



Attention to Details

Brunoe Logging finds success by paying attention to the details, looking to the future, and remembering the people

By Bob Bruce

Forty years ago, Mickey Brunoe got a chain saw and a self-loader and started salvage logging for Warm Springs Forest Products. As soon as his two young sons, Bruce and Robert, were old enough, they pitched in with their dad, and Brunoe Logging became a family operation.

Over the years, the industry has seen a lot of changes -- as everyone knows -- but Brunoe Logging has survived and prospered thanks to a simple set of rules that Mickey put in place: Keep your eye on the details, look to the future, remember your people, expect you may get knocked down along the way, and when you do get knocked down, don't treat it as a failure but as an opportunity to learn.

"We started out as a small salvage outfit harvesting blow-down and beetle kill," says Bruce. "All we had was a self-loader, a 666 Clark cable skidder, and a couple of fallers." The company grew slowly over the next twelve years. However, in the early 1980s, they began to get work logging green timber. "We got ourselves a Cat 980 front end loader, got rid of the self-loader, hired some more fallers, and we were in the game."

Moving from Big Wood to Small

In the 90s, things changed. "Before the 1990s, I never imagined that 100-log loads would be a normal thing. I don't think anybody did. But then everything switched from big wood to small wood. You didn't see those three-log loads anymore."

Harvesting higher volumes meant having to consider different types of equipment. "We were working three sides at a time, so we got a couple of Cat 518 skidders with the grapples." But Bruce was reluctant to invest in too much new equipment too soon, and eventually the number of men he needed to have in the brush to keep up production became an issue.

"I think you need to have at least 4 or 5 guys falling trees per side to stay productive," he says. "But when we started getting into that small stuff, we had a dozen or more fallers out there, and it got uneconomical. When the mechanized feller bunchers and delimiters came out I was really stubborn about changing, but I saw those guys out there using feller bunchers, saving time, and having lower workmen's comp expenses, and I saw the writing on the wall. I was probably one of the last ones to change, but a guy has to do what he has to do to survive, or he's not going to be doing it anymore."

The Subcontracting Solution

These days, Brunoe runs a Linkbelt 240LX delimeter and a Timberline delimeter. They no longer employ a large crew of fallers, but that's not a result of purchasing their own feller buncher. According to Bruce, the best solution he's found so far is to subcontract the falling to someone else. The benefits to him are greater efficiency and lower cost.



“Now we run just two sides. One does green wood, and the other does salvage when it’s available. Contracting out the falling has really worked well for us. The guy can come in, cut it, and lay it out, and then we bring it into the landing tree-length, delimb it, cut it to length, sort it, and then ship it to the mill.” Bruce owns a couple of log trucks and contracts out for any additional hauling as needed.

Long Term Relationships

Bruce considers himself extremely fortunate to enjoy a long relationship with Warm Springs Forest Products. For one thing, it has kept his family in business all these years with steady work.

Warm Springs owns in the neighborhood of 664,000 acres of timber, containing considerable diversity among terrain and species. The diversity has caused Bruce to employ people and equipment that can handle the different requirements of large and small wood. At the same time, the fact that the Consolidated Tribes own such a large area of managed forest allows him to offer his workers a fairly stable employment situation -- something not always found in the logging industry.

“We log all through the base of Mt. Jefferson to Mt. Hood,” he says. “We’ve got pine, Douglas fir, noble fir, silver fir, and all the different species. We cut small diameter wood, and for that we use the Linkbelt 240LX, which can handle 16 to 18 inch diameters and does really well for the smaller wood. We also cut big diameter wood, and for that we use the Timberline delimeter, which can go up to around 24 inches. They are both really good machines that have helped us throughout the years.”

Although the Warm Springs timberlands are geographically fairly diverse, very little of it requires tower logging. “Some of the places we log are really rocky and others are pretty wide open. There are some areas where it’s really steep, but we don’t do any tower logging. We use our tractors to just go straight down the hill and blaze a trail. Then the feller buncher can come in and harvest the trees. Once the trees are all bunched, the skidders back up and haul them out.”

Good Fallers are Hard to Find

He still uses guys with chainsaws for the salvage logging since, in most of those situations, it’s a selective harvest requiring more delicacy and brute force. As far as getting guys out in the brush, who know what they’re doing and truly enjoy doing it, Bruce admits that, just like everyone else in the industry, he’s finding it harder and harder to attract and hold on to qualified workers -- especially fallers.

“Good fallers are definitely a dying breed,” he says. “We really have to search hard to find guys who still want to do that work. Once we do find them, though, we really try to take care of them. I think that sometimes what we have to offer is we don’t move around too much, so local guys who want to stick around and stay home, like in Prineville or Madras or Warm Springs, like working for us.”

Being Prepared

One of the keys to success, according to Bruce, is not losing sight of where you are headed or how you plan to get there. “You’ve got to know what’s coming around the next corner all the time,” he says. “We try to travel and look at what the new things are, what’s happening in the industry, and how other loggers are doing things.”



He also acknowledges the ongoing support provided by Warm Springs Forest Products in terms of being a steady and reliable customer. “With the economy being the way it is right now, I don’t really know about the future. I don’t think anybody really knows. You just kind of go with what you have.”

“We always plan our year ahead, and we plan like we’re going to have work, but it really depends ultimately on what the Tribe will do and what their plans are. The mill kind of fills us in on what the future looks like from their end, and when it gets to the point where they’re not going to go anymore I guess that’s when you have to go out and start bidding jobs at other mills and other places.”

“But,” he points out, “that hasn’t happened yet.”