



## Passing the torch

**B.C. logging contractor Chasse Holdings is in the process of making a transition, passing the business on to the next generation, a move that should be eased by the recent upswing in the forest industry, and the opportunities that brings.**

*By Tony Kryzanowski*

While attracting young people to Canadian forest industry jobs is a concern, several logging contractors working in southeastern British Columbia have been relatively successful at bucking the trend and have managed to attract younger family members and employees to the industry.

Invermere, B.C.-based Chasse Holdings is one of those companies in the midst of passing the torch to a younger generation.

The stump-to-roadside logging business is owned by Jacques and Shelly Chasse, in partnership with their son, Brady, and his wife, Krystle. Jacques started logging in the Kootenay Valley in 1975, purchasing his first piece of equipment when he was 18 years old. He has harvested a wide variety of timber over the years, from green wood to forest fire salvage wood, to salvaging wood infected by the mountain pine beetle. He has also witnessed a lot of change in the valley's forest industry during his 38 years in business.

"I've outlasted four or five different forest companies that have been established here over the years," says Jacques.

Brady and Krystle Chasse became full partners in the business last year. Brady joined the business right out of high school and has taken on more and more responsibility over the past decade in day-to-day operations.

"Brady is doing a fantastic job running our forestry operations," says Jacques. "He's the production guy out in the bush and I look after the business side of the company." Although they are a stump-to-roadside contractor, they also own three logging trucks.

The Chasse family history in forestry started in Quebec and continued in British Columbia when Jacques's father, Onidas, came to work for his brother, Lucien, in the Kootenay Valley as a loader operator. Later, when Lucien passed away, Onidas purchased his own loader and D6 Cat dozer, and continued to work in the Valley as a sub-contractor.

Jacques joined the forest industry at a young age, established Chasse Holdings, and grew the business over nearly four decades, now providing an opportunity for Brady to carry on the family tradition.

Over the years, Jacques' logging contracts took him to many different job sites throughout the Kootenay Valley, from Golden to Canal Flats, but since 1988, the company has logged primarily in the Parsons area north of Radium. It is a mountainous region involving a steady diet of steep slope logging.

"We work in terrain that is anywhere from flat ground to 60 per cent slope," says Jacques, "and the ground can vary from being wet to rocky."



Their employers over the years have been Revelstoke Sawmills, Slocan Forest Products, Crestbook Forest Industries, Tembec, and now Canfor, which has become the dominant sawmill operator in southeastern B.C. with its recent purchase of Tembec's sawmills in the Kootenay Valley.

Chasse Holdings has a 250,000 cubic metre annual contract to deliver logs primarily to Canfor's newly-renovated sawmill in Radium. Canfor has spent \$38 million to modernize its sawmill in Radium after it was shut down for three years and plans to spend another \$42 million on its sawmill in Elko, which is about two hours south of Radium.

Chasse says the reopening of the sawmill in Radium plus Canfor's investment to modernize it is having a very positive impact on the local economy by providing jobs, and also bringing some stability to local logging contractors concerning work opportunities into the future.

So with the forest industry taking a turn for the better in southeastern B.C. and with other area lumber businesses planning to restart their operations—thus opening up new logging opportunities—it seems the next generation of area loggers has a bright future ahead of it. Jacques says the current volume being harvested by Chasse Holdings is probably the most volume the company has harvested on an annual basis.

However, there will be new challenges along the way, including looking for ways to operate as efficiently as possible when faced with higher overhead costs, as well as adjusting to different styles of logging.

Jacques says that among his generation, there is still considerable enjoyment working within the logging industry, even if a typical day for both he and his son starts at 3:30 am and does not finish till about 6 pm. But when he first started out 38 years ago, there was also the opportunity to make good money, which he says is not the same for today's contractors. It's something the industry will have to consider if it wants to attract more young people to the industry in future, particularly with competition for employees coming from other industries.

Chasse Holdings has also had to make an adjustment in its logging style over the past year, to switch from tree length logging to cut-to-length (CTL) logging, which has required the purchase of another processor and hiring extra employees. Plus, it's been a bit of a learning curve to achieve the production numbers they want.

Their main log species are spruce, pine, balsam fir and Douglas fir. The average diameter on the logs is 8" to 14". They average four to five sorts at roadside. The spruce and pine are sorted by diameter and also in lengths, with the break points being 12', 16' and 20'. They also have a separate sort for power poles and for harvested fir.

Jacques says the focus on controlling the advance of the mountain pine beetle, by logging in areas infected, has yielded positive results in the overall quality of the wood basket in his area of operations.

"We did a lot of salvaging of pine beetle wood—I feel that we have a good handle on managing the pine beetle now, better than most places and it's not really a big concern anymore," he says. "We seem to have gotten control of it." They have been harvesting primarily green wood for the past four to five years.

At present, Chasse Holdings has 19 employees, with 17 in forestry operations and Shelly and Krystle working in the office. Jacques says they have done a tremendous job keeping up with the extra amount of administration that has come with growth, as well as with new reporting requirements from organizations like WorkSafe BC and B.C.'s Forest Safety



Council.

“That’s as important as the logging we are doing in the bush these days,” says Jacques. He says the company has been successful because it has been able to attract quality employees, even after the company was forced to lay them off for six months in 2007. All 11 employees they had at that time returned, and they are attracting more 20 and 30-year-olds to the industry as the business grows.

“At the end of the day, we can sit down, have some laughs and do it all over again the next day,” says Jacques.

The company is able to log 11 months of the year, taking only April off for spring break-up. Logging is focused on higher ground in summer, transitioning to lower ground about the end of December because of the snow pack that accumulates in the mountains at higher elevations. The snow can sometimes be as much as two metres deep.

The company’s fleet consists of two Tigercat L870C tilting feller bunchers and a Tigercat LX830C tilting feller buncher, which they will use to harvest logs in up to 55 per cent slopes. In steeper slopes, they will employ chainsaw operators. They have three rubber-tired skidders. Two are John Deere 848H skidders and one is a Tigercat 630C grapple skidder. Because they often must harvest logs in steep slope and deep snow, they have two Cat 527 tracked skidders to complement their rubber-tired skidders. In slopes between 35 and 50 per cent, they will retrieve the logs with their Cat tracked skidders down to a trail, where the rubber-tired skidders can take over. The Cat skidders will also sometimes help with building trails and roads.

Chasse Holdings has three processors equipped with Waratah 622B processing heads.

“The Waratah 622B is the properly sized head for the wood we are in,” says Jacques. “It seems to work well in that 6” to 20” range. Also, about 90 per cent of the contractors up and down the Valley use Waratah heads, local dealers stock the parts, and Waratah puts out a good product.”

Two processors are mounted on John Deere 2154D carriers and one is on a John Deere 2054D carrier. For loading logs, they have a John Deere 2454D carrier. For road building, they use a 2054D John Deere excavator, which they also use as a hoe chucker with a power clam head to retrieve logs to trails that have been hand fallen on steep slopes by the chainsaw operators. Logs retrieved by the hoe chucker are picked up by a tracked skidder and transported to flatter ground. Trees will also be hand fallen in riparian zones, areas where the ground is too wet for the feller buncher and near creeks.

Jacques says that service support is an important priority when Chasse Holdings makes an equipment purchase.

“Downtime is really something we can’t afford any more these days with our high production requirements,” Jacques says, adding that it has been a good time to purchase equipment over the past couple of years as they’ve noticed that prices on equipment have actually come down.

Resale value is also an important factor and for that reason, Chasse Holdings prefers to stick with brands that are well known in forestry applications with good track records. On average, they keep equipment for 10,000 to 14,000 hours before trading it in.