

THE VOICE OF THE TIMBER INDUSTRY

TIMBER BULLETIN

DULUTH, MINNESOTA

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2020

VOLUME 76

**Looking for an Edge:
Fletcher Trucking**

**TPA Self-Insurance
Program Success**

**Loggers Begin
Receiving Relief**





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Volume 76
September/October 2020
Duluth, Minnesota

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ON THE COVER

Fletcher Trucking's Chad Auer skids harvested aspen to the landing. For more on Fletcher Trucking, please see page 8.

The Timber Bulletin is published six times annually, in February, April, June, August, October and December by the Minnesota Timber Producers Association, located at 903 Medical Arts Bldg., 324 W. Superior St., Duluth, Minn. Minnesota Timber Producers Association members receive the Timber Bulletin at an annual subscription rate of \$25 which is included in their membership dues. Periodicals postage paid in Duluth, Minnesota. Advertising rates and data on request. The views expressed in the Timber Bulletin do not necessarily reflect the views or opinions of the Minnesota Timber Producers Association.

Postmaster: Please send address corrections to **TIMBER BULLETIN**, Minnesota Timber Producers Association, 903 Medical Arts Bldg., 324 W. Superior St., Duluth, Minnesota 55802, Phone 218-722-5013.
ISSN: 10973532 - USPS: 016208



UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE® (All Periodicals Publications Except Requester Publications)

Publication Title: **Timber Bulletin The Voice of the Timber Industry** Publication Number: **10973532** Filing Date: **9-14-2020**

Issue Frequency: **B1 - Monthly** Number of Issues Published Annually: **6** Annual Subscription Price: **\$25.00**

Complete Mailing Address of Headquarters or General Business Office of Publisher (Not printer):
324 W. Superior St., Ste 903 Duluth, MN 55802 Complete Mailing Address of Publisher, Editor, and Managing Editor (Do not leave blank):
324 W. Superior St., Ste 903 Duluth, MN 55802

Publication Title: **TPA Services, Inc. 324 W. Superior St., Ste 903 Duluth, MN 55802**

Publication Title: **Mike Birkeland** Complete Mailing Address: **324 W. Superior St., Ste 903 Duluth, MN 55802**

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Publication Title: **TPA Services, Inc. 324 W. Superior St., Ste 903 Duluth, MN 55802**

Publication Title: **Minnesota Timber Producers Assn. Duluth, MN 55802**

13. Publication Title: **Timber Bulletin**

14. Issue Date for Circulation Data Below: **Sept, Oct 2020**

15. Extent and Nature of Circulation

15. Extent and Nature of Circulation	Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months	No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date
a. Total Number of Copies (Net press run)	800	800
b. Paid Distribution (Net press run)	501	501
c. Paid Distribution Outside the Mail (including Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, Counter Sales, and Other Paid Distribution Outside USPS®)	103	103
d. Paid Distribution by Other Classes of Mail Through the USPS (e.g., First-Class Mail®)	N/A	N/A
e. Total Paid Distribution (Sum of 15b, 15c, and 15d)	604	604
f. Free or Nominal Rate Outside-County Copies Included on PS Form 3841		
g. Free or Nominal Rate In-County Copies Included on PS Form 3841		
h. Free or Nominal Rate Copies Mailed at Other Classes Through the USPS (e.g., First-Class Mail®)	12	12
i. Free or Nominal Rate Distribution Outside the Mail (Carriers or other means)	15	15
j. Total Free or Nominal Rate Distribution (Sum of 15f, 15g, 15h, and 15i)	27	27
k. Total Distribution (Sum of 15b and 15j)	631	631
l. Copies not Distributed (See Instructions to Publishers #4 page #3)	137	137
m. Total (Sum of 15k and 15l)	800	800
n. Payment Paid (PSR divided by 100 times 100)	91.00	91.00

If you are claiming electronic copies, go to line 16 on page 3. If you are not claiming electronic copies, skip to line 17 on page 3.

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16. Electronic Copy Circulation

16. Electronic Copy Circulation	Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months	No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date
a. Paid Electronic Copies		
b. Total Paid Print Copies (Line 15c) + Paid Electronic Copies (Line 16a)	606	606
c. Total Print Distribution (Line 15b) + Paid Electronic Copies (Line 16a)	613	613
d. Payment Paid (Sum Print & Electronic Copies) (100 divided by 100 + 100)	91.00	91.00

I certify that 95% of all my distributed copies (electronic and print) are paid above a nominal price.

17. Publication of Statement of Ownership

This publication is a general publication, publication of this statement is required. Will be printed in the **Sept/Oct 2020** issue of this publication. Publication not required.

18. Signature and Title of Editor, Publisher, Business Manager, or Owner: **Mike Birkeland** Date: **Sept 14, 2020**

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President's Column



With the wind gusting up to 30 MPH on this early day in October, the leaves are flying all over the place. Signs of fall are all around us. I recently had the opportunity to take a short trip out west to do a couple days of prairie dog hunting. Fall is most definitely the most favorite time of year for me. Brisk mornings and warm afternoons are hard to beat. Also a time for loggers to get ready for winter. Looking forward to a safe and productive season for all of us in the busiest portion of the year.

Congratulations to Scott Dane from ACLT for being selected to the President's export council. The council is an advisory committee on international trade. This should bring an opportunity for the timber products voice to be heard when trade polices are discussed. Good

Luck Scott!

My term as TPA President concluded with the Annual Membership meeting, so this is my last article for the Timber Bulletin. It has been a year full of challenges for TPA. From losing our Executive Vice President to mill closings. Covid-19 has dished out more delays, cancellations, and obstacles than any of us care to talk about. It is my hope that we can look forward to better times for our industry that we all care so deeply about. With the gridlock in politics it is more important now than ever to keep our membership strong to protect our interests in the timber industry. I know that our new President, Rod Enberg, will do a great job in keeping our industry sustainable. I want to thank our membership for giving me the opportunity to serve. To the TPA staff, who do a great job of keeping our interests at the forefront of all the agencies on their toes, thank you, for your diligence in keeping the organization running smoothly.

With hunting season just around the corner, remember to be safe and enjoy all that fall has to offer!

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Executive Vice President's Column



I started writing this column with politics and the election in mind. As I write, the topic is dominating news cycles, social media, and coffee shop conversations.

But by the time you read this the presidential election could well be decided ... or maybe not. Delayed counts for mail-in ballots could add drama in some parts of the country—especially contested states with deadlines that extend beyond the election date.

Will Minnesota make a difference in the Presidential race? We'll see. Our state was a focal point for both campaigns with strong advertising buys and visits from both candidates and surrogates through September.

We've also heard the saying – all politics are local. At TPA, we've been watching all races closely and have been in touch with candidates at the congressional, legislative, and county board levels. The results in these races are important to loggers and truckers as well. After the election dust settles, we'll be working with decision-makers who understand the need for healthy and sustainable forests – and healthy and sustainable logging operations.

We've had an awesome fall season. It's been mostly dry. That always helps keep equipment moving in and out of the woods – and it keeps timber on landings, loaded onto trailers, and/or hauled to mills. Hopefully, it sets up for a safe and productive winter harvest season as well. So – remember to put safety at the top of the list each day—every day—whether you're working in the woods, or...

Hunting. For many of us, hunting season is top of mind right now. Thankfully, in Minnesota, our forests provide abundant habitat for a wide

range of wildlife species across the state's 17 million acres of forestland.

As always (and with any audience), it's worth recognizing the fundamental role that logging plays in maintaining healthy forests, creating habitat for wildlife, keeping water clean, and the climate clear. All that, while providing essential products that keep our families informed, warm, safe, and comfortable.

Loggers know this. And it's important that others—especially those who think you “whittle wood” to make lumber, building products, or paper (that is an actual quote from a city-dweller I recently spoke with).

The point about healthy forests is worth revisiting – especially with the wildfires out west this year – fires that resulted in death, destruction, and devastation across California, Oregon, and Washington.

Unfortunately, headline chasers and newsmakers created the “narrative” that pointed to climate change as the reason for the fires. They labeled the wildfires “climate fires.”

But amid the smoke, the flames, the rhetoric, and the destruction, there is way more to the western wildfire story than just climate change. Perhaps the finger-pointers should look in the mirror – because the lack of forest management for nearly 30 years played a significant role in the devastating fires. The result: historic wildfires that unleashed tons of stored carbon into the atmosphere.

It's a different story in Minnesota. We have different forest cover – and a different “climate” than California. But we also benefit from active forest management, and an outlook across public and private land that balances competing views and use of the forest. That, in turn, benefits our climate with the growth and use of trees that store carbon – whether on the stump or in products that sequester carbon and benefit the world.

Forest Health is an important issue for all Minnesotans. TPA has long supported policies and

legislation that improve the health of Minnesota's forests. If you're talking with a friend, neighbor, or family member that doesn't know – here are a few friendly reminders to share:

- Healthy forests fight climate change by storing and sequestering carbon.
- Healthy forests provide habitat for wildlife and ensure an abundant supply of clean water.
- Healthy forests provide fiber for loggers and the Minnesota's forest product industry, creating jobs and growing our economy.
- Minnesota's forestland acres have increased by nearly six percent over the past 40 years. There are 1,084,000 acres more forest in Minnesota now than in 1977 -- a rate of more than 25,000 acres per year.
- We grow three times as much wood as we harvest. Our forests are more balanced, better managed, and healthier than ever.

This is a narrative that doesn't generate headlines – but our story benefits our state, our nation, and the world. Let's hope the headline chasers catch on – regardless of who wins elections!

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Member Feature...



Edward Casterlow, Zack Fletcher, Al Denny, Shawn Fletcher, Chad Auer, Chip Fletcher, and Aaron Schultz of Fletcher Trucking.

Looking for an Edge

Two weeks ago, Shawn Fletcher took delivery on his first cut-to-length processor. This morning he's at the controls of the John Deere 703JH with a Waratah head, cutting oak logs into eight-foot lengths on a logging job northeast of Brainerd for a nearby Amish mill.

"I want to utilize the processor in the pine and all the off species," Fletcher says. "Odd, random lengths and stuff like that. I think it'll be more profitable. When we're doing pine, we cut 16-footers, nine-footers, and eight-footers. And then when we're doing oak, part of the time we're cutting eight-footers and seven-footers. So it works better than the slasher for the odd lengths and you can sort it really well."

Using the processor is also a way to free up his slasher and the rest of

this conventional logging crew to focus on the 800 cords of aspen on this Crow Wing County sale. For a company with two full conventional crews as well as a crew focusing on chipping, the cut-to-length processor is something different, an experiment that isn't inexpensive. But Fletcher has always been one to try something new.

"It just seems like we try to expand every year a little bit of something," Fletcher says. "Our company's always growing every year. We're always looking for that little edge, I guess."

Fletcher grew up in Brainerd. His dad Don made his living logging and trucking, taking much of his wood to the paper mill in Sartell, as well as a transfer yard in Brainerd for Potlatch's Bemidji stud mill. As

a result, Shawn was surrounded by the business when he was a kid.

"I'd cut the pile up with a chain saw," Fletcher says. "I did it in the summers when I wasn't in school. I'd also run cable skidder. We hand felled the wood and probably got our first buncher, a Hydro-Ax pincher, when I was 14."

When he graduated from Brainerd High School in 1988, Shawn bought a truck from his dad and started Fletcher Trucking, hauling wood for the father's business. After a couple of years he bought a belly dump, and left the logging business, hauling dirt and gravel in the summertime. In the winter months, he'd take his business to Texas to do the same there.

"We mostly worked in San Antonio," Fletcher says. "We were



Aaron Schultz operates a John Deere 2154G stroke delimeter with a Pro Pac boom on Fletcher's Trucking's job northeast of Brainerd.

in Austin some, and we were in Phoenix, Arizona too. Wherever the work was, that's where we went. But we were in San Antonio a lot more than anywhere, I think."

Over time, opportunities grew, and Fletcher added trucks and drivers. But after about ten years he grew tired of the back and forth between Brainerd and Texas.

"I kind of got sick of going down south and I wanted to stay home," he says. "So I started logging in the winter."

Fletcher continued the dirt and gravel work in the Brainerd area during the summer months. But

armed with the knowledge he'd picked up from his dad's business while growing up, he put together a conventional logging crew for the wintertime, hauling their wood to the Weyerhaeuser Trus Joist mill in Deerwood.

"I learned a lot from my dad's great work ethic," Fletcher says. "I think I came back to logging because I grew up doing it. You kind of go back to your roots."

A lot has changed since then. Deerwood has closed, but Fletcher's moved into other markets and that effort to expand a little each year is working out. These days Fletcher

is up to three logging crews: two running conventional equipment, and a third that comes in after harvesting operations to chip the tops and limbs. The harvested roundwood is hauled to a variety of places, including Sappi, Norbord, PotlatchDeltic, Cass Forest Products, and Christensen Forest Products in Pine River, as well as an Amish maker of pallet and furniture parts. Most of Fletcher's logging equipment is newer, which means more investment and payments, but it's under warranty when things go wrong.

"We just try to keep newer stuff," Fletcher says. "Newer, bigger, faster, and less repairs and breakdowns. More logging, less mechanic work."

Logging is now a year-round business, but it isn't the company's only profit center. As the company's



Shawn Fletcher took delivery on this John Deere 703JH cut-to-length processor two weeks ago. Here, he uses it to cut harvested oak to eight foot lengths.



Chad Auer drives Fletcher Trucking's Tigercat 625E skidder.

name suggests, trucking is still central to what they do, with 25 to 30 local owner-operators handling dirt work around the state, as far north as the Iron Range, as well as south into the Twin Cities.

"Almost all of them are pulling side dumps," Fletcher says. "We do have some belly dumps, but mostly side dumps that haul dirt. They go all over the state of Minnesota. We also make all of our own black dirt right at the shop. We haul it off jobs and we screen it and blend it. And make our own blend there and sell it."

There are also 17 of his own trucks that handle Fletcher wood deliveries throughout the year. Plus, Fletcher has truck repair at his shop, mostly for the owner-operators to keep



A Vermeer screener is loaded with chips at Fletcher Trucking's shop. Larger "overs" will be used for mulch, while turkey bedding will be made from the smaller material.

their rigs running, as well as his own.

Fletcher has also gotten into the turkey bedding and mulch businesses. It's a result of the closure of the Benson biomass plant three years ago. Roughly 40 percent of his logging jobs are on private land, and landowners typically like their sites clean with minimal tops and limbs left behind. Fletcher had been chipping that slash and hauling up to twenty truckloads of chips a day to the Benson facility. Once it closed, he needed a home for the material.

"When Benson shut the doors, we put up a drying facility to try to market some of our chips,"

Fletcher says. "We've been hauling the chips back to our shop and then run them through the plant which knocks them down smaller, and we dry them and sell them for turkey bedding. We also dry down product and sell it to Koda Energy in Shakopee, and we make a highly absorbent product used in the oil industry to absorb oil and water.

"We utilize everything from the woods, so there's no waste," he says. "We try to take all the round wood out of it that's economical and we chip everything else and then all the chips go through a screen. Then after we screen all the chips out—all the big overs and big pieces and

sticks—we re-grind all that and we make mulch out of that: colored mulch, regular mulch, stuff like that.

"Almost all of our mulch stays local," Fletcher says. "A lot of it they come pick up, or if people want a dump truck load, we'll deliver it. Or we'll even bring them a whole semi-load of it"

Putting in the dryer and purchasing the grinder, screener, and other equipment took a huge investment. But for Fletcher, it's been worth it.

"It gets better and better each year," he says. "And now we're also doing shavings there too, so we're able to get rid of all of our pine



A mulch customer backs his trailer to one of Fletcher's color options at the company's Brainerd shop.



Driver Al Denny loads his truck with oak using a Serco 7500 center mount.



Zack Fletcher harvests aspen with a John Deere 853M feller buncher.

pulpwood.”

The closure at Benson was a scary time, forcing Fletcher to adapt.

“We’re doing more roundwood now,” he says. “We used to only run one roundwood crew and two chip crews. Now we’re running two roundwood crews all the time, and one chip crew. You have to adapt all the time because different mills, different markets, they’re always changing. One mill doesn’t want anything this week and you have to adapt and do something different. We might go cut oak or pine or whatever we have to do to make a little bit of money.”

Adaptability has never been more

important for Minnesota loggers than in 2020. The closure of Duluth’s Verso paper mill tightened wood markets and has affected everybody, including those like Fletcher who didn’t deliver there. And the COVID-19 pandemic also injected uncertainty into the market.

“Markets are picking up now but they were pretty slow this spring,” Fletcher says. “Who knows what’ll happen this winter? I think a lot depends on COVID. Fortunately, this summer has been one of the best we’ve had as far as rain. The last three summers we’ve had pretty touch-and-go conditions.”

Not this week. Fletcher moved

one of his two conventional logging crews onto this site only a couple of days ago. The terrain is hilly, but the weather’s been great and they’re making good progress. On top of the 800 cords of aspen, the job includes another 480 of oak and 200 cords of birch. It looks like they’ll be done here by the end of the week. Shawn is glad to be helping out, at the controls of the processor. He spends far more time than he’d like in the office, so he relishes the chance to be in the woods running a machine.

“When I’m here, I usually run the slasher or something,” he says. “I just like to be out in the woods. It’s what I grew up with.”



Harvest oak for an Amish mill from Fletcher Trucking’s Crow Wing County permit.



Chip Fletcher processes aspen with a John Deere 437E slasher/loader.

Demenge is Candidate for Aitkin Co. Board

Long-time TPA member Jerry Demenge is a write-in candidate for a seat on the Aitkin County Board.

Demenge lives in the County's 4th District. After the date for filing to appear on the ballot, Residents of the 4th commissioner district in Aitkin County have urged Jerry to throw his hat in the ring, and as a result is a write-in candidate.

Demenge has been in the logging business for 50 years, was a long-time member of the TPA Board of Directors, now serving on the Association's Advisory Committee. Jerry also served as Chair of TPA's Transportation Committee for 15

years, continuing to be active on transportation issues, among others. He's also served on his township board for more than two decades.

"No one in our Association has a better working knowledge of transportation issues—including safety, enforcement, road engineering, trucking, etc.—than Jerry," TPA's Ray Higgins said. "I've also attended numerous meetings over the years with Jerry and representatives of MnDOT, the State Patrol, and others in regional transportation, I've learned a ton watching his ease in dealing with people, articulating his thoughts,



Jerry Demenge

and working to resolve issues with government agencies."

Election Day is November 3rd.



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On the Markets

The *Timber Bulletin* publishes information regarding results of a sampling of recent timber sales and other market indicators, as well as other market-related news items.

Recent Timber Sales

Average prices, as reported by each agency

Agency	Regular	Intermediate
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Koochiching County
July 8th—Oral Auction

Aspen P/B	\$28.10	\$33.23
Spruce P/B	\$20.44	\$20.39
Tamarack P/B	\$ 5.46	\$ 6.00
Jack Pine P/B	NA	\$49.08

19 of the 20 tracts offered during the sale were purchased.

Cass County
July 30th—Sealed Bid

Aspen	\$38.70	\$38.04
Basswood	NA	\$20.12

5 of the 6 tracts offered during the sale were purchased.

Koochiching County
August 5th—Oral Auction

Aspen P/B	\$31.76	\$32.60
Spruce P/B	\$17.64	\$19.27
Balsam P/B	\$ 7.29	\$ 7.64

Norway
 Pine P/B \$46.17 \$37.28
 All 22 tracts offered during the sale were purchased.

Aitkin County
August 19th—Oral Auction

Aspen P/B	\$34.45	NA
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Mixed
 Hdwd pulp \$12.12 NA
 Maple P/B \$10.99 NA
 Red Pine P/B \$51.74 NA
 16 of the 19 tracts offered during the sale were purchased.

Cass County
August 27th—Sealed Bid

Aspen	\$41.74	\$38.64
Red Oak	\$28.32	\$34.34
Jack Pine Pulp	NA	\$31.52
Birch	\$25.34	\$21.95

All 5 tracts offered during the sale were purchased.

DNR—Park Rapids Area
September 15th—Sealed Bid Trembling

Aspen (PB)	\$49.34	\$40.21
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Nrthrn
 Hdwds (PB) \$37.68 \$19.92

Red Oak (PB)	\$55.46	\$21.25
Oak Species (PB)	NA	\$35.87

19 of the 22 tracts offered during the sale were purchased

DNR—Little Falls Area—Camp Ripley
September 17th—Sealed Bid

Aspen		
Species (PB)	\$14.01	NA
Oak		
Species (PB)	\$15.34	NA

Aspen
 Species (PW) \$13.75 NA
 4 of the 6 tracts offered during the sale were purchased.

Cass County
September 24th—Sealed Bid

Aspen	\$35.45	\$39.04
Red Oak	\$19.75	\$22.03
Maple	\$12.34	\$19.64

4 of the 5 tracts offered during the sale were purchased.

Crow Wing County
September 25th—Oral Auction

Aspen	\$38.62	NA
Oak	\$22.05	NA
Maple	\$12.16	NA
Birch	\$19.64	NA
Basswood	\$14.65	NA

10 of the 12 tracts offered during the sale were purchased.



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St. Louis County

September 30th—Oral Auction

Aspen	\$32.05	NA
Birch	\$ 5.68	NA
Black Spruce	\$16.59	NA
Balsam	\$ 3.91	NA
Red Maple	\$ 4.99	NA

23 of the 34 tracts offered during the sale were purchased.

Hubbard County

October 5th—Oral Auction

Aspen Pulp	\$36.54	NA
Aspen Mixed	\$41.93	NA
Birch Pulp	\$10.94	NA
N. Pine Pulp	\$20.83	NA
N. Pine Bolts	\$48.71	NA

All 11 tracts offered during the sale were purchased.

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Loggers Begin Receiving Relief

With some Minnesota county boards voting to utilize federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funds to offer relief to timber permit holders, loggers have begun to apply for those funds over the past several weeks.

The programs are in response to the closure of Verso's Duluth mill and the resulting changes to spruce and balsam markets. St. Louis, Itasca, and Koochiching Counties were among those developing plans to assist affected loggers.

St. Louis County

\$500,000 was allocated to provide relief for loggers. Ten eligible companies turned back 18 timber contracts and applied to receive relief funding for their down payment. Several companies applied for other COVID impact costs in addition to the down payment on returned contracts. These applications were still being reviewed and totaled when this edition of the Timber Bulletin went to press.

The county's general timber turn back policy runs until March 1, 2021.

In addition, the county board approved \$750,000 for "right-of-way" clearing. Bids on these projects are let each week. Only logger companies located in St. Louis County are allowed to bid under this program. Projects are in the \$10-15k range, and individual firms are limited to work up to \$50,000.

So far, 33 projects have been let, with winning bids totaling more than \$600,000 in relief to loggers. An additional six projects are being advertised.

Koochiching County

The county board voted to allow permits with spruce and balsam totaling more than 20% of the volume to be extended or turned back without penalty. For permits turned back, permit holders were eligible to apply for down payment refunds.

A total of 41 permits met the criteria for relief, held by nine



different companies. So far, all of the permit holders have elected to extend the permits rather than apply for refunds on down payments.

The program application window is open until November 16th.

Itasca County

Itasca County Commissioners dedicated \$300K of their CARES Act allocation towards a program

to support loggers in Itasca County. Itasca Economic Development Corporation (IEDC) facilitated the program, with 24 Itasca County loggers applying. Grants started at \$3,000 and were awarded based on the criteria set.

"We believe these grants will be critical to supporting our loggers during this crisis," said IEDC President Tamara Lowney.

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Safety Pays

By JOHN SACCOMAN, Mackinaw Administrators, LLC.

There are easier ways to make a living. Days are long. Weather can be harsh. It seems like profit margins seem to shrink annually. And equipment costs can give even the most grizzled logging veterans acid reflux.

But Derek Killmer, of Killmer Brothers, Inc. and a 20-year logger from Big Falls, MN, wouldn't change a thing.

"People who are still in it are there because it's in your blood," Killmer said. "If things are going good, it's a pretty rewarding way of life."

Killmer helps run a 7-to-10 employee logging operation that ships most of its product up to outlets like PCA (Packaging Corporation of America) in International Falls. Like many logging operations, his business is family run.

"I think up in this area, going back to the early days, you needed everybody in the family to work together to run a business," he said. "It was the only way to make it work."

Killmer said his business was started by his dad and uncle years ago.

"My dad's still out working every day, and he's 78," Killmer said. "I tell him all the time to buy an Ice Castle (fish house) and that's a lot more comfortable in the winter. He'd rather sit in his slasher."

There are other outside forces that ensure logging operations are family run. Many logging operations depend on sons, nephews, brothers, and wives. Killmer said he believes he knows why.

"Young help is hard to find," Killmer said. "It's hard to find young people with the drive and motivation to get out of bed at 4 a.m. and deal with the cold and long hours."

Most owners aren't excited to turn over the keys to expensive logging machinery to just anyone either. Many prefer to stay with a small crew of experienced employees, ones they can trust to show up,



work hard, and treat equipment with respect.

"It used to be that if you had ambition, a little bit of money, a skidder, and a chainsaw, you could carve out a living," Killmer said. "But with the cost of everything now, it's almost impossible for someone to jump in and start up."

It isn't just cost of the equipment. The maintenance costs of everything associated with running the operation have gone up as well. In days past, there was more "meat on the bone" to make a living compared to today's market. "It just seems like everything from the parts to the tires has gone up," he said. "And the wood price doesn't usually change much."

On a positive note, that expensive equipment has changed the industry. No longer dependent on chainsaws and multiple employees on the ground, Killmer said the industry has become much safer. But he was cautious to add that it doesn't mean that loggers don't have to remain vigilant.

"Things can go wrong at any minute," he said. "You have to be constantly paying attention and aware of your surroundings. Like Limbaugh (Rush) said, 'you need intelligence guided by experience'."

Even though there is competition

among other loggers in the north woods, all bidding for the same jobs, Killmer views logging as a brotherhood. He knows many of the other area loggers and considers them friends.

"Everybody is in the same boat just trying to make a living. You see each other at the gas station, church or the bar...not necessarily in that order," Killmer said laughing.

As he ponders again why he's neck-deep in a such a difficult profession, Killmer said it's sometimes the simple things that are hard to beat...like the scenery and wildlife.


"The things you can see when you open up the roads 15 miles into the woods," he said "You're in a place that nobody else much gets to. That deep in the woods...you just don't get that anywhere else."

Mackinaw Administrators, LLC is the third-party administrator of the TPA/Northern Capital Workers Comp Insurance Program, working with program participants to increase safety, thereby reducing costs, including insurance premiums. For information on the TPA/Workers Compensation Insurance Program, call the TPA Office, or Jay Eystad (218-255-0446) or Bill Dupont (952-913-6950) of Northern Capital.

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Firefighter Dies in California Fire Started By Gender Reveal

A firefighter was killed in a California wildfire started by an elaborate gender reveal in September.

A smoke-generating Pyrotechnic device designed to reveal the baby's gender ignited four-foot-tall grass,

Timber Talk

Efforts to douse the fire with water bottles were unsuccessful.

The fire El Dorado Ranch Park, east of Los Angeles grew to more than 22,000 acres in the San Bernardino National Forest. At its

peak, 1351 firefighters battled the blaze, using 17 hand crews, 177 engines, 20 water tenders, 17 dozers, and 10 helicopters. Numerous Fixed Wing Tankers including a DC-10 assisted with aerial fire-retardant drops. Three Canadian Fire Bosses and a Single Engine Air Tanker (SEAT) Water Scooper were also used for the first time in Southern California.

Thirteen firefighters were injured in addition to the one fatality. The El Dorado Fire is one of several fires to burn California timberland over the past two months.

As of early October, the fire was 93% contained but was not expected to be fully extinguished for several weeks. According to California

prosecutors, no charges can be filed until the fire is completely out and the extent of the damage is known.

Twin Cities Homebuilding Surges in September

Construction for new single-family homes picked up significantly in September, according to Housing First Minnesota.

Low interest rates and pent up demand continue to impact the housing market, according to the report. With 650 permits pulled, single-family construction jumped by 38% over September of 2019.







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That's the highest number of single-family permits pulled in the month of September since 2005.

"As inventory of existing homes for sale continues to drop, we're seeing increased interest from homebuyers looking to build," said Gary Kraemer, president of Housing First Minnesota. "On top of the pent-up demand, many buyers are now looking for more space to work remotely and are willing to look further into the suburbs as they may no longer have a commute to consider."

According to data compiled by the Keystone Report for Housing First Minnesota, there were 697 permits issued for a total of 1,135 units during four comparable weeks in the month of September.

While the number of permitted units for large multifamily construction fell by 68%, the number of permitted units for townhome construction was up a sharp 150%.

"While we are pleased to see homebuilding activity continue to lead the economic recovery, we

remain deeply concerned about the challenge of housing affordability," said David Siegel, executive director of Housing First Minnesota.

"Following more than a decade of underbuilding, our housing market is extremely undersupplied. This is causing existing home prices to continue their steep climb. Those in existing homes cannot move to their new moveup home, breaking the entire ecosystem. A powerful uptick in homebuilding is necessary to provide some relief to the entire

housing market. We've got to be able to reintroduce starter homes into this market, and with today's regulatory roadblocks, we simply cannot."

Nationally, US housing starts in August (the most recent stats available) were down 5.1% from July, but rose 2.8% above the rate from August, 2019, according to figures from the US Census Bureau.

Additionally, sales of new homes in the US topped the one million mark in August, they're highest level since September, 2006.



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Walz Appoints Birkeland Climate Change Council

Governor Tim Walz has named TPA Executive Vice President Mike Birkeland to the Governor's Advisory Council on Climate Change.

Over one hundred Minnesotans applied for spots on the board. Birkeland is one of fifteen appointed by the Governor.

"It's an honor to be appointed to the Governor's council," Birkeland said. "I'll bring the message that active forest management and carbon sequestration play a major role in combatting climate change. Loggers are at the heart of that message, setting the standard for a healthy environment and sustainable economy."

"Addressing climate change requires bold and creative solutions," Governor Walz said. "It is my honor to appoint members to

the Governor's Advisory Council on Climate Change that represent Minnesota's diverse strengths and our tradition of innovation in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. This Advisory Council will provide valuable input on how we can achieve the emissions reductions needed to get us back on track to meet our Next Generation Energy Act goals, explore natural and agricultural solutions to reduce carbon, and promote a green economic recovery in Minnesota."

Those appointed to the Governor's Advisory Council on Climate Change include:

- Khalif Bashir, Willmar School District
- Mike Birkeland, Minnesota Timber Producers Association

- Christopher Clark, Xcel Energy, Minnesota, South Dakota, and North Dakota
- Eric Dayton, Askov Finlayson
- Wayne Dupuis, Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa
- Marco Hernandez, Communities Organizing Latinx Power and Action (COPAL) and Minnesota Council on Latino Affairs
- Lucinda Johnson, Ph.D., Natural Resources Research Institute, UMD
- Alexandra Klass, J.D., University of Minnesota Law School
- Patrick Lunemann, Lunemann Farms
- Ann Mulholland, Nature Conservancy
- Micah Niermann, M.D., Gillette Children's Specialty Healthcare
- Kevin Pranis, Laborers' International Union of North America, Great Lakes
- Hilda Martinez Salgado, Environment and Climate Consultant
- Anne Schwagerl, Prairie Point Farms
- Dave Sunderman, BENCO Electric Cooperative


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Northern Capital Insurance expected workers comp rates to go down with the move to the self-insurance group, and that has proven to be the case. Being part of a group helps establish more consistent and secure pricing because rates are set by a board of members instead of an insurance company. As a result, pricing doesn't fluctuate nearly as much.

"The board of directors runs the program and sets the rates," said Northern Capital account executive Jay Eystad. "We're not going to an insurance company and asking them what the price should be. We're establishing our own price based on past performance of the group."

Another major advantage of the self-insurance group is the potential for a dividend in years with

acceptable loss ratios. Based on the success of first full year of the program, insureds will receive a dividend on their premiums. Because state law requires members to be in the self-insurance program for three years before receiving dividends, those disbursements will be made in 2022. But once a company qualifies for the first dividend, it is eligible each year thereafter.

TPA members are seeing another advantage of the self-insurance group. The board of directors not only controls the dividends, but also the underwriting process. This means the board can make decisions on whether to take on any account, not an insurance company.

"Based on all that, we are able to write some of the smaller accounts that we couldn't write when we were working with insurance companies," said Northern Capital account executive Bill Dupont.



Jay Eystad



Bill Dupont

Another major advantage of the TPA/Northern Capital program is the customer service provided by Dupont and Eystad. Each has been helping Minnesota loggers for more than two decades.

Northern Capital offers a variety of coverages in addition to workers comp. For more information on the TPA/Northern Capital Workers Compensation Insurance program, and to get a quote on how you can save on your insurance, call Jay Eystad (218-255-0446) or Bill Dupont (952-913-6950).





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LOGGERS OF THE PAST . . .

"Walkers" Ruled the Woods

by J. C. Ryan

This story is reprinted from an earlier *Timber Bulletin*—one of the first of "Buzz" Ryan's ever-popular contributions to these pages. The *Bulletin* will continue to reprint selected stories from the memories he recorded for us.—*Editor*



Today most industry of all kinds is not lacking in supervision. There are superintendents of production, of maintenance, of costs, of personnel – and many others.

In the old logging days, supervision was at a minimum. A general manager of logging operations generally was situated in the town that was company headquarters, and he probably would make one trip a year to the woods to visit some major project. He would usually come in over a railroad spur in a special car with some of the stockholders, stopping at one of the better camps for a good feed and to give the stockholders a briefing on how efficient things were. Then the camps would not see him again for a year.

However, there was no lack of supervision in the camps and little was needed. The "walking boss" or "walker," as he was known, provided the answer to all the problems.

He kept all the foremen in line and kept a check on all phases of the camps' work. He was generally in charge of from four to 12 camps, or all in a certain area. In the old days, he would walk from camp to camp, then on to the next. He would check on how many logs were being cut each day, how many were skidded, the conditions of the ice road, how supplies were coming in, how the men were being fed, and advise the camp foreman on any changes that were needed.

However, there was very little "meddling" with the running of the camp or the crews. The walking boss had hired the camp foreman and gave him full charge of everything from the food the cook put out to the delivering of the log to the landings. It was the camp foreman who ran the camp, and he had plenty of chance to show his ability. The "jacks" referred to the foreman as the "push."

In the fall of the year, the walking boss was a very busy man. He had to line up locations of new camps and arrange for the toting in of lumber and supplies to build them. He figured out the locations for logging spurs and logging roads and arranged for the distribution of horses and equipment. Once this was done and a foreman was assigned, the foreman became the boss of the camp and the operations. In the

early days, there were no camp timekeepers or clerks, and the foreman handled all of the selling of snuff and tobacco to the crew in the evenings. In later years, the camp clerks handled all the time keeping and book work, such as ordering kitchen supplies.

It was the ambition of all camp foremen to become a walking boss some day. The ability of some of these camp foremen was astonishing. You didn't have to go into detail explaining a problem; just mention it and they took it from there and they always seemed to come up with the right decision.

In winters, when but few camps were in

Though some rode from camp to camp, 300-pound Henry Graham, "walking boss" for National Pole Co., always traveled on foot. This photo was taken about 1919 at National's Kelliher office; man at left is unknown.



operation, some walking bosses had to drop back to camp foreman for a while. In the depression of 1921, I knew several walking bosses who were doing common labor. Woods work was all they knew, and they could not turn to supervisory work in another field very easily.

However, when the CCC camps came in 1933, many of the old camp foremen got jobs as foremen in these and did very well. A few of them got to be superintendents. One of the old walking bosses was Christ Lee of the Northern Lumber Company. In talking with him after he got his CCC job, he said to me, "I didn't think I would ever get one of these highfalutin jobs of "super-tender" – but hell, I only got one camp to look after. This is more like a camp foreman job."

Most lumber camps of 200 men had two or three "straw bosses" who worked under the foreman. Straw bosses were working foremen who were put in charge of one phase of the logging operation. There might be one in charge of the skidding crew, one in charge of the loading crew, and one in charge of the log landing. They worked along with the men and usually were the hardest workers on the crew. Some camp foremen had only one straw boss who went from crew to crew, working a while with each. He was called a "traveling straw boss."

Supervision in the lumber camps was carefully kept at a minimum, as workers resented too much supervision. Each man had his job to do and took great pride in doing it well without a foreman standing over him.

While the name "walking boss" was given the man who walked from camp to camp in the early days, by the early 1890s he usually arrived at camp with a team of fine driving horses. These walking bosses took great pride in their driving teams, which were always rigged out in nice harnesses with many spreader rings and were always kept in the best of shape. When the team arrived in camp, the "barn boss" took over their care, groomed them, fed them, and had them ready when the walking boss moved on to the next camp. These driving teams were "sharp shod" to travel over the ice roads at a good rate of speed.

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Most of the driving teams were trotting horses, but I know several bosses who had teams of pacers.

Horse teams were used during the winter months. In the summer, camps were mostly railroad camps and the “walker” would arrive by motor speeder or on a logging train. Companies that did not log during the summer had watchmen at the camps, and it was the duty of the “walker” to visit these camps about once a month and check on these watchmen, who usually had several head of horses and a number of pigs to care for. Pigs were raised at most camps that had watchmen, and when the camps started up again in the fall were butchered to furnish a supply of pork. Some of these camps with summer watchmen were in isolated places, and the “walker” had to walk across several miles of swamp to visit them. Supplies for the watchmen – and feed for the horses and pigs – had to be toted in during the preceding winter.

During the days when white pine was king, there was a great number of walking bosses working for the many lumber companies and logging contractors. The first one I recall was George “Bum” Bush, who worked about 1907 in the Bemidji area for the J. Neils Lumber Company and the Bemidji Lumber Company.

Others I knew well included “Bob” Murseau of the Crookston Lumber Company in the Kelliher and Northome area; “Billie” Betts, also of the Crookston Lumber Company, in the Blackduck and Mizpah area; Merdick Morrisson of the Bemidji Lumber

Company in the Tenstrike area; Henry Graham of the Page Hill Company and the National Pole Company in the Gemmill area; “Poker Jack” Baust of the International Lumber Company; Ben Bronson of the Backus & Brooks Company – and many more.

However, two of the best known in the early days were the Sullivan brothers – Jim and Mike. They worked for several companies – Jim mainly for the old Pine Tree Lumber Company in and around Brainerd, and Mike, his younger brother, for most of the lumber companies operating from Bemidji to International Falls.

Mike Sullivan was the better known of the two, and every lumberjack from Brainerd to International Falls knew him as “Hungry Mike.” He was a large man, about six-foot-two and 240 pounds, with a red mustache, a very strong voice and a tremendous appetite. Many a tale has been told and retold in all the lumber camp bunkhouses about Mike eating 12 dozen eggs for breakfast, a whole ham for lunch and 50 baking powder biscuits and 30 pounds of beef for supper. The tales are greatly exaggerated, but he certainly did eat as much as two ordinary men. Despite his large size and voice, he was a very gentle man and very kind – and was known to have taken his shirt off and given it to a man who did not have one. No lumberjack ever passed his camp hungry, and he was loved by most all who knew him.

Another great walking boss and foreman who worked in the Cloquet Valley State Forest was big Christ Lee of the

Northern Lumber Company. He was known for taking care of old time “jacks” who were crippled or getting pretty old” – and usually had several working around his camp, sawing wood for the stoves or keeping fires in the stove at night. He was criticized by the head men for keeping them around, but still he took care of them. I remember him for wearing six pairs of socks and oversize 13 rubbers; he never could get enough socks on to keep his feet warm.

In the Cloquet Valley State Forest area, just north of Duluth, were many others who worked for the Combined Cloquet Companies: “Big Hank” Glassow, Ed “Pine City” Netser, William P. Campbell, Mort Sheils, “Spot” Chisholm, Tom Henderson, John Shea, Pete Gibbons, John McPhersen – and many others.

History has but little to say or mention about these dedicated, noble, hard working men, who conquered our rivers, built our logging railroads and ice logging roads, and delivered our pine logs to the mills to be manufactured into lumber that built our homes and farms in all the area west of the Mississippi River. But much credit is due them, for without them our pine forest would never have been harvested.

And while the name “walking boss” will soon be a forgotten word in our American life, there are still a few old timers around who can remember the “bull cook” sticking his head in the bunkhouse door on a frosty January morning at 5:00 a.m. and singing out, “Roll out, you sleepy heads! Time to get up! The walker is in camp!”

A fine team moved this “walker” between Duluth & Winnipeg Railroad camps.



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