



Meeting customer needs--with solid equipment

Alberta's Wilderness Logging has built its business on providing a high level of customer service. And having solid, dependable equipment--including John Deere's new 2454D log loader--has been a big part of delivering that service.

By Tony Kryzanowski

The difference between logging contractors that make it and those that struggle in difficult times certainly depends on the financial fortunes of their forestry clients. But those that stick around also tend to have a strong focus on taking care of their customers.

Alberta's Wilderness Logging, owned by Perry and Linda Hussey, is one example of a logging company that is managing to hold its own in these tough times, and it's obvious that they pay attention to the small, but important, aspects of their operation. For example, Hussey takes forest retention in the cutblock very seriously, which helps to enhance the profile of his client, Sundance Forest Industries. Both Wilderness Logging and Sundance are headquartered in Edson.

Rather than leaving a few individual trees standing and calling it forest retention, only to see many of them blow over with the first big gust of wind, Wilderness Logging has made a point of leaving noticeable clumps of trees to provide higher quality forest cover for wildlife.

"So instead of providing habitat just for birds with a single tree, if you look at that clump of trees, you've got cover for moose, elk, deer, or whatever," says Hussey, during a tour of his operations. The retained area is also often close to a cutblock boundary so that wildlife only has a short distance to travel fully exposed.

In addition to making a commitment to quality forest management, sometimes it also helps to be a bit lucky. Hussey realizes that working for Sundance Forest Industries does afford him with better work security than contractors hitched to clients producing high volumes of softwood lumber.

Since its inception, Sundance Forest Industries has focused on the value-added market, seeking to capture the maximum value and recovery from each harvested log, going so far as to produce posts from undersized logs and poles from large logs. It only uses lodgepole pine, exchanging its incidental spruce and poplar with Weyerhaeuser's operations in Edson and Drayton Valley.

"I think working for Sundance gives me quite a bit more security," says Hussey. "They've treated me well over the years and we have a good business working relationship."

What Hussey also has is history with the sawmill.

Originally from Dawson Creek, B.C., Hussey went to work for a logging company in Grande Prairie in 1988 and three years later purchased a delimeter from them and established Wilderness Logging.

Hussey's company started working for Sundance Forest Industries in 1994, sub-contracting two delimiters to another contractor, while operating a processor and truck directly for the sawmill. In 2000, the Hussey family committed them-



selves to operating as a full-scale, stump-to-dump contractor after buying out another Sundance contractor. Linda is very active in the business, taking care of the office and the paperwork, while two of their four sons work in forest operations. The company has a total of 22 employees and another 17 workers through its sub-contracts.

Wilderness Logging's annual allowable cut is 300,000 cubic metres, and this is actually an increase now that Sundance has implemented its mountain pine beetle control program. Like other forestry companies operating on Alberta's eastern slopes, Sundance is targeting mature and over-mature wood in an attempt to deny the beetle its primary food source, as it spreads further east.

"We're still cutting larger blocks," says Hussey, "but we are trying to cut blocks adjacent to blocks that we cut upwards of 20 years ago so that there is a greater distance between the mature standing timber and the immature timber. That way, the beetle actually has to take flight." This has required some minor changes to Wilderness Logging's harvesting approach. It generally means more equipment moves so that the proper trees can be harvested.

The company logs 10 months a year, south of Edson on terrain that has both steep and flat terrain. The wood fibre comes in a variety of sizes, with some timber as large as 40" in diameter. All the wood is harvested and delivered to the mill because of the number of products manufactured. Hussey has tailored his equipment fleet so that he is able to minimize ground disturbance while at the same time working productively. The company targets harvest blocks on higher and drier ground in summer, leaving lower, wet areas for winter when they are frozen over.

Wilderness Logging owns a John Deere 903J feller buncher with a 22" full rotation head, and a sub-contractor operates a lighter, John Deere 853G feller buncher equipped with an FS head. It tends to work in a lot of the softer areas in summer.

The company's fleet also includes two John Deere 848H skidders. This redesigned larger sized skidder includes an 18 square-foot grapple and a longer wheel base than the 748, which Hussey says results in better flotation and less ground disturbance. The third skidder in his fleet is a Cat 535C skidder, and all three skidders are equipped with larger, size 35-5 tires.

Wilderness Logging uses processors at roadside exclusively. It owns and operates a Waratah 622B processor mounted on a John Deere 2054 carrier, while a sub-contractor operates two more of the same processor and carrier combination. The processor operators do a lot of merchandizing right at roadside in an attempt to capture maximum log value for the sawmill, although the logs undergo another sort in the mill yard.

Tree length material is delivered anywhere from 21' to 72', while cut-to-length logs are merchandized into 10'6", 12'6", 14'6", and 16'6" logs, depending on what makes the most sense.

For log loading, the company operates a Cat 325C log loader and a new John Deere 2454D log loader with a CWS butt'n top grapple.

"I prefer the butt 'n' top grapple although a lot of contractors are going to the power clam," says Hussey. "A power clam works really well for short wood and you can use it for tree-length, but to me it's not nearly as quick or as agile as a butt 'n' top."

Next to the feller buncher, the log loader performs perhaps the most critical function in a stump-to-dump operation,



because a fast, reliable, and high capacity loader means more log trucks loaded per shift and more wood delivered to the customer.

The John Deere 2454D log loader is a relatively new product, and Wilderness Logging has about 900 hours on its unit. So far, the company has not run into any unscheduled downtime with it, and Hussey says that he has had good uptime with all of his John Deere equipment.

“We needed a log loader that was obviously more easy to move around and a little quicker because when you are loading short wood you need something with a little more speed than a bigger log loader. It’s filled the bill well.”

The log loader weighs in at 77,823 lbs and has a standard transport width of 11’9”. Standard transport length is 47’ and standard height is 11’6”.

In terms of performance, the log loader has a lift capacity of 22,800 lbs. over the front at 20’, and a lift capacity of over 16,600 lbs. at 20’.

It comes equipped with a John Deere 6068H, 183 hp engine at 2,100 rpm. It is a six-cylinder engine with 414 cubic inch displacement.

“Although the other dealers have very good machines, I found that this log loader was more of a purpose-built machine,” says Hussey. “The weight, size, and power are what attracted me to this unit, so it was a combination of everything.”

John Deere lists a number of features that have been improved on the 2454D log loader, which they say has been designed for prolonged uptime. It has been designed with next-size-up components.

Among the improvements Deere lists are: improved horsepower; an updated hydraulic system that improves attachment performance, machine smoothness, and facilitates faster cycle times; greater reach and lifting capacity; increased swing torque resulting in more wood loaded per shift; increased tractive effort; external debris management and component protection to reduce downtime; remote mounted filters; dynamic test ports for easy oil sampling; and a standard 277-gallon fuel tank to extend run time between fill-ups.

Wilderness Logging is burning about 400 litres of fuel per 12-hour shift with this unit. Hussey says the only area where he could see room for improvement was a bit better climate control in the cab for the operator.

There is a noticeable preference for John Deere equipment in his fleet, and Hussey says that is simply a reflection of the quality uptime and service support he has gotten from Deere dealer Brandt Tractor, although he adds that service support from all the major equipment dealers has been good.

In the final analysis, it often just comes down to dollars and sense, especially in a challenging economic environment.

“Brandt Tractor has treated me very well and John Deere has stepped forward with some very good financing opportunities out of their finance group,” says Hussey. “When it comes down to dollars and sense, Brandt has been able to step out front for the most part.”