



With the Right Equipment, Any Job is Possible

Pulley Logging Corp., Sedro Woolley, Wash.

By Andrea Watts

Helicopter logging to thinning in an ecological reserve—for Greg Pulley, owner and founder of Pulley Corp., the question isn't what logging jobs has his company taken on, but rather, what jobs hasn't he taken on.

Pulley became a logger because, at 23, his father called him and said, "If you have a big tower, we have lots of old growth timber to log for Barbee Mill." That decision more than 30 years ago created a company that has survived the timber industry's booms and busts by adapting to changing silviculture prescription practices.

Busy Days

The day I tagged along with Pulley to visit his job sites, he had a full day planned after our 5:30 a.m. departure from Mountlake Terrace, a city 10 miles north of Seattle. First a visit to the city of Tacoma's Green River Watershed where one crew was working on a Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) thinning operation; over to Belfair to inspect another DNR thinning operation; and then to the coast to observe a tower logging clear-cut operation on the Quinault Indian Nation.

For Pulley, this amount of traveling isn't out of the ordinary; the previous day had him down in the Battle Ground area overseeing a helicopter logging operation.

Running multiple jobs sites throughout western Washington is a business model that sets Pulley Corp. apart from other logging companies. Though potential jobs are a distance from the company's base of operations in Sedro Woolley, if the calculations done by his timber manager, Don Anderson, demonstrate the jobs are profitable, Pulley won't hesitate to bid. This means that his company has worked at sites that include Fort Lewis and the Cedar River Watershed but also over in Yakima (in eastern Washington) for an agricultural district's thinning job, which Pulley described as being a blast.

A Forte for Thinning

Thinning operations are my company's forte, and "the larger the project, the better it is for us," he says. Sales can range up to eight million board feet.

Pulley began thinning almost by accident. In the early 90s, when the spotted owl issue halted federal logging operations, Pulley was working at a site that was blocked during the controversy. He had to look elsewhere for work. "I kept seeing DNR putting up thinning sales, and they weren't selling, so after acquiring a loan from Skagit Bank, I had the funds to bid on the jobs, and I have taken them on ever since. [These jobs are] a strong meal ticket for us to keep everyone employed."

Thinning operations can be challenging. They require good fallers (especially on tower sites) who can fall the trees in a way that not only minimizes damage to the surrounding trees but also makes it easier for crews to yard the trees. And while it is also challenging to work with the foresters assigned to oversee the operations, Pulley says, "At the end of the day, we're here to make the prescription work."



Flexibility

Pulley's company purchases timber sales and contracts logs, and he says this flexibility works well for the crews. Purchasing the timber sales that can be logged over the course of several years allows him to schedule work to take advantage of the market when it is good, or in the case during the recession, keep his crews working. And his experience logging with various equipment setups, whether shovel, tower, or helicopter, means Pulley can adapt to any site condition.

Helicopter logging came about on a job Pulley did with Brian Jorgenson's Timberline Helicopter in Port Angeles in 2006. Due to the additional costs associated with using helicopters, Pulley only considers the jobs if there is a reasonable margin of profit. At the time of the article, he had a helicopter logging job down in Battle Ground and had recently done some work in the Gifford Pinchot National Forest near Yacolt.

Keeping It Fun

On the job sites, Pulley has praise for every crew member, from Aaron Parker, his woods supervisor who is said to be a "great guy" with extensive timber knowledge and experience, to Duane Mefford, who is a "shovel logging machine." Truman Santiago, a recent hire, has credentials that stretch back 30 years. Of Anderson, the company's third timber manager and former faller, Pulley says, "I couldn't function without him."

"My reason for treating my guys well is simple," explains Pulley. "In this business, if you take the fun out of it, the guys will go away."

Pulley's crew consists of 38 dependable employees, including Pulley's wife Katie (the office accountant) and Melissa Anderson, who handles log and trucking accountability, L&I compliance, and assists Katie and Don —the company couldn't operate without her, according to Pulley.

Pulley also relies on partnerships to complete jobs, and he enjoys this side of the business. "I meet the neatest people in this industry," he says.

His company doesn't handle the hauling; instead that is contracted out to Bob Hillier, owner of Hire Trucking, whom Pulley has worked with for many years. Pulley Corp. runs 12-16 trucks on any given day throughout western Washington, and Pulley says Hillier always comes through.

Terry Rabuzite, owner of Aloha Excavation and a long-time friend from Pulley's school days, does road work as needed, and Blair Stadin, owner of Precision Forestry, is someone Pulley has worked with and would like to continue working with in the future because their companies worked well together.

Keeping Up with Equipment

These much-needed partnerships are also found in the financing side of the business. "When we started the business, it was with a few old pieces of equipment, and we grew very slow, saving up a bit as we went along," Katie says.

Pulley Corp.'s first piece was a Skagit Tower, and the equipment portfolio has expanded substantially over the years. As my dad said, "If you have the gear, you have the job," Pulley says.



To pull him through the recession, Pulley relied on the 071 Madill Yarder, 830L Tigercat with a Waratah processing head, and a 320 CAT log loader and D5H grapple CAT with a swing boom.

Pulley's current equipment is primarily CAT because of a rent-to-purchase program offered through NC Machinery. He praises the branch manager for giving his company a "great [financing] tool" that allows him to invest in new, efficient equipment. He also credits Skagit Bank, especially Kirk Hereford, his banker, as "always be[ing] right beside me" when it comes to lines of credit.

Out on the Green River Watershed job site we visited, Parker was running a CAT 320D, and Scott Radder was operating a Tigercat with the Waratah 622B head. In Belfair, Mefford was on a new 568 LL CAT while Sean operated a CAT 325D with a 623C Waratah head. The two tower logging sites had a 255 Thunderbird and a 071 Madill Tower, which were paired with a 225LL Doosan and CAT 320D.

Ever Evolving

Throughout his 30-year career, Pulley has witnessed many changes, including the end of logging operations in the city of Seattle's Cedar River Watershed. Pulley worked there during his company's first nine years, contributing to the 200 loads a day that came out of the watershed. But logging operations ceased after the public voted to place the entire area into a habitat conservation plan.

Pulley remembers the watershed's director vowing logging would never happen again. Twenty years later, logging did happen again, albeit as thinning operations, and Pulley found himself back working in the watershed.

Because the Cedar River Municipal Watershed is considered an ecological reserve with the goal of creating an old growth forest, silviculturist Rolf Gersonde's prescription called for selective thinning. Pulley's crew had to work slower and adapt their traditional yarding techniques to minimize the damage to the surrounding trees. As an example, instead of yarding trees uphill, they were yarded downhill.

In reflecting on the job, Pulley said the relationship with Gersonde and his company worked really well, and he is proud of the work they accomplished. With the Cedar River Municipal Watershed also being FSC certified, Gersonde asked if Pulley would be interested in obtaining FSC certification to keep the chain of custody intact. Though earning FSC certification wasn't a requirement of being awarded the job, Anderson said becoming certified made sense, and Pulley Corp. is the only logging company they know of that has this certification. He worked with Sustainable Northwest to earn the certification and described the process as pretty straight forward.

"Although the certification doesn't necessarily always yield a higher price at the mill, it just gives us an upper hand on certain sales," says Anderson.

Looking Ahead

Pulley is optimistic about the future, yet he also sees the reality of fewer younger people entering the workforce, the high L&I rates, increasing operating costs, and a public that doesn't fully understand the complexities of logging or realize that loggers are conservationists at heart.

"The people I know, we want to protect the resource the best we can," Pulley says. "We need to protect what we do...so it can continue in the future."