

Saskatchewan Rivers MLA Nadine Wilson, along with Carrier Forest Products president Bill Kordyban and Premier Brad Wall attended the grand re-opening of the Big River Saw Mill to cut the ribbon on May 13. “It is a great day for the forestry sector, for Big River and the province as a whole,” said Wall.

Speeches and tours the day of the re-opening attracted about 150 people. Reeve of the RM of Big River John Terr, along with the manager of the plant Paul Turgeon, the Minister of Economy, Big River mayor, and a representative from the United Steelworkers Union were also in attendance.

When the plant originally closed in 2006, 200 people lost their jobs, many having to resort to moving away from home to find work. Many of the workers chose to stay living in their hometown, and have spouses working out of town. In 2010, Carrier Forest Products bought the site, and began production in 2013. This gave many families the opportunity to have their entire family move back home. The mill currently employs approximately 90 people. “We are still to hire one more shift on the planer,” said Kordyban.

Within the Sawmill, are two different operations. The one side, hosting the Sawmill, added a second shift near the end of March. The planer, which is hosted on the other side, is believed to be adding a second shift within the month. This shift will employ approximately 100 people. “Probably by mid-June we’ll be at full capacity, and at that point, we’ll just continue with the upgrades,” Said Kordyban.

The number one priority in the province is the labor shortage, Wall stated whilst Kordyban spoke with the Shellbrook Chronicle about the difficulties the Sawmill was having recruiting employees. The provincial government has set aside funding specifically for training and skills development. SIAST and Regional Colleges have been greatly funded to insure the supply of workers meets the demand for them.

“This is an ongoing issue,” said Wall. “That’s why we work with the federal government on immigration issues; it’s why we increase investment to the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technology by 48 percent, because we know that we will need more First Nations engaged in our economy.”

The same company owns another sawmill near Prince Albert. It is not a priority but thoughts have passed about re-opening that one also. “We want to make sure that Big River operations are well established before we open the plant in Prince Albert again,” he stated. Prince Albert Sawmill site is being used as a reloading site for the Big River plant. Kordyban is looking into expanding the commercial site in Prince Albert to hire the facility out to others.

Carrier Forest Products runs differently than other companies, according to Kordyban. “We produce high quality product: we are not big on hierarchy; we integrate all of our departments and we are pretty easy to talk to,” he said. Kordyban feels the Big River community has treated them with open arms, and they are honored to be treated so well.

“Big River is an important part of our long-term corporate plan, and we wish to remain in this community for many years to come,” he stated.

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