

RESTORING ENDANGERED WHITEBARK PINE ECOSYSTEMS IN NORTHERN BC

Alana Clason and Sybille Haeussler, Bulkley Valley Research Centre, Smithers

In 2007 the Bulkley Valley Research Centre began research on the resilience of whitebark pine (*Pinus albicaulis*) ecosystems near Smithers. The research included Alana Clason's MSc thesis at the University of Alberta (2009-2010). It quickly became apparent that whitebark pine ecosystems in our region were under dire threat from recurrent outbreaks of mountain pine beetle (1980s – 2000s) compounded by heavy white pine blister rust mortality in old and young stands and other factors. In 2011, in partnership with UNBC and the Office of the Wet'suwet'en we initiated a comprehensive program of whitebark pine restoration and mapping and began to lobby for the listing of whitebark pine as endangered on the federal Species at Risk Act. Since the listing in 2012, interest and support for whitebark pine restoration has grown exponentially and our program has expanded across northern BC. We have now established 4 whitebark pine restoration trials across northern BC extending from Hudson Bay Mtn near Smithers to McBride Peak in the Rockies, collected more than 350,000 seeds from apparently rust-resistant parent trees, mapped the current and projected distributions of this species under climate change, and partnered with mining, forest industry, community groups, environmental foundations and government agencies to get more restoration work done. Our first locally-grown seedlings are scheduled for planting in wildfires of Morice area provincial parks this spring. Local support for our work has been exceptional and we thank everyone who has been involved. In this seminar, we will discuss BVRC whitebark pine conservation and restoration work since 2007.