



Praise-worthy Processing Combo

Alberta's JHL Harvesting is putting Waratah's new HTH624C processing head and Waratah's all new heavy duty Fixed Wrist control option to work--and the combination is getting praise from operators.

By Tony Kryzanowski

Since the company's launch in 2001, Alberta's JHL Harvesting Inc. has evolved into an unqualified success as a limited partnership between two First Nations communities and pulp producer Alberta-Pacific Forest Industries (Al-Pac).

Operations supervisor Brian Beauregard remembers the long hours and tough times during the early years as the stump to roadside contractor and its "greenhorn" employees learned the ropes. Today, he's pleased with the level of professionalism and skill that each employee brings to their job.

The main reason why the Chipewyan Prairie First Nations and Heart Lake First Nations decided to start a logging venture with Al-Pac was to provide training and employment to First Nations people. For its part, Al-Pac made a commitment to the communities in and around its massive 58,000 square kilometre Forest Management Area, located in northeastern Alberta, that it would involve them in timber harvesting when their pulp mill began operations in 1993.

JHL Harvesting has a contract to deliver 180,000 cubic metres of aspen and softwood to Al-Pac and has eight pieces of equipment in its fleet. At present, it employs 12 workers, 85 per cent of whom are First Nations.

"There's definitely a lot of interest among First Nations people wanting to work for JHL Forestry," says Beauregard, who is a First Nations person himself. He has nearly 30 years experience working in the forest industry, primarily operating logging equipment.

JHL Harvesting not only has a group of dedicated employees. It also operates equipment with a proven track record--and has shown a willingness to invest in more technologically advanced equipment in an effort to meet Al-Pac's specific log size and forest management standards.

For example, the company recently purchased one of the first Fixed Wrist equipped Waratah HTH624C processing heads as part of its transition from using stroke delimiters for processing wood at roadside, to using processing heads.

JHL's Waratah harvesting head is attached to a Cat 325D FM carrier using Waratah's new Fixed Wrist configuration option. This Fixed Wrist option became available earlier this year and is designed to offer an alternative to the standard Waratah configuration that is normally sold.

David Lloyd, JHL Harvesting's general manager, says opting for the Fixed Wrist configuration and Waratah HTH624C series head has definitely worked out for the logging outfit.

Lloyd initially saw the possibilities and benefits of switching to Waratah processing heads from delimiters through the experience of another logging contractor working in the same area. That contractor was able to replace five delimiters with four Waratah processing heads, and the production improvement was noteworthy. The concept of using the new Waratah



C series processing head and the opportunity to mount the head using a Fixed Wrist configuration was particularly intriguing.

“One problem that we’ve had with training new operators was mastering a dangle head,” says Lloyd. “It takes quite a while if you are coming off a delimber on to a dangling head to get used to the motion that is required to process the wood and place it where you want it.” He says it is possible to learn the technique, but it takes a lot more effort.

What made the process of planning and making the transition to processing heads more challenging for JHL Harvesting was that Al-Pac has very precise standards for the length of its logs and the neatness of its decks, requiring the logs to be bookcase square beside the road. The logs, which average 65’ to 75’ in length, are processed down to 37’, with the remainder processed down to a 2” top. There is only a 6” plus or minus tolerance on the log lengths.

With the fixed wrist configuration, JHL Harvesting was able to train five operators on the machine in no time. Operators could not believe how quickly they were able to learn to process wood with this fixed wrist set-up versus a dangle head.

“It feels just like operating a backhoe,” says Dennis Thompson, who has over 30 years logging experience, including operating many dangle head-style attachments. “You have way more control of this head compared to a dangle head.”

Waratah’s new TimberRite measuring system was an added bonus, as it has proven very accurate based on the presets JHL Harvesting has programmed into it to meet Al-Pac’s specifications.

“It’s very quick and accurate to what Al-Pac is looking for as far as wood utilization goes,” says Lloyd, “and it takes away a major headache for the operators.”

Beauregard says JHL Harvesting opted for a Cat carrier with its Waratah HTH624C processing head because the company felt it was the right weight combination for the attachment.

In addition to the new Waratah processor and Cat carrier, the company also operates a John Deere 903J feller buncher that it purchased in 2008, a John Deere 748H skidder that it also purchased in 2008, an older John Deere 748GIII skidder as well as an older John Deere 648 skidder, and two John Deere 2054 Logger carriers, one equipped with a Denharco 4400 delimber and the other equipped with a Lim-mit 2100C delimber. Rounding out the fleet is a Cat D6T dozer used for road building.

About 160,000 cubic metres of the logging contractor’s annual harvest is aspen, with the remainder being softwood. The diameter of the aspen at the butt is between 14” and 16”, on average.

The relationship between Al-Pac and its First Nations partners is a good fit, as the pulp producer has a reputation for going that extra mile to minimize the environmental impact of its logging operations.

Beauregard says JHL Harvesting’s logging philosophy draws heavily upon its aboriginal roots, taking a “respect the land” approach as much as possible. The company is careful to leave significant clumps in each cutblock to assist with maintaining biodiversity and forest regeneration, and is also careful to build crossings in low lying areas even when the requirement is marginal to minimize environmental damage. He notes that the company never clearcuts a harvest block.



“Any trees that are unmerchantable, I get the guys to leave a clump and then we also leave some merchantable timber around it to protect it,” he says. “The odd time, I will also have them leave rub stumps, up to about eight feet high. That way, when the skidder hauls out the logs, it is not rubbing against any of the trees in the clump. What they will do is rub against the rub stump.”

Recently, the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Businesses recognized Al-Pac for its commitment to building positive relations with aboriginal people and communities. The company participates in the Council’s Progressive Aboriginal Relations Program (PAR) and in February 2009, it was re-certified at the program’s gold level. Other companies and organizations achieving the gold level were Canada Post, Syncrude, and IBM.

To maintain its gold status, Al-Pac takes part in a comprehensive self-assessment exercise, where it assesses its individual performance working with aboriginal communities. This is verified by an independent organization called the National Quality Institute, which then passes on its recommendations to an independent PAR program jury to determine whether a company’s level should be bronze, silver, or gold. A gold standard means that a company has achieved a level, “exhibiting leadership and sustainability”.

In addition to JHL Harvesting, Al-Pac also has a partnership with the Wabasca First Nation in Bigstone Forestry Inc.

For its part, JHL Harvesting conducts the majority of its log harvesting east of Athabasca. It operates for nine months a year, with employees coming from both local First Nations communities and from out of province.

Lloyd has been instrumental in helping both JHL Harvesting and Bigstone Forestry to get off the ground. He was seconded from Al-Pac initially to work as general manager for Bigstone Forestry, and now with JHL Harvesting, and is in charge of managing day-to-day operations for the company.

Lloyd noted that Al-Pac has encouraged First Nations communities to become involved in other forestry-related activities besides timber harvesting. The company also provides employment to First Nations contractors in such activities as road building and reclamation.