

The Balance

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The Sawfish, a cross between a feller buncher and a submarine, is operated by remote control and can cut as many as 100 trees in an eight-hour shift. Once it grasps a tree, it attaches an inflatable air bag so the tree floats to the surface after it is cut.

TROLLING FOR TIMBER

VICTORIA – Chris Godsall was working as a log salvager on British Columbia's coast when he realized the fibre potential in underwater forests created when forest lands are flooded by hydroelectric dams.

Today, Godsall is president of Triton Logging Inc., a Victoria-area company that holds long-term underwater timber harvesting licences in British Columbia, and is using its Sawfish™ technology to recover this high-quality sunken timber.

"We're combining British Columbia's world-leading expertise in submersible underwater technology and in forest management," he says. Triton developed an experimental logging machine by 2000, and three years later the Sawfish was perfected and in use.

Today, Douglas-fir, western redcedar, western white pine, hemlock and other species are cut and surfaced by the Sawfish in two British Columbia reservoirs. The logs are dried in the open air or in a conventional wood kiln, and then milled into high-quality lumber that can be used for a wide range of industrial and specialized uses. Products have SmartWood certification for rediscovered wood.

Godsall says British Columbia's reservoirs are like an underwater deep freeze, with an estimated five billion board feet of merchantable, submerged standing timber. He figures this is barely five per cent of the world's total submerged inventory, which means there are plenty of international opportunities to use Triton's Sawfish technology.

The cost is comparable to conventional harvesting because there is no need to build roads or reforest. An added bonus is improved safety – both for the workers harvesting the trees and for recreational users of the reservoirs once the underwater hazards are removed.

The worst thing you can do is waste a resource, says Godsall. By ensuring no wood is lost, Triton is making a unique contribution to British Columbia's sustainable forest management – and opening up opportunities around the world.

Triton (www.tritonlogging.com) and its Sawfish technology are attracting more than business interest around the world – there is also lots of media attention, including Forbes, Scientific American and Berliner Zeitung magazines, and television coverage on Martha Stewart Living, the Discovery channel, Welt der Wunder and many other shows.