

# In pursuit of equity

Change is happening in the forest products sector. The global events of this past year in particular – the toll of COVID-19, the pandemic's impact on physical and mental health, and the momentum of the Black Lives Matter movement among them – have led to difficult and necessary workplace conversations across all industries, including this one.

From a gender diversity standpoint, it's been amazing to watch the transformation in the forest products sector. In 2016, Statistics Canada reported that women comprised 17 per cent of the forestry workforce. In an effort to increase the visibility of these roles, *Canadian Forest Industries, Pulp & Paper Canada* and *Canadian Biomass* have been regularly sharing stories on the sector's efforts to recruit, retain and advance women for the past three years.

During this short time, we've seen the development of a government- and industry-led national plan for gender equity, which has since implemented several sector-wide initiatives, such as detailed data collection on demographics and the creation of an online resource hub.

We've witnessed the work of organizations including the Forest Products Association of Canada (FPAC) with its #TakeYourPlace campaign highlighting women in the industry, and the Alberta Forest Products Association with its own #WomenInForestry project recognizing women working in that province.

We've reported on industry leaders such as Cascades and Kruger Products earning parity certification from the Women in Governance organization for their workplace policies that support career growth for women. We've watched the conversations expand to show how men play a role in women's success, and how hiring more women in forestry makes good business sense.

We've seen the community rallying in large numbers to discuss these topics at industry conferences – including our very own inaugural Women in Forestry Virtual Summit, held Mar. 9. A total of 883 people registered for that event to hear leaders speak on gender equity, diversity and inclusion in the sector. (It was a compelling event for all – if you missed it, register for free to watch the recordings at [WomenInForestry.ca](http://WomenInForestry.ca).)

The progress is palpable: in July 2019, an Osler report showed that women now hold 23 per cent of director positions at TSX-listed companies in the forest products and paper sector – in 2016, that number was five per cent.)

Knowing how far forestry has come, even just in the past few years, gives us cause to celebrate. But we must acknowledge there is still a lot of work to do concerning diversity, equity and inclusion. The fact remains that women are underrepresented in the industry, as are marginalized groups such as Indigenous people (comprising seven per cent of the total workforce, inclusive of women) and Black people (comprising five per cent, inclusive of women).

They're also paid less. Data collected by the steering committee of the Gender Equity in Forestry National Action Plan shows that women in the forestry sector earn, on average, less than men for the same job – and, in eight of the top 20 forestry occupations, the spread is greater than 25 per cent.

In an interview for [WomenInForestry.ca](http://WomenInForestry.ca) this year, Jenna Strachan, Indigenous relations superintendent at Mercer's Peace River mill, shared with me some wise words from a former mentor – that "intention is irrelevant."

"I didn't understand completely what he meant at the time," she says. "But I think about it often and understand now that although good intentions are a great start, what matters the most is the impact."

This advice applies across your organization – it's not just about talent. The participating companies in our Safest Mill in Canada ranking (p. 12), for example, turned intentions into actions that had great impact on their workplace culture. Congratulations to them!



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Printed in Canada  
ISSN 0316-4004 (Print)  
ISSN 1923-3515 (Digital)

PUBLICATION MAIL AGREEMENT #40065710

## SUBSCRIPTION RATES

Canada \$57.50 - 1 year; \$92.50 - 2 year  
USA \$139.00 CDN per year  
Overseas - \$150.00 CDN per year

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Funded by the Government of Canada

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