



# Tree Planting

Montreal-based **Skyler Boushel** has planted thousands of trees with the Canadian forestry industry. Here are his secrets to putting down roots.



## Q. How did you get started as a tree planter?

Originally, it was a summer job to pay for university. I'd plant for three months and make so much money I didn't have to work during the school year. Now, I've been planting for 14 summers.

## Do you make enough money to support yourself year-round?

If you're smart, you could live off it. About \$32,000 in three months. During months off, I travel.

## How do you plant so many trees so quickly?

I plant them seven to 12 inches apart. I take a few steps, put my shovel in the ground with my right hand and then in a side-ways back-pulling motion to the right called a C-cut, I dig a hole big enough for the seedling

and my left hand. Once I've put the tree in deep enough, I pull out the shovel and kick the soil around the base. It takes about seven seconds per tree.

## How do you get to the planting sites?

We plant eight hours north of Edmonton, Alberta, three hours south of the 60th parallel. We're flown in by helicopter or driven in by a quad, like a Marsh Master, which is basically a giant aluminum tank. Then we bag up and walk. I'll pack between 270 and 350 trees at a

time in three bags. After that, it gets too heavy. Supervisors will slowly bring in more trees during the day, leaving boxes of saplings on the road in case you need more.

## Are there times you can't plant?

If there's no visibility, we'll be grounded somewhere. If it's almost freezing or snowing, we won't plant. If we run out of trees, we'll be out of commission for an hour or two. Then we sit in the woods and just wait.

## What else makes it tough work?

If it's a bad bug year, hundreds of mosquitoes and black flies swarm, getting in your eyes and ears and biting you nonstop for nine hours a day. Those days are insanely taxing, mentally and physically. I've seen people completely crack up. There's wildlife too: bears, lynx, moose, wolves. Lynx aren't an issue, and moose are pretty dumb. Bears will get close. When they get too close, you have to get as big and loud as you can.

The coldest temperature is about 28°F, and it can get up to 100°F, which at that latitude feels like the sun is only 100 feet above you.

## Do you consider yourself an environmentalist?

At first, I thought I was saving the planet. But the forestry companies pay planting companies. The Canadian government requires that forestry companies replant before they can harvest again. I technically work for the forestry company, planting trees they can cut down. I'm the best part of the crappy industry.

## What keeps you coming back every season?

I don't have to sit in a cubicle, which I can't do. That far north in the summers, it's bright at 11:30 at night, and I live in a tent.

## How many trees do you estimate you've planted in your career?

Three and a half to four million. Basically, I've planted a big forest all by myself.

## BY THE NUMBERS

**\$57**  
BILLION

Revenue of the Canadian forest industry in 2012

**500**  
MILLION

Trees planted in Canada each year to replace harvested trees

**6**  
THOUSAND

Saplings Skyler can plant in a day

**10**  
CENTS

Rate per tree planted