

Office of the Leader of the Opposition

Cabinet du chef de l'opposition

NEWS RELEASE

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Conservatives Commit One Billion Dollars to Fight B.C.'s Pine Beetle Infestation

PRINCE GEORGE - Conservative leader and Leader of the Opposition Stephen Harper said today a new Conservative government will make a long-term commitment to British Columbia by providing \$100 million each year over the next ten years to help deal with the consequences of a mountain pine beetle infestation that is ravaging western forests and threatening the livelihood of 90,000 forestry related workers.

"We want to help the people of B.C. deal with this epidemic which is threatening the long term sustainability of their jobs and communities," said Harper. "It's imperative we work with the B.C. government to help implement its Mountain Pine Beetle Initiative."

The initiative includes programs to protect areas that have yet to be damaged, harvest healthy wood before it decays, develop alternative economic growth opportunities such as tourism and natural resource development, maintain public health, and finally, to restore forest resources in affected areas.

Since the epidemic was first detected in 1994 the federal Liberal government has committed a paltry \$140 million dollars towards the epidemic, and most of that money was just announced in the 2005 budget. Meanwhile the pine beetle infestation spread from a localized area around Prince George, B.C. to an area now encompassing more than 7 million hectares and reaching into Alberta. The epidemic is estimated to cost the B.C. economy more than 1\$ billion a year over the next decade and officials expect that by 2013, more than 80% of the marketable pine timber in B.C. will be destroyed.

"B.C.'s forestry communities need help and so far they haven't received the assistance you would expect from a federal government," said Harper. "Once again the Conservative Party will stand up for our forestry workers and the industry by committing to real action and providing real leadership to our country."

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For further assistance: Carolyn Stewart-Olsen (613) 297-9479