



The Beast takes on beetle wood

There's wood product and bioenergy potential in the fibre debris left over from mountain pine beetle harvesting efforts in the B.C. Interior--and Pine Star Logging and Double D Logging are tapping into that with Bandit Beast mobile grinders.

By Jim Stirling

A grapple loader feeds limbs, butts and branches into a mobile grinder. This machine converts the material to chips which are automatically fed directly into an awaiting truck parked at roadside. Welcome to the future and a new era in wood fibre utilization in British Columbia.

Pine Star Logging Ltd., a contractor based in Prince George, was quick to recognize the potential and switched gears to accommodate this new and growing market: the demand for logging debris to fuel value added wood product plants like pellet manufacturers and bio energy producers.

Pine Star has found a ready market for the chipped material at Pacific BioEnergy Corp.'s pellet manufacturing plant in Prince George. "This is the beginning of a brand new industry because what was once considered waste now has value," observes Keith Brandner, Pine Star's manager.

"Plus, the portability of this operation means we can go wherever we need to and harvest what has been previously been left behind on the forest floor."

Those volumes are huge. The mountain pine beetle epidemic has forced the licencees' logging contractors into salvaging the soundest sections of the trees for manufacture into commodity lumber products--and leaving the rest in the bush. The debris is piled and windrowed in mini-mountains with much of it scheduled for burning.

The emergence of a more sensible approach to dealing with the abandoned wood volumes came at an opportune time for Pine Star. "We were looking at small business sales but less and less wood was available. We had to decide what else we could do and we had to move quickly," recalls Brandner. Last fall, Pine Star did just that, establishing the market with Pacific BioEnergy.

And they also went shopping for a grinding machine that could handle the demands of the roadside wood debris material. "We looked at other machines but the Beast made the best product for the mills we supply and the most consistent size of piece. Plus the advantage of the dealership," explains Brandner.

The Beast recycler is manufactured by Bandit Industries Inc., with its corporate headquarters in Remus, Michigan. The Bandit dealer is Brandt Tractor Ltd. with sales, parts and service in 21 locations across western Canada.

The Beast 3680 model, one of eight towable and tracked models features a 42 inch diameter by 63 inch wide cuttermill with a 35 inch by 60 inch opening. The unit has a self-propelled steel track undercarriage and according to Bandit, the grinder can produce up to 500 cubic yards an hour depending on the material type being processed.

Attaining good production was not an issue for Pine Star. They can produce about 40 green tonnes an hour, reports Brand-



ner. The Beast's availability was also good during its first 350 hours on the clock. "It's pretty simple to work."

Brandner expected to take about 300 loads of chips off a block on a recent job. Interestingly, Pine Star had logged the block originally and had taken 63,000 cubic metres of logs from it. "Our dad, (Ray) said it was the first time in 30 years we got paid for everything out in the bush," laughs Brandner.

Not surprising for a developing venture, there are issues that need to be resolved. One is the availability and scheduling of chip trucks, so the grapple loader and grinder don't have to sit around idle, waiting for the next truck to arrive. Another is the way the piles of debris are positioned. They were intended primarily for burning, not reclamation. The piles can be problematic to break apart and feed into the grinder, especially when the temperature is 30 below and better.

Double D Logging Ltd is another logging contractor in this vanguard of change. "Because we have a logging background, we learn to react quickly," points out principal Dave Jacobs. He, along with brother, Darren, also run Northern Engineered Wood Products (2007) Inc., a manufacturer of particleboard, based in Smithers, B.C.

"One of the reasons we started with this is the industry downturn and the shifts that has caused in fibre supply," explains Jacobs. "We have to have some sort of fibre and this (roadside material) is pretty close size-wise that we can work around it," he adds. "It's challenging, what has to be done, but when it comes right down to it, you do it."

Double D also acquired a Bandit-made Beast grinder. One, a wheeled unit, produced about 200 loads for the Smithers plant and a tracked unit, acquired last November and working north of Prince George, had produced about 250 loads. "One thing with the grinder, there's a required amount of maintenance daily," he recommends. "But do it and it'll work well and the availability is there."

Apart from extracting additional value from a publicly-owned resource, Jacobs sees a welcome reduction in the amount of burning going on in the bush, especially when close to communities. "We're going from zero value right now to some value. I honestly believe it's a way of the future, to deal constructively with what I consider to be a brush/waste problem."

Liam Parfitt would concur. He's worksite product specialist with Brandt Tractor in Prince George, who handles the Bandit line of recyclers.

He's bullish about the future for the machines and the emerging industry in the region. "There's so much wood out there and there's so much potential demand for the wood out there," he says "Wood that's not good for anything else. It's all energy." And utilizing it is all opportunity.