From the Director

In this brief, informal publication, the staff of Forest Improvement and Research Management (FIRM) branch share a few highlights from 2018. We are not aiming for a comprehensive review of branch operations - but rather a few highlights from each section that may interest our clients, colleagues, and stakeholders.

FIRM is structured into six sections with the following key functions:
1. **Orchards** – Produce improved seed for reforestation in BC
2. **Research Management and Contract Services** – Coordinate the ministry’s provincial forest research program and provide contract services for the Office of the Chief Forester (OCF) and Resource Stewardship Divisions (RSD)
3. **Tree Seed Center** – Process, store, and distribute the tree seed used for reforestation of all Crown lands in BC
4. **Forest Genetics** – Conduct forest genetics research and tree breeding
5. **Policy and Planning** – Manage the policy framework for BC’s forest tree genetic resources
6. **Business Operations** – Provide a wide range of administrative support for FIRM branch

2018 was distinguished by very large cone crops throughout BC. Many orchards produced record seed yields. To harvest the cone crop in ministry orchards, FIRM’s orchard managers hired 86 people and collected 8527 sacks of cones. Over all public and private orchards, the 2018 harvest totalled 24,000 sacks, 30% larger than the previous record. In addition, there were numerous wildstand cone collections. All this collecting generated an enormous volume of work for the Tree Seed Center (TSC). In response, we took various actions to manage cone volumes, including deferring receipt of out-of-province cone collections.

In 2018, we mourned the passing of three long-time colleagues - Heather Rooke, John Ogg and John Russell. Heather, the previous TSC manager, had worked tirelessly to improve operations and build a culture of excellence at TSC. John Ogg led high-quality propagation work at the Cowichan Lake Research Station (CLRS) for decades. John Russell developed the cedar breeding program and managed CLRS. We were deeply saddened by their passing but thankful to have had the chance to know and work with these three inspiring individuals.
From the Director

In 2018 we secured funding from the federal Low Carbon Economy Leadership Fund (LCELF) and the branch initiated tree improvement projects focussed on increasing carbon capture, and avoiding carbon losses, in plantations.

In 2018, we celebrated 60 years of operation of the ministry's Tree Seed Center. Celebrations included a reception for retirees, a visit and tree planting by Minister Doug Donaldson, and technical workshops. Media were quite taken with the operation, and the TSC was featured in The Province, regional newspapers, and on the front page of the October 2nd edition of the Vancouver Sun.

Throughout 2018 staff turnover remained high and we invested significant effort in recruiting and onboarding new staff. Efforts were rewarded and we were pleased to welcome many talented new individuals to the branch.

Only 1 in 3 lodgepole pine seedlings planted in BC are derived from improved, orchard-grown seed. In 2018, we initiated a large program of orchard expansion that will shift some production to northern locations, establish new orchards with advanced generation parents, and significantly increase the production of improved lodgepole pine seed.

In 2018, regulatory changes enabling climate-based seed transfer (CBST) came into force. This significant policy change enables operational foresters to deploy seedlots in ways that take climate change into account. For their work on CBST, several current and past branch staff received the 2018 ABCFP Climate Change Innovator award.

Portions of FIRM branch operate on a “cost recovery” basis—revenues from cone and seed sales and services must cover operating and staffing costs. In 2018 we completed a detailed cost analysis and developed a proposed update to our fee schedule. The new fee schedule will soon be released for public consultation.

In 2018, we continued to make progress on the coordination of the ministry’s research program. Much was accomplished, but two events generated special interest-i) the filming of several TED-style talks at St Ann’s Academy in November, and ii) the first provincial meeting of ministry research staff in several years.

Looking ahead to 2019, I see more change, more challenge, and more opportunity. With key positions vacant, we will need to pay special attention to the forest genetics section. More retirements are expected in the coming year so we will need to continue our focus on recruitment and training.

The LCELF provides an opportunity we have not had in several years and we will focus on disciplined implementation. While CBST is now operational, issues generated by the change will continue to challenge us in 2019. We will continue to look for ways to improve access to the capital needed for maintenance and improvement of our equipment, facilities and infrastructure. Victoria-based staff will move into a new, ultra-modern workspace.

Regardless of what 2019 may bring, we in FIRM will continue to strive for excellence in the delivery of our key services, operate as a well-organized team, and provide a healthy work environment. FIRM staff work at 9 different work sites around the province. As I visit our sites I am struck by the pride FIRM staff take in their work and the care we take with the valuable public assets entrusted to us.

I hope you enjoy the brief, informal articles in our second Year in Review publication.

Patrick Martin
Director, FIRM

[Images of Barry Jaquish in a team building exercise, Petra Nielsen with one of her grafts, Spencer Reitenbach and "found money", and Connections Through Seed workshop at TSC.]
Seed Production

As 2018 began, a large cone crop from the orchards was anticipated, however the final yields far exceeded our estimates and were the largest on record for many species. Over 1,700 hectolitres (HL) of cones were collected. This is expected to yield over 1,200 kg of seed that will produce 113 million seedlings.

This year marked the retirement of Jim Corrigan, the long-standing Seed Orchard Pest Biologist. Jim has retired to New Brunswick where Atlantic salmon are plentiful. With Jim’s retirement, we welcomed Geoff Bradley as the new Seed Orchard Plant Health Biologist. Geoff spent his first 7 months visiting and learning about the various orchards and their unique issues and building relationships with stakeholders in the seed orchard community. New auxiliary staff were hired-i) Tracey Simpson, Judy Sameit, Faith Manke, Kailey Charest, and Trish Wallenstein at Skimikin; ii) Shanna Wedeen at Bailey, and iii) 86 temporary cone picking staff at all sites.

The mast year for many species made for a relatively simple year from a pest management perspective. The large crops overwhelmed the pest species ability to damage a large portion of the cone crop and few cone pest issues were noted.

The primary focus at the Kalamalka Reservoir and Bailey sites was the management of record cone crops in most orchards; producing over 1,100 hectolitres of cones, surpassing the previous record of 841 hectolitres (in 2016). Managing such a large volume of cones proved to be a significant challenge, even for the experienced Kalamalka staff. We are confident that next time we need to deal with a massive cone crop the hard lessons we learned this year will allow us to operate even more efficiently.

Other 2018 highlights included the BCSOA meeting in Penticton, and improvements to the Bailey cone storage facility and the irrigation infrastructure at Kalamalka. Also, the first interior paper birch seedlot was registered for use.

Prince George participated in the safety compliance audit as part of the Ministry’s safe certification. With leadership by site staff Ian Wayland and support from others, Prince George continued its good safety record and successfully passed the audit. Annual site and equipment maintenance and site clean-up through auctioning of old and unused equipment significantly improved the operations for 2018 and moving forward.

**CROP SUMMARY**

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Seed Production

Cones from lodgepole pine orchards in Prince George are collected every two years and the next crops will be collected in August 2019. Planning and site preparation was completed for 2 new lodgepole pine orchards. In 2019, we will begin grafting for a new CBST-based next generation lodgepole pine orchard. Planting will commence in 2020. A site is also ready for a next generation Central Plateau orchard near the existing Central Plateau orchard. Additional site clearing and planting activities included planting a 100-tree white bark pine vigor trial, removal of an old balsam fir trial to create space for expansion of the spruce clone bank, and clearing a 2.2 ha area for a 2925 ramet (975 clone) lodgepole pine clone bank. Orchard and genetics activities are picking up once again at the Prince George Tree Improvement Station and the future is looking bright.

The Skimikin Squad completed emitter checks on over 40,000 drip emitters, graft maintenance on 1,500 ramets, planted the new lodgepole pine breed arboretum and the Michael Carlson seed source demonstration trial, and helped pick and supervise the collection of 1,900 sacks of cones. In addition, each staff member developed one standard operating procedure in written and/or video format.

At Skimikin, Machine Operators Tim Cardinal and John Vivian supported the surplusing of 29 items, preformed reclamation on the settling ponds for Picket Creek and ensured site safety was at an all-time high.

Technician Rob Taylor supported hiring of 38 cone pickers over 3 harvest times, helped new staff hit the ground running, conducted soil samples and developed detailed soil maps critical for facility management. Major infrastructure improvements at the Skimikin site included a new roof on the main office, heat recovery ventilation system for radon reduction, and interior office painting.

At Saanich, for all the current orchards, 2018 was the largest crop ever harvested. The yellow cedar hedge-orchard transfer from Cowichan Lake Research Station was completed with the planting of an additional 3550 ramets, for a final orchard of 9800 ramets and 91 clones. In 2018 the second crop of approximately 67,000 cuttings were harvested from this orchard.

In conjunction with TimberWest and Western Forest Products, operational pesticide trials were completed to test the effectiveness of the pesticide Movento on redcedar and coastal Douglas-fir cone crops.

One of the most noteworthy pest management items of 2018 was the identification of the causal agents of ongoing mortality in the provincial white pine and larch orchards. Working with Harry Kope (FLNRO) and researchers from UBC Forestry, Phytophthora and Pythium root-rot pathogens were isolated and identified as the causal agents of mortality on a number of sites.

Having identified the problem we can now develop responses. Phytophthora control and containment measures, as well as a treatment regime, have been implemented. They will reduce but not eliminate the mortality in the orchard. As there is no practical way to eradicate the heavy pathogen loads from the soil at Saanich, this site is unsuitable for white pine seed orchards.

In light of the high levels of Phytophthora found at Saanich Seed Orchard FIRM developed an MoU with Wildfire Management Branch to establish in 2019-2020 a replacement white pine orchard at the Cobble Hill fire base. Preliminary samples from Cobble Hill indicate that pathogen levels at this well drained site were quite low. Re-establishing the Saanich white pine orchard at Cobble Hill will help solve the coastal Pw seed shortages in the long term.

As we finished out the year we shifted to planning for next year. Included in this planning is a focus on developing new tools for pest monitoring particularly electronic monitoring surveys in Survey 123 and a written pest management framework plan for provincial orchards that will help provide continuity, consistency and opportunity for continual improvement as we move into the future.

Stephen Joyce
Manager, Seed Production
Research Management and Contract Services

Research Program Management

The Chief Forester leads the ministry’s research program with scientists and technicians embedded in operations throughout the ministry. FIRM branch provides the management, coordination and support functions required to sustain a strong research program. Some key functions include strategic planning, streamlining research business processes, overseeing the research program budget, communication, research installation protection, and liaising with external agencies.

Now into the second year, 2018 highlights include:

- The release of the Research Program 3-year Strategic Plan
- Hiring the Research Management Lead, Francesco Cortini to help coordinate and manage the program
- Adding bench strength with the new MITAC Research Fellow, Felicitas Egunyu, to elucidate the link between science and policy
- Implementing a more streamlined Business Planning process to improve research awareness in RMT’s
- Hosting the first Face-to-Face meeting of scientists and operational leaders in 5 years
- Recording TEDx style presentations of the great science we do

We have another great year ahead so watch us make significant inroads into improving the management of the research program.

Contract Services

The Contract Management Unit had another strong year. We continue to serve both the Office of the Chief Forester Division and the Resource Stewardship Division, covering 9 branches. For staff in these Divisions, we are your one-stop shop for contracting, so contact us at RSTEWDCR@gov.bc.ca with your procurement needs.

With over 20 years of contract management experience, and a strong client-centric focus, we do our best to understand our client’s business and work to provide them with continuity of service and a standardised, seamless procurement process that follows best practices and current ministry and core procurement policy. This 2018 was another busy year and highlights, in no particular order of importance, include:

- Helping divisional staff with over 350 contracts
- Releasing the much anticipated “Guide to Requesting a Contract” - signed copies are still available
- Implementing the new contract records management model in preparation for the move to Capital Park
- Welcoming Lauren Harrison to our team to backfill Kelly Michelsen’s maternity leave
- Planning for the future by adding bench strength with Henry, Kelly Michelsen’s new child.

We are looking forward to another great year serving our clients better.

Keith Thomas
Director, Operations

Keith and his Gantt chart.
Tree Seed Centre

The Tree Seed Centre saw a continuation of staff change and team building over the past year as manager Heather Rooke retired in January and Michael Postma stepped into the role. In response to the record cone crop, the Cone and Seed Processing team added 2 new auxiliary staff.

In October we were saddened to hear that Heather Rooke, who had dedicated 45 years of public service to the citizens of BC and was Tree Seed Centre Manager for almost 20 years, had passed away.

Various events were hosted as part of the Tree Seed Centre’s 60th Anniversary Celebration. These events included a reception for retirees, a visit and tree planting by Minister Doug Donaldson, and the Connections Through Seed and Whitebark Pine technical workshops. Combined, the two technical workshops were attended by more than 80 participants.

In 2018 Tree Seed Centre staff presented and participated in a variety of conferences and technical workshops including Wild Stand Cone Collection workshops, BC Seed Orchard Association, Forest Nursery Association of BC and the International Society for Seed Science meeting in Fort Collins, Colorado.

The Cone and Seed processing team was very busy with a record crop of orchard cones and very large collections of natural stand Fir and Cedar cones. In total more than 30,000 sacks of BC cones were collected for processing at the Tree Seed Centre.

In August a technical redesign of the IM/IT batch system that transfers data between the Seed Processing and Registration (SPAR) and Cone and Seed Processing (CONSEP) systems went into production. This change was the biggest IM/IT project completed for the Tree Seed Centre in more than 20 years. The Tree Seed Centre extends a big thank you to Information, Innovation and Technology Division staff and contractors for all their hard work making this project a success.

The Tree Seed Centre operates with a steady and predictable annual business cycle, below are some highlights of the 2018 cycle.

- Withdrawal, preparation and shipping of more than 2,500 sowing requests representing 275 million requested seedlings.
- Processing, testing and long term storage of BC cone collections with 60 seedlots registered on SPAR
- Processing of 50 out-of-province cone collections
- More than 2500 seed tests completed
- More than 30 seed collections completed and placed in long term storage for Genetic Conservation purposes

Michael Postma
Manager, Tree Seed Center
Forest Genetics

The Forest Genetics Section had a successful year but not without its challenges.

We were pleased to welcome a new coastal tree researcher, Jon Degner, to the Section. Jon is currently completing his PhD at UBC under the supervision of Dr. Sally Aitken and has joined us on a part-time basis. His dissertation is on the “Genomics of hybridization, adaptation and speciation in Picea species of western Canada.” We also had several technicians return to support coastal research and added a new technician to the geneecology research program. We hope to add an additional coastal researcher. The new staff additions reflect our long-term needs but also respond to some significant staff absences due to illness and parental leaves.

The Section staff managed to make significant progress on much of the work outlined to the Forest Genetics Council and developed in the Branch business plan. Some of our progress included new or updated breeding values for volume growth and/or pest resistance for western redcedar, coastal and interior Douglas-fir, western larch, lodgepole pine and interior spruce. A new system of three-letter codes was developed for genetic traits. The new codes provide a consistent framework to characterize seedlot genetic worth for traits such as volume growth, insect and disease resistance, and wood properties. This work is being finalized and has been done cooperatively with our Seed Policy Section colleagues.

The Section has a strong history of peer-review publication and this year is no different. Of special note is the work that Nick Ukrainetz led in publishing the results of his large multi-environment trial analysis from two cycles of lodgepole pine breeding...while on parental leave. This analysis will guide future program planning and the deployment of improved lodgepole pine seedlings. It will also immediately support the establishment of new Bulkley Valley second-generation lodgepole pine seed orchards.

While significant work was undertaken on all species in the breeding program, three notable highlights were: 1) seedling preparations for the coastal Douglas-fir fourth generation testing at six new test sites, 2) seedling preparations for second generation progeny tests for the Nelson interior spruce low elevation seed planning zone, and 3) establishment of four western larch full-sib second generation test sites in the East Kootenay seed planning zone. The latter now completes the establishment of second-generation full-sib progeny tests in the western larch program.

The Section also discussed the need for future direction in tree-breeding research.Presently, we are in the process of proposing new programs for interior western redcedar and ponderosa pine. Marie Vance has drafted a problem analysis for the development of a new ponderosa pine tree improvement program in BC and will propose actions at an upcoming ITAC meeting.

There was also significant progress made toward meeting forest health objectives. At Kalamalka a population of terminal weevils was reared and released to screen seed orchard parents from the interior spruce Nelson seed planning zone for resistance to terminal weevils. Also, work began on establishing Armillaria cultures and refining inoculation methods for resistance screening of interior Douglas-fir parents. On the coast, work on seed pathogen studies and root pathogen isolation studies on Douglas-fir seedlings are showing promise; root pathogens are increasingly causing problems in coastal Douglas-fir nurseries. Additionally, grafts of interior Douglas-fir will be ready to screen for adult spruce budworm selection preference in 2019.

Forest Genetics

On the conservation side of our mandate, whitebark pine resistance work has continued through controlled inoculation studies at Kalamalka led by Ward Strong and Michael Murray. Charlie Cartwright continued monitoring whitebark pine survival at research field trials throughout BC. A new site was established near Sweeney Lake, 120 kilometres south of Houston, BC. It was a great seed year for this species and three kilograms of seed from resistant populations were collected under a Material Transfer Agreement with Region 6 of the USDA Forest Service. This translates to nearly 23,000 seeds.

Trevor Doersken joined a group of BC government and industrial tree improvement foresters on a tour of forest nursery and tree improvement facilities in Finland.

As the year drew to a close we received word that John Russell, our friend and colleague, had passed away. John was a man of great energy and initiative. He developed the cedar breeding program and introduced many innovative, new approaches. We will long remember our friend and colleague, Dr. John Russell.

Shane Ford
Manager, Forest Genetics

Policy and Planning

Welcome Sabina Donnelly!

Sabina began work in the Policy and Planning section on Dec 12, 2018. She is the new Seed Resource Specialist, who will replace Susan Zedel after a 3 month overlap during which Susan will attempt a brain dump to Sabina!

Susan plans on retiring March 31, 2019, leaving her big shoes behind after 35 years of exemplary service to tree improvement, forest seedling nurseries, Tree Seed Centre staff, FLNRORD and Licensee foresters.

Margot Spence, Tree Seed Policy Officer is planning to retire at the end of May 2019. Margot will have been with FIRM for only 3.5 years, but after 30+ years with the BC Govt, says “FIRM has meaningful work and has been a fabulous way to end my career!”

Leslie McAuley, Decision Support Officer, has been pouring her energy into the CBST Impact Assessment and Gap Analysis this year. Leslie is also the Branch representative on the ministry’s Climate Action Planning Team, and provides input on seed use and genetic gain assumptions to Integrated Silviculture Strategies and the provincial Timber Supply Review.
2018 was a busy year for Climate Based Seed Transfer (CBST) policy and implementation work. In April 2018, the Chief Foresters Standards for Seed Use were amended to provide the option to use either the existing Geographic Based Seed Transfer (GBST) standards, or the new CBST standards. The amendment came into effect on August 5, 2018 at the start of the 2019 Sowing Year. Revisions to SPAR were undertaken to facilitate the option to use CBST.

### Impact Assessment and Gap Analysis

Assessing the impacts and gaps under CBST was a primary focus for the year. Species-level summaries will be available early in 2019 to inform ongoing policy development.

### CBST Tools, Support and Maintenance

Implementation of the SPAR CBST Suitable Seedlot / Vegetative Lot Search functionality, including a CBST Area of Use tool (map), was critical to the success of CBST policy implementation. Development of a CBST Maintenance and Support Plan is currently underway. This will include a schedule for planning and managing changes to CBST including: BEC, climate data, and planned updates to provenance data. Dr. Greg O’Neill will provide the analysis to incorporate new/updated CBST areas of use.

### Communications, Extension and Training

Getting the word out on CBST this year included delivery of:

- Webinars and tutorials on CBST;
- Publication of an article on CBST in The Forest Professional (May-June edition) and the Commonwealth Forestry Newsletter (Sept 2018);
- Four regional Wild Stand Cone Collection workshops, that highlighted changes for CBST;
- CBST presentations at the CSC summer workshop, Connections Through Seed workshop, the Provincial Stewardship Meeting and to Interfor and WFP foresters; and
- Presentations to the Forest Genetics Council, ITAC and CTAC.

### Other Important Work of the Section

2018 included implementation of new Genetic Trait codes for genetic worth; new templates for Material Transfer Agreements; and, support in drafting a Fee Issue Paper for Treasury Board review pertaining to proposed revisions to seed prices and cone and seed service fees.

*The branch Planning and Policy section is honored to be nominated by their peers for the ABCFP Climate Innovator of the Year Award, for their work on implementing CBST!*

Margot Spence  
Tree Seed Policy Officer
It is time to reflect on the year gone by – the challenges we faced and the accomplishments we achieved. In 2018, we accomplished a great deal due to the fine finance and administration team working in the Branch.

In 2018, we said farewell and best of luck to Alana Phillips who moved on to a new permanent position and is currently with Environment as a Species-at-Risk Policy Analyst. Tanisha Hett had a beautiful baby girl, Taylor, and will be off through 2019. As a result, like all sections in the Branch, we had to make some adjustments to workload and responsibilities but it has been done with a laugh or two and some steep learning curves.

In 2018, we continued to focus in four main areas – financial tracking, payroll, records management and the Cowichan Lake Research Station (but we certainly touched on some other areas as well).

In the financial tracking realm we continued to strengthen the Unit’s cohesiveness and cooperation. Pam Luebker continued to provide excellent financial tracking for the Branch and keep up with the high demands at the Tree Seed Centre. We tracked invoice payments as they happened in order to provide faster and more detailed information in conjunction with CSNR. Stephanie Gillis and Deanna Foster have worked on this over the year, along with the team at Kalamalka.

With over 100 auxiliary employees in 2018 and our regular 55 or so full time staff in the Branch to track, provide hire and layoff letters, and numerous bi-weekly tasks to ensure everyone gets paid properly, I can’t say enough how impressed with Business Operations staff I have been this year.

Records management always seems like it is two steps forward and three steps back. Well not quite, we would have liked to get more done this year but we did manage to lay a foundation for moving forward in 2019. A special shout out to Skimikin who took the role of guinea pig and worked to start moving their files over to a new LAN drive that has the ARC’s and ORC’s classifications imbedded. Also with the move of headquarters staff to Capital Park there is a fair bit of work to do to get our records at headquarters into TRM.

Again this year Kathy Theobald quietly and efficiently managed the operations and administrative functions not only of the Cowichan Lake Research Station but also the Conference Centre (https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/sports-culture/recreation/facilities/cowichan-lake-research-station). From ensuring that the bunk houses are clean and tidy to ensuring that food services are provided for the various attendees, Kathy makes sure that the site remains a great place to have meetings and workshops. This is in conjunction with all her other duties there which she handles expertly.

Also of note in 2018, Deanna Foster led contract management training and business continuity plan development and Stephanie Gillis worked tirelessly to provide the administrative support that is so vital to the Branch.

I would like to acknowledge Pam Luebker and her TEAMS support. The provincial wildfire emergencies across the province continue to be something the entire Ministry deals with every summer. Wildfires lead to significant increases in administrative and financial transactions for the Ministry. Pam continues to assist every year to support these efforts.

These are just a few highlights of the critical work undertaken by the Business Operations team in 2018. I am very pleased with the accomplishments of the Business Operations Unit and we look forward to continue to serve the Branch in 2019 to ensure all FIRM employees are able to effectively care for BC’s forests.

Darrell Wood
Manager, Business Operations