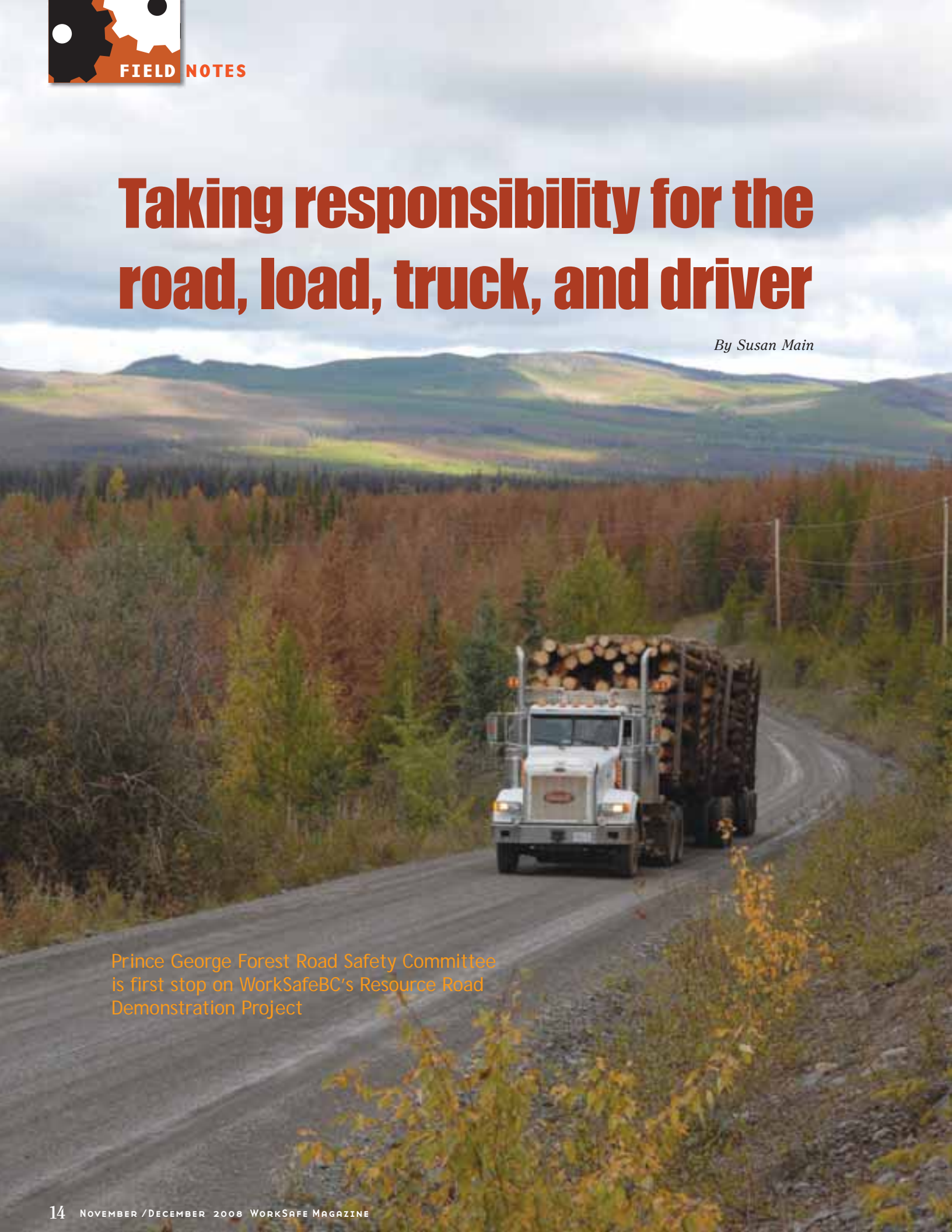


Taking responsibility for the road, load, truck, and driver

By Susan Main



Prince George Forest Road Safety Committee is first stop on WorkSafeBC's Resource Road Demonstration Project



Half a million kilometres of resource roads run through the province of B.C. — used for forestry, oil and gas, mining, product delivery, and public recreation. These roads cross public and Crown lands, through mountainous regions, around narrow switchback curves with limited visibility, and along steep, rocky cliffs that slope into the waters. Since 1995, 30 logging truck drivers, and many others including the public, have died on these roads in B.C.'s northern regions.

“The greatest risk to drivers of forest roads is unexpectedly meeting another vehicle coming towards them and not having enough time or space to avoid a collision or avoid driving off the road,” says Chuck Carter, chairman of the Prince George Forest Road Safety Committee, and senior operations supervisor for Canfor.

The Prince George road management committee is helping WorkSafeBC by participating in the Resource Road Demonstration Project that started in August. One of the goals of the project is to find out if industrial road users understand their responsibility for safety as required by the *Workers Compensation Act*, sections 115 to 119.

The WorkSafeBC project team will meet with licensee and management groups before going onto the back roads to talk with drivers

and collect their feedback on surveys and questionnaires. Various new road safety technologies will also be reviewed and may be tested on portions of the road systems. WorkSafeBC's second project destination is south of Fort St. John, where a committee comprised of oil and gas, mining, and forestry stakeholders is meeting with the WorkSafeBC project group to ensure systems are in place and use of roads is coordinated for the safety of all users.

“This gives us an ideal opportunity to find out how we can actually bring together a group of owners, companies, and industries to be effective in managing the roads in their particular area,” says Don Dahr, manager of Industry and Labour Services for oil and gas at WorkSafeBC. “Both project locations have different perspectives and will bring something unique to the final report. We hope to end up with a road management template that can be used in other districts or regions. We hope to provide a lot of useful information for those who are starting new road management groups throughout the province.”

The Prince George road management committee is made of major licensees, B.C. Timber Sales, and WorkSafeBC. The committee formed in September of 2007 and by June had established a set of forest road procedures that includes standardized radio calling protocols. Drivers use two-way radios to announce their location

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and direction of travel at regular intervals so they can keep track of who is coming towards them. In the past, different road systems in the district could have had different radio calling procedures and signage standards. But now, all forest roads in the Prince George Forest District have the same procedures. Signs at the start of each road system remind drivers which radio channels to use and what the procedure is.

“When procedures are consistent and everyone is following the same set of rules users can start training and policing each other. Everybody’s aware of the same rules now,” Carter says.

Contractor Greg Jacob of Lo-Bar Log Transport describes how the new radio procedures have impacted the roads of the Prince George District.

“Generally, there was pretty good structure around road calling procedures, but this put the final polish on it. Before, there were a lot of unwritten rules and there were actually some inconsistencies in the district. Some of the licensees were doing things a little bit differently and there’s definitely some risk in the system because of that,” Jacob says. “This brought all the players together in one room and they came up with one standard protocol.”

Jacob says the region’s drivers have accepted the new procedures.

“Travelling those roads and listening to the radio, it sounds like everybody’s bought it, even though there were a few changes that some people balked at,” he says. “Everybody has their way of doing things, and in a lot of cases, they’ve been doing it their way for a long time. But they have to be prepared to bend a little because the greater goal of being consistent within an area is worth it.”

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Bringing the right attitude to the table

Chuck Carter, chairman of the Prince George Forest Road Safety Committee, describes the type of mindset that leads to collaboration among groups of people starting new committees.

“Participants have to be motivated to affect a positive change, to put away some of their older ideas and be open to doing things differently,” Carter says. “Don’t try to make huge wholesale changes right off the bat. Try to minimize the amount of disruption to the users as much as possible. Involve the users – the truck drivers and the logging contractors – so they can have some input and understand why these changes are made. They are more likely to embrace the changes if they know why it is being done.”

The Prince George Forest Road Safety Committee’s procedures are online at: www.for.gov.bc.ca/dpg



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