasised the importance of local ecosystem integrity in multi-scale forest management decisions with reference to flood, wildfire, water quality (watershed health) and climate impacts on local communities. The Minister signified that changes to the BC Timber Sales model are under consideration that are intended to enhance regional and local operations.

- **BC Rural Dividend Program:** The NCLGA identified concerns regarding the reprofiling of \$25 million in Rural Dividend funding and inquired regarding the deployment of the \$69 million for programs and support for impacted workers and communities. The Minister reported that the Rural Dividend Fund is suspended for this year, not cancelled. All applications that are currently on hold will be considered in the next fiscal cycle (2020-21) and that the current funding structure to support impacted workers and communities is as follows:
 - \$40 million to establish a new cost-shared, early-retirement bridging program for older forest workers;
 - \$15 million to establish a new short-term forest employment program, focused on fire prevention and community resiliency projects;
 - \$12 million for workers to access skills, employer and community grant training;
 - \$2 million to establish a new job placement co-ordination office that will track the transition and employment of impacted forest workers on an individual basis; and
 - Community support grants aimed at providing short-term assistance to communities more profoundly impacted by the closure of a major forest employer.
 - **Recommended Local Government Action:** Ensure that the Rural Dividend Fund receives appropriate budget allocation for upcoming input cycles.

- **Geothermal Power:** The NCLGA emphasised the potential for geothermal power development to contribute to the goals of Clean BC, to help address Provincial air quality standards for ambient particulate matter exceedances (at a local and regional level) while creating new economic opportunities for communities experiencing decline due to significant changes to the resource management sectors in their regions. The NCLGA further expressed the need for the Provincial Government to support the development of the business case for geothermal power by addressing the fees associated with the current exploration drilling permitting process under the Oil and Gas Commission (Note: drilling permit fees are estimated to be approximately 10 times less under the Mining Act) and review the current position on Energy Purchase Agreements in light of current and future local community limitations, needs and opportunities. The Ministry indicated that no changes in Energy Purchase Agreements is anticipated at this time.

Summary of Referenced Resolutions¹

NCLGA Resolution	Sponsor Community	UBCM Status
Local Authority in Provincial Planning (#R1 – 2019)	Northern Rockies RM	Not admitted for debate
Southern Mountain Caribou (#R23 – 2019)	City of Prince George	Endorsed
Municipal Solid Waste (#R22 – 2019)	Bulkley-Nechako RD	Not admitted for debate
Geothermal Power (#LR1 – 2014)	Village of Valemount	Endorsed

¹ Related resolutions were referenced in an original briefing note but discussions were limited during the meeting.