



## Tower Logging Has the Best Views

### NDC Timber Inc. - 30 Years of Corporate and Environmental Responsibility

*By Andrea Watts*

In John Evans' opinion, tower logging has the better views, and as a forest engineer for NDC Timber Inc. who has spent nearly 30 years overseeing high-country tower logging operations throughout Grays Harbor, Mason and Pacific counties, and southeast Alaska, he would know.

Shovel logging, road construction, and stream restoration are in NDC Timber Inc.'s portfolio of services, but its specialty has always been high-country tower logging.

NDC calls their yarder a BergSkag because it's part Berger and part Skagit, and it was recently rebuilt by Way Machine Inc. out of Centralia, Wash.

John says now that the BergSkag now has a bigger engine, extra drum, and longer span capability they can handle even longer span units.

#### **Good Pace**

On a job site overlooking the hills of southeastern Mason County, the yarder is being put to use with over 3,500' of cable John purchases from Harbor Haw, in Aberdeen, Wash., strung out between the tower and an old-growth Douglas-fir tree on a facing hillside. Before the Douglas-fir stand was cut, John walked the site to locate the tower placement and find potential stumps along the corresponding angle on the opposite hillside to serve as anchors so the skyline has the right amount of deflection.

Once the trees are felled, the hilltop landing is busy with the yarder hauling the trees up from below, a Cat shovel with a Waratah 22" processing head, delimiting and cutting the logs to length, and another shovel sorting and loading onto the logging truck. It is a flow of activity that John says is kind of graceful with everything dependent on the machinery working and everyone keeping pace so a steady flow of logs heads off the site.

#### **Leaner Team**

Nearly 25 full-time employees are employed by NDC; the number used to be 50, but even before the 2007 recession, the company was already becoming lean. During the busy times, NDC brings on retirees to work part-time, which they recognize as good for the community.

In years past, their crew was only busy half of the year, but in recent years, they are now busy 80 percent of the time. This year John says they are hoping for 90 percent. "[Our] intent is to be working."

Because they have a small but efficient workforce, NDC has to balance the number of jobs that the company can manage at any given time. On the particular day they are doing tower logging in southeastern Mason County, they also have crews at two other jobs sites: building a road in the Wynoochee Valley and a shovel logging operation. John explains that having a small crew means there is diversity in the work, which the guys like.



Of the jobs that NDC Timber Inc. takes on, tower logging is the bulk of their work, but they also build roads for Weyerhaeuser and Green Diamond Co. Their work in stream restoration is consistent but has tapered off in recent years because of agency cuts. Adding that service to their portfolio of expertise came about after a conversation with a fellow who worked at the Willapa Bay watershed, John explains. “It fit with the equipment and our people, and it was work we really enjoyed.”

### **Benefits of Tower Logging**

NDC foresees tower logging as a source of steady work for their company. Forest companies, such as Weyerhaeuser and Rayonier, are contracting out more tower logging operations. It’s more expensive, but the hillsides are where the timber is.

Depending on the job, John may have his crew do all the work or contract out portions; for the building of the new road, John contracted out the hauling of rock to a company based out of Raymond. The felling of the trees at the Mason County site was done by fallers who John describes as “old-school guys” who know their craft.

Unlike other operations, tower logging can be done year round, although in the summer the fire danger is greater so the crew must stop during the hottest part of the day. To accommodate a variety of jobs, NDC has in its equipment portfolio five logging trucks, one dump truck, two low boys, a mule train, the yarder, and a Berger two-drum machine that is its other piece of tower equipment. For road construction, the D5 and D8 road builders and two excavators are used.

### **Diversification**

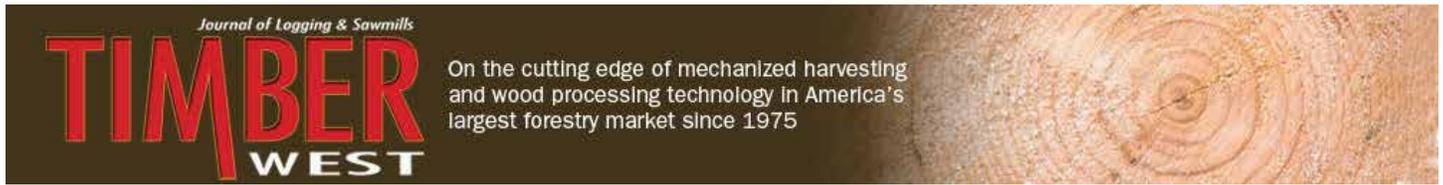
To diversify NDC’s revenue stream, Dell and John purchased property around the company headquarters off Schouweiler Tract Road over the years, and the investment has paid off in either leasing the land to businesses or selling parcels. When the future of the timber industry was uncertain because of the spotted owl issue, they started a joint venture with a Russian company to operate a reman sawmill that did secondary finishing of lumber that was sold to Japan.

“I learned a lot,” John says, and the business worked well until the business culture in Russia changed. He estimates he made 90 trips to Russia from 1992–1997 until NDC ended the contract.

### **Insurance Concerns**

One aspect of tower logging that concerns John is the L&I Industrial insurance rates. While their business model can accommodate the fluctuating costs of diesel and the expense of replacing cable nearly twice a year, the insurance rates have seen substantial increases.

“I’m worried if it doesn’t start going in the opposite direction, tower logging [may be] put out of business,” John says. While tower logging is more hazardous, it is not prone to more accidents than other logging operations. He routinely writes to his state representatives informing them of what these increases mean to NDC and their ability to keep people employed.



## **Safety, Stewardship, and Survival**

Along with providing living wages and steady employment for its employees, NDC is also committed to operating responsibly. We pay attention to keeping our operations safe, because “the industry is not forgiving in making mistakes,” John explains. They work primarily for Green Diamond Co., a company that he credits with remaining consistent even during the recession. “Green Diamond wants to do a good job [by being good stewards of the environment]. That’s why we want to work for them.”

Last year marked the 30th anniversary of the company that Dell Carter started in 1982 and John joined in 1986. The company is also very much like family: John’s wife, Kathy, and Dell’s younger sister, Zella, manage the office; Dell’s sons, Jared and Jeremy, work for the company in a variety of roles as does his granddaughter, Jesse. Because of their many years together, John and Dell make a great team, and their objective is the same — keep NDC Timber Inc. running so people remain employed.

“We’re really not trying to grow ... [and] I don’t subscribe that if you’re not growing, you’re not doing well,” John explains. Instead, they are committed to ensuring that the company thrives not only during the boom times of logging but, more importantly, survives the slow times