

**Poll backs resource education:
Rural communities want forestry, mining promoted in schools**

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Rural British Columbians overwhelmingly support the notion of raising the profile of the province's resource industries in public schools, according to a new poll from the Truck Loggers Association.

Full details of the poll are still pending, but association executive director Jim Girvan said preliminary results from an independent poll conducted by Toronto-based Innovative Research Group suggest that resource-based communities want their economic mainstays to get a higher profile in schools.



CREDIT: Glenn Baglo,
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Jim Girvan is executive director
of the Truck Loggers
Association.

"We asked specifically: 'Should young people be receiving more education in school about resource industries such as forestry, mining and fisheries, and the contributions they make to their communities and to the province?'" reported Girvan in a recent interview.

"The summary information that Innovative provided me was that 93 per cent agreed with that statement. It's overwhelming."

Girvan said the poll sampled the opinions of residents in rural and resource-driven B.C. communities ranging from Hope to Terrace -- the area that the Truck Loggers cover with their membership.

The poll results will be on the agenda for discussion at the 63rd annual Truck Loggers Association convention, which begins Tuesday at the Vancouver Convention and Exhibition Centre.

Girvan said he expects the information to lead to a heightened effort by his members to communicate the positive aspects of their industry -- it's the province's single largest employer and economic driver -- to students.

For example, the association is now looking to increase its support for a U.S.-developed educational program called Provider Pals.

The program sees miners, foresters and other resource-driven industries provide financial support intended to foster awareness of those industries, as well as communication between students at rural and urban schools.

Right now, the association is supporting an exchange of information between kids at an East Vancouver school and their young counterparts in Campbell River -- where local families depend on income from a variety of resource-derived work including logging, fishing and mining.

"I've said many times there's no sense in us trying to revitalize an industry if nobody wants to work in it.

"Kids have the wrong impressions about the industry, that it's stop and start, that it's lunchbucket and chainsaw, when in fact it's a high-tech industry that requires business savvy and understanding in dealing with world markets.

"This is an independent confirmation of what we learned a couple of years ago when we did surveys of [rural] community leaders," Girvan said.

That earlier survey, released in October 2004, collected the opinions of 24 coastal-town mayors and reported respondents' concerns that many British Columbians don't appreciate forestry's importance to the provincial economy -- and that the industry was falling out of favor as a career choice for B.C. youth.

"That survey found a general belief that people who work in rural resource British Columbia communities believe that those who live in large urban centres -- the 604s as we refer to them -- don't really have a grasp and an understanding of the value of the resource industry that built and still basically sustains a majority of the economic activity in British Columbia."

"This [new poll] just reaffirms our need to do this program, and our commitment to funding for programs like Provider Pals."

Girvan said the association will seek support from other resource-driven industries and wants to expand Provider Pals by two to four schools per year.

"I think what this [poll] does is reaffirm our association's mandate and ensure that we continue to promote and finance these kinds of programs for the benefit of the people of British Columbia."

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