



# Labour Market Bulletin

British Columbia

February 2022



This Labour Market Bulletin provides an analysis of Labour Force Survey results for the province of British Columbia (B.C.), including the regions of Northern B.C., Vancouver Island and Coast, Lower Mainland, Thompson–Okanagan and the Kootenays.

## OVERVIEW

Employers across the province geared up for a better February as a relaxation of public health restrictions allowed many businesses to operate at full capacity for the first time in almost two years. However, employment only increased slightly (0.8% or +21,000 positions) in February. Any gains were exclusively in full time employment (2.2% or 46,000 positions) that were offset by losses in part time employment (-4.2% or 25,000 positions). In positive news, British Columbia's economy grew by an estimated five percent in 2021, and the Provincial Government expects it to expand by four percent in 2022.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile, the province's unemployment rate declined slightly from 5.1% in January to 4.9% in February, still well below the national average. Approximately 16,700 individuals entered the labour market in February, an increase of 0.3% over the month and up 1.3% from the same time last year.

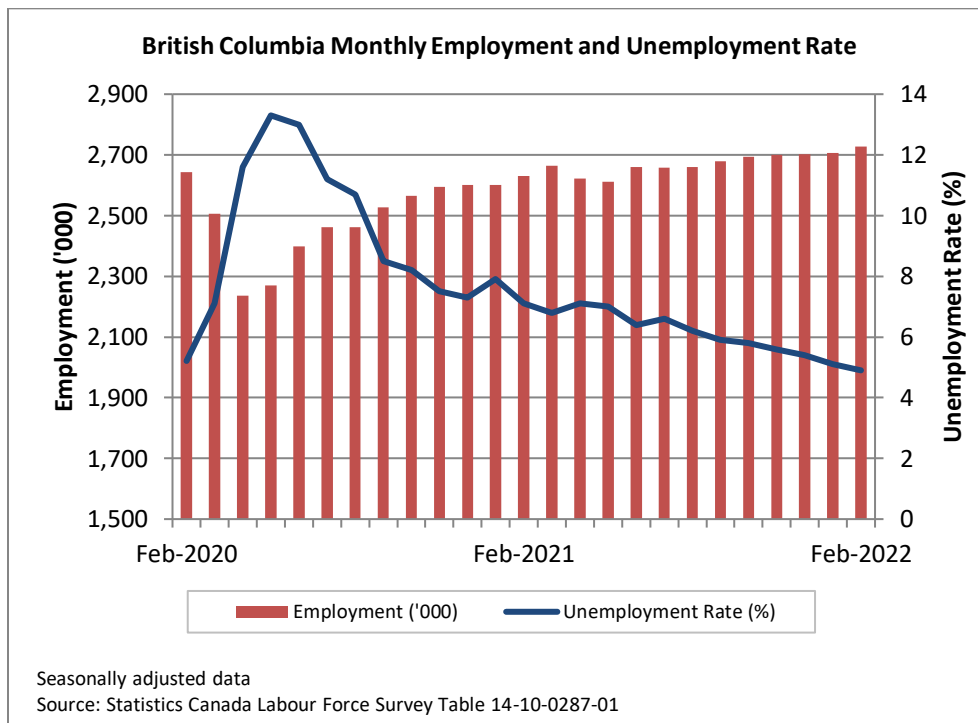
Year over year, employment increased 3.7% (+97,900 positions) across the province, and remained well above (+3.2%) the pre-pandemic levels of February 2020. Effective February 17<sup>th</sup>, the Government of B.C. relaxed a multitude of COVID-19 public health measures for a variety of businesses. As part of the update, capacity restrictions for indoor gatherings, adult sports, fitness centres, bars, nightclubs and dancing have been removed.<sup>2</sup> Many of these businesses are now permitted to operate normally for the first time in nearly two years.

**British Columbia Monthly Labour Force Statistics**

Seasonally Adjusted Monthly Data	February 2022	January 2022	February 2021	Monthly Variation		Yearly Variation	
				Number	%	Number	%
<b>Population 15 + ('000)</b>	4,403.7	4,396.4	4,323.3	7.3	0.2	80.4	1.9
<b>Labour Force ('000)</b>	2,867.3	2,850.6	2,829.7	16.7	0.6	37.6	1.3
<b>Employment ('000)</b>	2,727.3	2,706.3	2,629.4	21.0	0.8	97.9	3.7
Full-Time ('000)	2,159.4	2,113.3	2,050.3	46.1	2.2	109.1	5.3
Part-Time ('000)	567.9	592.9	579.1	-25.0	-4.2	-11.2	-1.9
<b>Unemployment ('000)</b>	140.0	144.3	200.3	-4.3	-3.0	-60.3	-30.1
<b>Unemployment Rate (%)</b>	4.9	5.1	7.1	-0.2	-	-2.2	-
<b>Participation Rate (%)</b>	65.1	64.8	65.5	0.3	-	-0.4	-
<b>Employment Rate (%)</b>	61.9	61.6	60.8	0.3	-	1.1	-

Note: Totals may not add due to rounding

Source: Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey – Table 14-10-0287, formerly CANSIM 282-0087



The province’s unemployment rate in February declined to its lowest point since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and was the third lowest out of the western provinces. Employment for the youth (15-24 years) demographic experienced slight growth from January as 4,300 youth entered the labour force, and almost double that number (8,400) became employed.

The unemployment rate for the 25-54 demographic group remained relatively stable as 14,900 individuals entered the labour force and 5,700 became unemployed.

Older workers (55 years and older) saw an improvement to their unemployment rate over the month, declining 1.0 percentage point, to reach 4% in February. This decline marked the group’s lowest unemployment rate since

the onset of the pandemic. Approximately 2,400 older workers left the labour force over the month, while unemployment declined sharply (-6,000).<sup>3</sup>

### British Columbia Monthly Unemployment Rates, by Gender and Age

Seasonally Adjusted Data	February 2022 (%)	January 2022 (%)	February 2021 (%)	Monthly Variation (% points)	Yearly Variation (% points)
<b>Total</b>	4.9	5.1	7.1	-0.2	-2.2
<b>25 years and over</b>	3.9	4.0	5.8	-0.1	-1.9
Men - 25 years and over	4.0	4.1	5.9	-0.1	-1.9
Women - 25 years and over	3.9	3.8	5.7	0.1	-1.8
<b>15 to 24 years</b>	10.6	11.7	15.0	-1.1	-4.4
Men - 15 to 24 years	13.4	15.8	12.5	-2.4	0.9
Women - 15 to 24 years	7.8	7.6	17.8	0.2	-10.0

Note: Totals may not add due to rounding

Source: Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey – Table 14-10-0287, formerly CANSIM 282-0087

## EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY

Though employment increased slightly (0.8%) between January and February, year-over-year employment growth was strong (+3.7%), particularly as employment was gained in both the **services producing sector** (+4.1%) and the **goods producing sector** (2.2%).<sup>4</sup>

Employment in the province's goods producing sector increased 1.3% between January and February, despite employment losses in several of the sector's key industries. The **utilities** industry experienced the greatest decline in jobs (-7.7%) over the month, followed by **forestry, fishing, mining, quarrying, oil and gas** (-3.1%). Fortunately, the sector's losses were more than offset by gains in **agriculture** (4.1%), **manufacturing** (2.9%) and **construction** (1.2%).<sup>5</sup>

B.C.'s **agriculture** industry experienced the highest employment boost in February, increasing 4.1% over the month. However, the industry continues to rebuild from damage caused in 2021 from both flooding and wildfires. Many individuals in the industry have suffered enormously as result of the province's recent extreme weather events. According to the provincial government, over 1,100 farms were damaged, and 2.5 million livestock were either displaced or killed from the Sumas Prairie in Abbotsford to Merritt and Princeton by November's extreme flooding. In response, the federal and provincial governments are providing up to \$228 million in joint funding for farmers in the Southern Interior and Fraser Valley who were impacted by floods as part of the Canada-BC Flood Recovery Program for Food Security. As part of the program, support for extraordinary recovery costs not covered by existing programs or private insurance will be provided.<sup>6</sup>

**Forestry** remains a key economic driver in many B.C. interior, coastal, and northern communities. Employment in the sector has been relatively stable (-3.1%) over the month. However, year-over-year employment in the sector remains down 13.2%. Supply chain disruptions and transportation backlogs present ongoing challenges to forestry operations. A lack of rail transportation and a shortage of trucker capacity is continuing to impact BC's forestry sector. As such, operations in the sector have been unable to move products to market and in some

cases have been forced to limit production. For instance, West Fraser has announced it is transitioning to a 3-day work week for its mill employees at the company's mills across the province. The company has cited challenges with rail transportation for the reduction in operating capacity. Around 740 employees will be impacted by the reduction.<sup>7</sup>

Looking forward, the outlook for revenue from forestry related activities remain uncertain. The Government of B.C. anticipates a decline in forestry sector revenue by nearly \$1 billion over the next couple of years. The decline is largely attributed to a recent moratorium on old growth logging practices, where the provincial government expects the annual allowable cut to decline from 45 million cubic metres in 2021 to just 38.5 million cubic metres by 2023.<sup>8</sup>

The **construction** industry demonstrated relatively stable employment (+1.2%) in February. Still, the industry employs less people now than the same time last year. Meanwhile, the number of new housing starts in the province in January declined 28.8% from December, but remained slightly above the same time last year.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, the total value of housing permits in January declined substantially, down 47.0% from December 2021, and down 12.4% over the previous 12 months.<sup>10</sup>

On a positive note, construction activity will receive a boost by the recent announcement of several large-scale infrastructure projects. For instance, the 2022 provincial budget earmarked \$27.4 billion over the next three years for work on infrastructure projects. Notably, capital funding includes plans for an expansion of the SkyTrain from Surrey to Langley.<sup>11</sup>

Similarly, the Province of B.C. recently announced plans for a new \$137 million Trades and Technology Complex at the B.C. Institute of Technology. Construction is set to begin in 2023, and is expected to create 600 jobs during its construction and train thousands of trade apprentices in the years after its completion.<sup>12</sup>

Employment in the province's **services** sector increased modestly by 0.7% (+14,600) over the month. The growth was largely attributed to gains in **professional, scientific and technical services** (+4.5%), **educational services** (+4.5%) and **transportation and warehousing** (+2.4%). There were significant employment losses in **business, building and other support services** (-8.2%), and smaller declines in public administration (-2.3%), **other services** (-1.9%), and **trade** (-1.0%).<sup>13</sup>

Employment in **health care and social assistance** remained relatively unchanged (0.4%) over the month, however it has increased sharply (13.5%) from the same time last year. The social assistance subsector received a significant employment boost in February, as the federal government announced funding of \$49.2 million through the Canada-British Columbia Early Learning and Child Care Agreement to reduce barriers and increase access to post secondary early childhood education programs. The provincial government anticipates 10,000 job openings for certified early childhood educators and assistants in the coming decade.<sup>14</sup>

The **healthcare** sub sector continues to provide invaluable support to the health and wellbeing of British Columbians as they navigate their everyday lives. The healthcare sector represents a significant share of employment across the province; however, the pandemic has exacerbated critical burnout levels among many healthcare professionals. According to survey data from the B.C. Nurses Union, 52 per cent of critical-care and emergency room nurses in B.C. feel the pandemic has made them more likely to leave their profession within

the next two years.<sup>15</sup> Looking forwards, the Province of B.C. is providing funding to add 602 nurse-training seats at 17 public post secondary institutions across the province to alleviate a strain on healthcare professionals.<sup>16</sup>

Employment in **professional, scientific, and technical services** experienced the largest employment jump, as 10,400 more individuals gained employment within the industry in February. In fact, a recent study suggests demand for workers in this industry may continue growing. BioTalent Canada has projected 5,000 unoccupied life sciences biotechnology positions in Vancouver by 2029.<sup>17</sup> In order to reduce the industry's talent strain, the Province of B.C. is providing \$195 million to two life science research centres to attract and retain top life science researchers. As part of the funding, Michael Smith Health Research B.C. is receiving \$116 million, while Genome B.C. is receiving \$79 million.<sup>18</sup>

### British Columbia Monthly Labour Force Statistics, by Industry

Seasonally Adjusted Data ('000)	February 2022	January 2022	February 2021	Monthly Variation		Yearly Variation	
				Number	%	Number	%
<b>Total employed, all industries</b>	2,727.3	2,706.3	2,629.4	21.0	0.8	97.9	3.7
<b>Goods-producing sector</b>	493.4	486.9	482.6	6.5	1.3	10.8	2.2
Agriculture	25.2	24.2	25.2	1.0	4.1	0.0	0.0
Forestry, fishing, mining, quarrying, oil and gas	44.1	45.5	50.8	-1.4	-3.1	-6.7	-13.2
Utilities	14.3	15.5	19.9	-1.2	-7.7	-5.6	-28.1
Construction	216.2	213.6	217.5	2.6	1.2	-1.3	-0.6
Manufacturing	193.5	188.1	169.3	5.4	2.9	24.2	14.3
<b>Services-producing sector</b>	2,234.0	2,219.4	2,146.9	14.6	0.7	87.1	4.1
Trade	429.9	434.1	396.9	-4.2	-1.0	33.0	8.3
Transportation and warehousing	147.6	144.2	137.8	3.4	2.4	9.8	7.1
Finance, insurance, real estate and leasing	164.9	163.9	163.6	1.0	0.6	1.3	0.8
Professional, scientific and technical services	253.9	243.0	257.4	10.9	4.5	-3.5	-1.4
Business, building and other support services	87.8	95.6	103.6	-7.8	-8.2	-15.8	-15.3
Educational services	206.5	197.7	192.5	8.8	4.5	14.0	7.3
Health care and social assistance	388.2	386.8	342.0	1.4	0.4	46.2	13.5
Information, culture and recreation	136.3	133.9	124.6	2.4	1.8	11.7	9.4
Accommodation and food services	176.3	172.1	176.9	4.2	2.4	-0.6	-0.3
Other services	103.2	105.2	115.1	-2.0	-1.9	-11.9	-10.3
Public administration	139.4	142.7	136.3	-3.3	-2.3	3.1	2.3

Note: Totals may not add due to rounding

Source: Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey – Table 14-10-0355, formerly CANSIM 282-0088

## REGIONAL ANALYSIS

The province's economic recovery to challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic remain ongoing in all economic regions. Compared to February 2021, the unemployment rate declined in all of the province's economic regions, with the largest improvements in the **Cariboo** (-4.9 percentage points), **Northeast** (-4.3 percentage points), and **North Coast and Nechako** (-3.3 percentage points) economic regions.

Please be aware that the statistics for the economic regions are not seasonally adjusted and should only be compared on a year-over-year basis. Employment is sometimes influenced by seasonal and calendar effects occurring at the same time and with the same magnitude every year, which can bring about changes in the data that make monthly comparisons difficult.

### British Columbia Monthly Labour Force Statistics, by Economic Region

3-Month Moving Averages Seasonally Unadjusted Data	Employment			Unemployment Rate		
	February 2022 ('000)	February 2021 ('000)	Yearly Variation (%)	February 2022 (%)	February 2021 (%)	Yearly Variation (% points)
<b>British Columbia</b>	2,681.2	2,580.0	3.9	5.1	7.5	-2.4
<b>Economic Regions</b>						
Vancouver Island and Coast	428.0	398.6	7.4	5.2	7.1	-1.9
Lower Mainland - Southwest	1,721.0	1,649.1	4.4	5.1	7.6	-2.5
Thompson - Okanagan	289.6	285.7	1.4	5.9	7.5	-1.6
Kootenay	75.1	78.6	-4.5	5.5	6.9	-1.4
Cariboo	89.7	85.5	4.9	3.0	7.9	-4.9
North Coast and Nechako	41.7	42.8	-2.6	5.2	8.5	-3.3
Northeast	36.2	39.7	-8.8	0.0	4.3	-4.3

Note: Totals may not add due to rounding

Source: Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey – Table 14-10-0387, formerly CANSIM 282-0122

Year-over-year, employment increased 7.4% in **Vancouver Island and Coast**. The unemployment rate improved (-1.9 percentage points) to 5.2%. Looking forwards, the provincial capital's economy will soon be supported by the opening of a new Walmart located at Victoria's Hillside Shopping Centre, set to open this spring. Once completed, the new store will hire approximately 300 staff.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, Tesla Motors is building a new dealership in Langford. The company expects it will cost between \$40-50M, and will be ready within 18 months. The mayor of Langford expects the new facility will create local jobs and attract new residents.<sup>20</sup>

Meanwhile, the region's construction industry will be active on a multitude of large projects. For instance, construction is underway on Eagle Harbour, a 55-unit housing complex for women, children, non-binary people, and two-spirit people who are fleeing violence. The roughly \$19M project is expected to be completed by fall 2023.<sup>21</sup> In addition, Construction is expected to begin this fall on new student housing at North Island College's Comox Valley campus. The \$65.9M project will add 157 individual and 60 family-specific accommodations and is expected to be completed by 2024.<sup>22</sup>

Employment in the **Lower Mainland – Southwest** region increased by 4.4%, while the unemployment rate fell -2.5 percentage points to 5.1%. Looking forwards, the regions' labour force will benefit in the near term from several large-scale infrastructure projects in various stages of development. For instance, construction is

currently underway on the \$87M Cascades Delta Casino in Delta. The new casino will include two restaurants in addition to gaming space, and is expected to create hundreds of new jobs during construction and once open.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, Wesbild broke ground on March 4 on its new Marine Landing development in South Vancouver. Marine Landing will include two six-storey buildings with industrial and office space. Wesbild estimates it will cost from \$110M to \$120M, and be complete by 2024.<sup>24</sup>

Meanwhile efforts to address the region's affordable housing crisis remain ongoing. Construction is underway on a new 90-unit affordable housing complex in North Vancouver, which is expected to be completed by fall 2023. The Province is contributing \$9.5M to the project, while the District of North Vancouver is providing the land, valued at \$13M.<sup>25</sup>

Employment in the **Thompson-Okanagan** region increased by 1.4% over the year, while the unemployment rate fell by 1.6 percentage points. Employment in the region's construction industry grew substantially in 2021 as a result of an influx of new housing projects. According to the Chartered Professional Accountants of B.C., construction of new housing units increased 50.3 % in 2021 ahead of 2020.<sup>26</sup> Additionally, the region is continuing efforts to rebuild communities affected by 2021's devastating wildfire season. In support, the Province of BC is providing an additional \$18.4M for recovery in Lytton, a village which was destroyed by a wildfire last summer. The funding will go toward debris removal, archaeological work, and site remediation. Debris removal began on March 8.<sup>27</sup>

The **Northeast** region experienced a substantial decrease in employment over the year, down 8.8% from February 2021. The region's unemployment rate also declined, down 4.3% as the region's labour force contracted 11.7% over the past 12 months. According to a recent labour market outlook released from the Provincial Government, there will be 12,300 total job openings in Northeast B.C. by 2031. Most of those of openings, 8,000 of them, will be to replace retiring workers. A smaller fraction of openings, just 4,300 or one-third, are attributed to economic growth.<sup>28</sup> Meanwhile, forestry related activities in the region continue to be constrained by supply chain disruptions. Canfor is curtailing production at its Taylor Pulp Mill (near Fort St. John) for at least six weeks. The mill's inventory is at full capacity, but transportation issues is prompting the curtailment. It is unclear how many employees will be affected.<sup>29</sup>

Employment in the **Cariboo** economic region increased 4.9% over the year, while the unemployment rate declined (-4.9%) to 3.0% in February. Canfor announced it is permanently reducing production capacity by 150 million board feet at its Plateau sawmill in Vanderhoof, B.C. The company has cited issues with timber harvesting for the reduction in capacity. Approximately 70 workers are expected to be impacted by the reduction. However, the sawmill is undergoing a \$14M project to improve manufacturing efficiency and flexibility at the company's two remaining production lines.<sup>30</sup>

Similarly, Pacific BioEnergy permanently closed their pellet plant on March 4. The company had announced its intentions last December to close the plant sometime in 2022. The closure means the loss of 55 direct jobs in Prince George.<sup>31</sup>



**Note:** In preparing this document, the authors have taken care to provide clients with labour market information that is timely and accurate at the time of publication. Since labour market conditions are dynamic, some of the information presented here may have changed since this document was published. Users are encouraged to also refer to other sources for additional information on the local economy and labour market. Information contained in this document does not necessarily reflect official policies of Employment and Social Development Canada.

**Prepared by:** Labour Market Information (LMI) Directorate, Service Canada, British Columbia

**For further information**, please contact the LMI team at: [http://www.esdc.gc.ca/cqi-bin/contact/edsc-esdc/eng/contact\\_us.aspx?section=lmi](http://www.esdc.gc.ca/cqi-bin/contact/edsc-esdc/eng/contact_us.aspx?section=lmi)

**For information on the Labour Force Survey**, please visit the Statistics Canada Web site at: [www.statcan.gc.ca](http://www.statcan.gc.ca)

© Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada as represented by Employment and Social Development Canada, 2022, all rights reserved

---

<sup>1</sup> Government of British Columbia. February 22, 2022. [Budget 2022 moves us forward together to build a Stronger BC](#)

<sup>2</sup> Kelowna Now. February 15, 2022. [BC ending many COVID-19 restrictions, but masking and vaccine card will remain in place.](#)

<sup>3</sup> Statistics Canada. [Table 14-10-0287-01 Labour force characteristics, monthly, seasonally adjusted and trend-cycle, last 5 months.](#) Accessed February 4, 2022.

<sup>4</sup> Statistics Canada. [Table 14-10-0355-01 Employment by industry, monthly, seasonally adjusted and unadjusted, and trend-cycle, last 5 months \(x 1,000\).](#) Accessed February 4, 2022.

<sup>5</sup> Statistics Canada. [Table 14-10-0355-01 Employment by industry, monthly, seasonally adjusted and unadjusted, and trend-cycle, last 5 months \(x 1,000\).](#) Accessed February 4, 2022.

<sup>6</sup> Government of British Columbia. February 7, 2022. [\\$228M flood recovery program helping B.C. farms return to production.](#)

<sup>7</sup> Nelson Star. March 1, 2022. [West Fraser temporarily adopts three day work week at B.C. lumber mills.](#)

<sup>8</sup> Richmond News. February 22, 2022. [Old-growth policy to blow \\$1-billion hole in B.C. budget.](#)

<sup>9</sup> Statistics Canada. [Table 34-10-0156-01 Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, housing starts in all centres 10,000 and over, Canada, provinces, and census metropolitan areas, seasonally adjusted at annual rates, monthly.\(x1,000\).](#) Accessed March 11, 2022.

<sup>10</sup> Statistics Canada. [Table 34-10-0066-01 Building permits, by type of structure and type of work \(x 1,000\).](#) Accessed March 11, 2022.

<sup>11</sup> North Shore News. February 22, 2022. [B.C. budget includes \\$2.1B in disaster relief; \\$5.5B deficit for next fiscal year.](#)

<sup>12</sup> CBC. February 17, 2022. [New BCIT complex to support trades, tech learning as part of government's skills training expansion.](#)

<sup>13</sup> Statistics Canada. [Table 14-10-0355-01 Employment by industry, monthly, seasonally adjusted and unadjusted, and trend-cycle, last 5 months \(x 1,000\).](#) Accessed February 4, 2022.



- 
- <sup>14</sup> Government of British Columbia. February 18, 2022. [Investing in early childhood educators creates a StrongerBC, Canada.](#)
- <sup>15</sup> Edmonton Sun. March 08, 2022. [B.C. has a critical ICU nursing shortage and no plan to address it: union.](#)
- <sup>16</sup> Government of British Columbia. February 20, 2022. [Hundreds of new nursing training seats coming provincewide.](#)
- <sup>17</sup> BIV. January 21, 2022. [‘Massive demand’ for B.C. biotech talent putting pressure on sector.](#)
- <sup>18</sup> Vancouver Sun. March 3, 2022. [B.C. provides \\$195M for life sciences.](#)
- <sup>19</sup> Times Colonist. March 4, 2022. [Walmart hiring 300 staff for new Hillside Centre store.](#)
- <sup>20</sup> Times Colonist. March 3, 2022. [New Tesla dealership in Langford the first for Vancouver Island.](#)
- <sup>21</sup> Government of British Columbia. February 18, 2022. [New transitional, permanent housing for women underway in Campbell River.](#)
- <sup>22</sup> Government of British Columbia, February 11, 2022. [On-campus student housing coming to North Island College.](#)
- <sup>23</sup> Delta Optimist. February 1, 2022. [Delta’s multi-million dollar casino taking shape.](#)
- <sup>24</sup> Journal of Commerce. March 14, 2022. [Wesbild breaks ground on Marine Landing stacked industrial project.](#)
- <sup>25</sup> Government of British Columbia. February 18, 2022. [New affordable homes coming to North Vancouver.](#)
- <sup>26</sup> Global News. March 10, 2022. [Thompson Okanagan housing starts grew 50% in 2021, B.C. accountants say.](#)
- <sup>27</sup> Government of British Columbia. March 7, 2022. [Province adds supports for Lytton’s recovery.](#)
- <sup>28</sup> The Mirror. February 9, 2022. [12,300 job openings forecast for Northeast B.C. by 2031.](#)
- <sup>29</sup> Energetic City. February 16, 2022. [Canfor pulp announces production curtailment at Taylor Pulp.](#)
- <sup>30</sup> Prince George Citizen. February 15, 2022. [Canfor cutting production, jobs at Vanderhoof sawmill.](#)
- <sup>31</sup> Prince George Citizen. March 4, 2022. [Prince George’s Pacific BioEnergy plant officially closes after 28 years.](#)