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From *The Canadian Press*, September 9, 2009 - 3:17 p.m.

Labour talks resume for B.C. interior forestry workers and Conifer; next meeting Sept. 14 in Prince George

By The Canadian Press

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Large stock piles of wood at the Pope and Talbot sawmill in Grand Forks, B.C. on Nov. 6, 2007. THE CANADIAN PRESS/Jeff Bassett

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VANCOUVER, B.C. - Contract talks will resume later this month between the union representing forestry workers in the interior of B.C. and the Council on Northern Interior Forest Employment Relations.

The two sides will return to the bargaining table in Prince George, B.C. on Sept. 14, nearly a month after the employer, known as Conifer, halted discussions.

Conifer said it walked away from talks on Aug. 19 because the negotiations were not moving forward.

The union, represented by the United Steelworkers, said the employer changed the bargaining rules.

The union has been without a contract since June 30.

The USW represents more than 9,000 forestry workers in the province.

Conifer is the first of the forestry firms to negotiate with the USW for a new contract this time around, and its progress could be considered a benchmark for other negotiations.

The talks are being held during one of the worst economic periods in the history of Canada's forest industry.

Lumber sales are in a slump thanks to the housing crisis in the United States and the recession that followed. Forestry companies have slashed production and cut staff to try and match supply with decreased demand.

A higher Canadian dollar, imports taxes and the mountain pine beetle are also causing forestry companies to lose millions of dollars.

Last week, PricewaterhouseCoopers released a study showing Canada's top 15 forest, paper and packaging companies lost a total of \$660 million in the second quarter, down from losses of C\$462 million during the same period in 2008.

Those losses were on top of net losses of \$480 million in the first quarter of this year.

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