

WFP, 2,400 workers sign deal

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There will be peace in the woods of Coastal B.C. for the next four years after the United Steelworkers Local 1-1937 voted to ratify its contract with Western Forest Products.

The union voted to accept the deal yesterday after the two sides came to a tentative agreement in late July.

According to a statement released by the union, the deal does not include major wage gains, but it also makes no concessions.

Local president Darrel Wong also pointed out there were improvements in contract language.

Included in the deal, which expires in June 2014, is a signing bonus and improvements in job security, health and welfare benefits, a long-term disability plan and severance pay. There are also general wage increases in the third and fourth year.

The agreement covers the vast majority of Western's unionized hourly workforce belonging to USW Locals 1-1937 and 1-85.

It covers about 2,400 sawmill and woodlands employees on Vancouver Island, the Mainland Coast and Haida Gwaii.

"This is great news for our employees, customers, investors and communities," said Western CEO Steve Frasher. "This is an important next step in our continuing efforts to recover from the worst market conditions the industry has experienced in a generation."

Frasher said the company and union have worked as "strong partners" over the last difficult few years to improve margins, manage production and inventory, and find new markets. "Our last two profitable quarters reflect this successful joint effort," he said.

The last contract between the union and company, reached after a bitter and divisive 13-week strike in 2007, expired June 15.

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