

Stories From The Archives —
City Launches Plan to Cut Fuel in the Bush
Researched and written by Ralph Drew, Belcarra, BC, January 2013.

In the middle of World War Two, during the winter of 1942–1943, BC experienced its coldest weather since 1909, and Lower Mainland households were left shivering in the cold due to a widespread shortage of wood, sawdust and coal used for residential heating. There were several causes for the shortages including war rationing and a labour shortage due to men serving overseas, compounded by sawmills shut-down due to snow and cold weather. The drop in lumber production reduced the amount of sawdust, mill waste and slabwood — outer cuttings off saw logs — available to the public. As a result, a residential fuel crisis developed, and it urgently became necessary to cut-up logs in the name of the war effort.

(From the *Vancouver Sun*, December 31st, 1942.)

Plans for providing Vancouver householders with bushwood for heating was pushed forward today by the special civic committee on fuels — informed by the fuel administration of *Wartime Prices and Trade Board* that the city faces “widespread distress” because of the millwood shortage. Alderman Charles Jones, committee chairman, today outlined civic plans for cutting bushwood in a number of areas adjacent to Vancouver, and committee members agreed to do their utmost toward providing 10,000 cords of bushwood for January and 20,000 cords for February. These amounts were estimated by R.M. Drown, regional wood fuel officer, as Vancouver’s probable requirements for the next two months.

SEVERAL AREAS

Areas considered by the special committee in which bushwood may be cut were described by Alderman Jones. They include 150 acres of the Burnaby Cemetery site, owned by the city, sections of the Musqueam Indian Reserve and the University Endowment Lands, an area of 10 to 12 acres near Ladner; others in Burnaby and North Vancouver District, and an unidentified area in Vancouver City. Plans have also been advanced for use of a large amount of cut wood in Fraser Valley, but Alderman Jones declined to release information about this fuel before arrangements are completed. It was said that this cache alone is sufficient to provide Vancouver “with all the wood it could want.”

ON VAUGHN ISLAND

Another large amount of bushwood has been suggested to the committee by the fuel controller himself, Alderman Jones declared. This is located on Vaughan Island, a 40-mile water haul from Vancouver, but logging crews would be required to get the wood out. The *Selective Service Board* has intimated that it is prepared to divert experienced wood cutters to carry-out the civic wood-cutting plan to meet the fuel shortage. The wood cutters would be paid regular loggers’ and millmen’s wages.

The opportunity to transport the fuel from the bush will be given established fuel dealers, but if they are unable to handle it the special civic fuel committee will make its own arrangements. Other proposals heard at the meeting included setting-up of a bush logging camp at Bidwell Bay [*sic* Bedwell Bay] on the North Arm [Indian Arm] of Burrard Inlet, and cutting of bushwood for the Vancouver market by Indians living at Harwood Island, opposite Powell River.

City Appeals for Troops to Secure Fuel
(From the *Vancouver Sun*, January 19th, 1943.)

[Vancouver] City Council today lodged an appeal to the Dominion Government for the use of local army units and military trucks to meet the wood fuel shortage. Sudden closing-down of more sawmills because of weather conditions resulted in Council instructing Alderman Charles Jones, it’s fuel committee chairman, to route the emergency request through R. M. Brown, regional wood fuel director *Wartime Prices and Trade Board*. Mr. Brown was asked, in turn, to transmit the plea to the *Department of National Defense* at Ottawa, and he undertook to comply.

ON ADMIRALTY RESERVE

Alderman Jones also requested that federal authorities arrange for immediate cutting of a stand of fir on *Admiralty Reserve* on the north arm [Indian Arm] of Burrard Inlet, opposite Dollarton. It was also disclosed by Mr. Brown that military units outside Vancouver are already experienced wood-cutters. Several weeks ago, he revealed, his office protested against the use by camps outside the city of large quantities of fuel which would otherwise have come here. As a result the *Department of National Defense* ordered its officials to have soldiers cut their own fuel.

C. A. Munro, city weights and measures inspector, reported that almost all fuel movements in the city have come to a halt and he is asking the committee to help-out in the emergency. He found, for instance, that the supply from the *Alaska White Pine* mill at New Westminster, yielding 110 units of sawdust and 50 loads of wood per day, was cut-off when the mill closed today due to the transportation tie-up.