



Busy Looking Ahead

B&G Logging keeps crews going by booking years in advance

By Bob Bruce

At a time when a lot of loggers are hurting for work, Levi Beelart of B&G Logging in Philomath, Ore., keeps his crews busy almost year-round by booking jobs two and three years in advance.

“A lot of people won’t bid that far out because they think something better might come along in the next two years,” says Beelart, “but then it might not get any better at all. I like to lock ourselves in a couple years ahead. We may slow down for a month or two here and there based on quotas, but at least we know the work is there.”

New to the Industry

Levi is actually a fairly recent arrival to the logging business having started only five years ago. “My dad was working for a construction company when I was growing up,” says Levi. “He had a little KC 50 Cat that he used to do a few backyard jobs, and I started using that to do some backyard jobs on my own.”

It wasn’t a lot, but it was all Levi needed to get started. Having the equipment was a big help. “I didn’t have to go out and buy a \$50,000 Cat,” he says.

In the beginning, it was just Levi and one other guy, Paul Glatley – hence the name B&G Logging. After about a year, however, Paul left to go on his own. “We still work together now,” says Levi. “He has his own log company. He’s actually working for me now on another job. We get along real well.”

According to Levi, he sort of backed into going from backyard thinning to commercial work. “I was trying to find something to do with the Cat in the wintertime because we were running out of work. The only thing available at the time was yarder work. But Levi didn’t own a yarder.

“So we thought we’d buy a yarder and give it a try getting some yarder work. That was an experience of its own — it was tough learning how to use a yarder since I’d never used one before.”

It took him a couple of years to get good with the equipment, he says, but it paid off. “We landed some big jobs with some state road department contracts. Then we got some jobs with Hampton — they were kind of pushing us into growing even more because they had some big jobs for us. So we just kept getting bigger and bigger.”

New Strategy for a Struggling Industry

Then of course, the market fell through the floor. Jobs dried up. It was then that Levi decided it was time to re-examine his business strategy. Like most loggers these days, he realized he’d have to be willing to take on work farther and farther from his home base. He also decided he needed to be more proactive about finding work and getting it lined up months, maybe years, ahead of time.



“We’re based out of Philomath, but we go all the way to Tillamook. Distance can be the biggest problem — making sure it’s feasible to drive there and not spend six hours a day on the road round trip. Beyond that, it really doesn’t matter what the job is or what it looks like; we can log anything. We work for anybody and everybody.”

For example, his current job is a 295-acre thinning job for the Forest Service. After that, he has a 350-acre job lined up, followed by another 280-acre job.

“I bid way ahead,” he says. “I don’t low-ball, and I also don’t bid for the next month. I bid for the next year so they can’t put the pinch on us. If you need a job next week, you can get beat up on the price. A lot of these bigger timber sales take years to do because of restrictions and whatnot. So like with Hampton, which we work with regularly, we’ve got contracts with them all through next year that we bid two years ago.”

A Focus on Thinning

In general, Levi specializes in smaller diameter thinning, primarily because there is a lot of that kind of work available these days, and it is possible to bid the jobs out pretty far into the future. He doesn’t have a lot of equipment on hand compared to other operations, but as he points out, everything he has gets used. “Any iron we don’t use does not sit in the yard for very long. It gets sold or is gone because it’s dead weight just sitting there.”

His current equipment inventory includes a Link Belt 240 processor with a Waratah 623C, a Komatsu 270 log loader, a Link Belt 210 log loader, a Thunderbird TMY 50 yarder, and TMY 45 yarder, a Hitachi 400 yoder, a Koller 501 yarder, four Acme carriages (two 15s, a 22, and a 28), three Cat skidders, five fire trucks, a Komatsu 200 excavator, and a Kenwood T800 log truck.

He’s not particularly concerned about having the newest iron on hand, just as long as it is reliable and gets the job done.

“The secret to smart logging is having the right machines for the right job,” Levi says. “We take pride in our iron, but we don’t go out and buy brand new machines all the time. A lot of times we’ll fix up an older machine to our specifications. Ninety percent of our work is small log thinning, so we have the right machines to do that.”

Waratah Performance

But, he points out strongly, “The only thing we do favor is Waratah for processors.” The reason is not only the quality of the equipment but also the excellent level of customer support he receives.

“This is our second Waratah head,” says Levi. “We’ve been running it for 12 hours a day for maybe six months and have not had one down day on it. My other one, we ran for three years, and we would never have more than a half day downtime with it.”

He purchased the 623C because it fits right in with his “right machine for the right job” philosophy. “The 623 is a lot smaller than the 624 weight-wise, but it does a lot bigger log than the 622. For tree-length timber, it is ideal because it’s not too big and it’s not too small. You get a lot of versatility with it; you can go down to a couple of inches and up to a 30 inch log.”



When it comes to service and support, that's where the Waratah really shines, he says. "Any parts we need we can get overnight, so we don't have to stock them ourselves," he continues. "If there's any issues, we just call Triad [Machinery], the local rep for Waratah. Michelle is in Parts, and she'll come in on a Sunday afternoon and open the doors to get you a part if you need something. Triad is the best service out of any dealership I've ever worked with."

"Jim is the head mechanic there. He knows everything about Waratah or Link Belt. He can walk you through anything and get you fixed over the phone. We had a problem with the Komatsu, and Jim came up here and fixed it in half a day — and it's not even their machine.

Up ahead

Logging is an ever-evolving industry, and operations like B&G Logging are the ones that will survive this downturn. They are evidence that it takes the right equipment, crew, service support, and flexible thinking. TW