

# Wilkinson's ways OK on small scale, say forest workers

Company president says it's different strokes for different eco-systems

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*Times Colonist staff*

Merve Wilkinson's approach to forestry is fabulous — on a small scale, says Darrell Wong, president of the Industrial Wood and Allied Workers local in Courtenay.

"Only a certain group of people are capable of doing that type of work and it's a good process," says Wong. "You could certainly have more woodlots around. But at the end of the day, the small individual or two-man woodlots cannot create a significant portion of the forest industry here in B.C. It's not just a viable process on a larger scale."

At 92, the eco-forester is angry about "Canada's failure to protect its forests." Exporting logs when mills are being shut down is "absolutely stupid," says Wilkinson. He wants to see his practices spread through the Canadian forestry industry. But despite many awards and international recognition, Wilkinson's ideas have not been adopted in Canada. Why?

"Greed," says Wilkinson. "And dollars. And the fact they can buy politicians for cheap."

Wilkinson's methods haven't been adopted by the industry because they cost too much money, says Wong. It's not realistic to have the 100,000 individuals who work in the B.C. forest industry working on woodlots. The wood still has to be marketed and processed.

"But on a small scale it's fabulous," says Wong. "You're maintaining the forest and a reasonable standard of living for an individual and the forest continues to be there for the future."

Rick Jeffery, president of Coast Forest Products Association, says there's no one answer to the problems facing the forestry industry in B.C.

"One size does not fit all," says Jeffery. "Merv Wilkinson practises one form of sustainable forestry in a forestry system where we're trying to manage for biodiversity and economic integrity. But we should be employing a number of different systems and practices across the landscape."

Wilkinson's methods work well for him in the ecosystem he's working in and the type of results and business models he employs, says Jeffery.

"But that doesn't mean everybody should be doing it. Every site is different and each ecosystem is different ... His is one of many."

Are Wilkinson's methods practical for the Canadian forestry industry?

"No," says Jeffery. "The way he harvests is more expensive for two reasons — he has small holdings that prohibit or make economies of scale very difficult and he's employing techniques that add costs to the way to do business."

Wilkinson's belief that industry is destroying the forest is totally untrue, says Jeffery. There is more forest land growing in Canada than 100 years ago and the forests are just as healthy and diverse as they were 100 years ago.

"If you look at the recent Harvard study on B.C.'s forest practices, they found that we have some of the best practices in the world and a compliance and enforcement regime that ensures that situation."

"I've been a forester for more than 20 years," says Jeffery, "and the forest industry has made remarkable progress in changing its practices. The industry is committed to the application of best practices in pursuit of global excellence. Merve's one part of the story."

"What Wilkinson does works very well for where he is located," says forest analyst Paul Senez, a former sessional lecturer at UVic.

"He's in a good location for what's growing on his property. And I believe he derives one-third of his income from the forest. But for someone to get 100 per cent of income, what land base would they need?"

Wilkinson's work is wonderful and shows the potential of what forestry could look like, says Senez.

"With climate change, the industry might have no choice but to consider rethinking how it is approaching the forest. Merve's is a viable alternative with the declining availability of the very best trees."

Ian Fawcett, deputy executive director of The Land Conservancy of B.C., says Wilkinson has been making a living off logging for 60 years.

"He's not getting rich, but I don't think that's his intention," said Fawcett.