



Bid Right does more than all right

A new carbon offset program from B.C.'s Central Interior Logging Association offers contractors potential fuel savings for their equipment--and cash in their pocket from selling the carbon offsets that result from the more efficient equipment operations.

By Jim Stirling

It's been quite the millennium so far.

Through some of the industry's most daunting periods, Bid Right Contracting Ltd. has maintained consistent growth in its log harvesting business and has successfully diversified into the accredited training of resource equipment operators.

That lone machine was an excavator and O'Brien's focus was the silvicultural sector. "We worked mainly for the Ministry of Forests and doing piling and mounding for a couple of licencees," he recalls.

"It's been a busy 10 years," understates Bid Right Contracting president Dan O'Brien (left). It was only in the early 1990s that O'Brien began his career in the forest industry with a single machine. "Now we operate about 50 machines."

The equipment fleet began moving into expansion mode when Bid Right started into contract logging private wood and bidding on B.C. Timber Sales volumes.

A pivotal point in the company's development came in 1998-99 when Bid Right began bunching and processing for Canfor Corp., in B.C.'s lower Fraser Valley. That helped lead to mechanical harvesting for Canfor's Englewood Logging Division on Vancouver Island (Englewood has since been sold to Western Forest Products).

Bid Right was able to capitalize on other opportunities in southern B.C., including working for International Forest Product operations in Hope and on the Sechelt Peninsula. "Meanwhile, we had continual operations in Prince George, logging stump to dump," continues O'Brien.

"In 2006, we acquired an evergreen licence with West Fraser in Quesnel and logged about 160,000 cubic metres a year. That was followed two years later with the acquisition of a licence for plus or minus 200,000 cubic metres a year for Canfor in Mackenzie."

The forestry town of Mackenzie, about 190 kilometres north of Prince George was amongst the hardest hit by the collapse of the U.S. housing market and the subsequent recession. Now, in 2010, it is struggling back up on its economic feet, aided primarily by the re-start of Canfor's Mackenzie operation. The sawmill and planer complex is back to running two daily shifts.

"This year," estimates O'Brien, "we'll be logging about 400,000 cubic metres between all our operations."

The operator training component of the company probably had its roots when Bid Right was logging for Englewood Division. "We trained their operators on feller bunchers and processors." Logging crews on the B.C. coast are often unfamiliar with operating the mechanical harvesting equipment that's normal on interior logging shows.

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But the real motivational crunch came around 2005, stimulating the creation of O'Brien Training. "There was a shortage of operators and a shortage of operator training for forest industry workers," explains O'Brien. "So we decided to be proactive."

Actual operator training began in 2006. "It takes time to become certified as a school," he adds. O'Brien Training Ltd. is registered with the Private Career Institution of B.C. and the Industry Training Authority.

The trade school is also a Safe Certified company with the B.C. Forest Safety Council.

The school offers a range of training, compliance and certification courses necessary for people to become "workplace ready" in the industry.

The courses are designed for both novice operators and those with varying degrees of past experience operating equipment. The machine options for forestry equipment operators course include butt n' top loader; dangle and stroker type processor; feller buncher; grapple skidder and forwarder.

"Today, on the training side, we have 16 machines and five trucks," says O'Brien. He adds the school's equipment was purchased specifically for the training process.

In 2007, O'Brien augmented Bid Right's training component with the acquisition of an existing company, Taylor Professional Driving in Prince George. This school offers a range of professional driving training and endorsements for industrial classes of vehicles, including logging trucks and low bedding. The school has expanded with the formation of professional driver training divisions in Fort St. John and Prince Rupert, and an associate operation in Nanaimo.

"On the school side, we now employ 15 full time people including a salesman," says O'Brien.

Bid Right operates all its own harvesting equipment on its Quesnel and Mackenzie sides. The company also has three logging trucks and two low beds to move its equipment fleet where and when it's needed.

Log harvesting in Quesnel is close to 100 per cent beetle killed lodgepole pine while further north in Mackenzie, the beetle wood is mixed with other species.

A mix also summarizes the manufacturers of the approximately 35 pieces of harvesting equipment Bid Right has assembled to harvest its Quesnel and Mackenzie tenures and other activities.

It can pay dividends to be discerning. "We do prominently run Cat equipment but we have a variety of machines. For example, we recently bought two new Komatsu processors," he says.

Auctions have been a fruitful source of good used equipment as contractors fall victim to the recession and/or opt to get out of the log contracting business."But the mountain of equipment has flattened out," O'Brien observes. "We're coming out of it."



O'Brien reckons the regional logging contractor ranks have been reduced considerably, perhaps by about 35 per cent because of attrition and the recession. But there are also fewer mills to service. However, he notes, the demand for fibre is increasing once more and is likely to continue into the future.

“Those still around can take advantage of that,” he predicts.