

THE VOICE OF THE TIMBER INDUSTRY

TIMBER BULLETIN

DULUTH, MINNESOTA

MAY/JUNE 2020

VOLUME 75

Bouncing Back - Johnson Logging Legislative Re-cap Fjeran: Logger of the Year

A large log is being processed by a sawmill machine. The log is positioned horizontally across the machine's rollers. The background shows a logging site with trees and a blue truck.

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IN THIS ISSUE

Bouncing Back - Johnson Logging	8
Verso Duluth Idled Indefinitely	12
Safety Pays	14
U Scholarship Honors Wayne Brandt.....	16
Expo Preview	18
Logger of the Year	19
Timber Talk.....	20
Ruffed Grouse Society	22
Legislature Re-cap.....	24
On the Markets	26
Loggers of the Past	28
Classifieds	30
Advertisers Index	30



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ON THE COVER

Johnson Logging patriarch Connie Johnson still helps out at 83 years of age, using a Wacker Neuson 750T loader to load ash onto the sawmill's log deck. For more on the Cannon Falls company, See page 8.

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Where to start? Every time I start to write an article for our magazine I have to sit and think for a while about all of the recent activities in our industry and how to put a positive spin on them, even though it may not be healthy for all of our business models. Continuing to find a silver lining is getting harder and harder to do.

The North Star Expo is (as of now) still on and is looking to be bigger and better than ever! Vendor participation numbers are steady and with hopes of COVID-19 numbers going down, we should be good to go. September 18 and 19 are the dates, mark your calendars. The Expo committee is still anticipating the hospitality time at Timberlake Lodge on Friday evening!

The annual TPA membership meeting is still scheduled for October 8 at Sugar Lake Lodge. Having to re-schedule it, of course, has made for agenda changes: TPA board of directors meeting in the morning, and all members in the afternoon. Keep in mind, you will receive MLEP credits for your attendance. We all hope that next year we can get back to our regular annual meeting in June, and include the golf and fish outing that so many of us enjoy.

President's Column



Of course with the current pandemic, the legislative session implemented some new rules as well. Executive vice president Mike Birkeland did not get to spend as much time in St. Paul this winter, not being able to have that face-to-face opportunity to meet with legislators and plead our case is seldom as effective as working remotely.

As most have heard, Verso announced some bad news as well. Closures of this magnitude are detrimental to our industry. In a very tight market as we have been in recently, this is going to have huge impacts to all wood markets in MN. Not only will this hurt the loggers and truckers who supply this mill, we have to understand that employees of the mill will suffer as well. TPA staff is in contact with agencies and legislators, looking for opportunities to help. Any comments or questions should be directed to TPA staff.

So this current pandemic has undoubtedly changed our industry and world forever, I think we can all agree on that. Most, if not all, companies in every facet of industry have changed their method of doing business. Working from home may now be the new normal instead of going to an office. Technology has grown by leaps and bounds in the last couple months. Even smaller companies have spent dollars to work or do business "remotely". While attending a meeting recently, the statement "We have outsmarted ourselves" was said. Think about it for a while, it could be very true.

And so I end with the way I started this article, trying to be "positive". It is my hope that through all the setbacks that have hit our industry lately, something good can come of it. Neighborhoods and towns, buildings and businesses will have to be rebuilt. Working remotely may encourage families to move to a more rural settings, stimulating new home projects. The prospective "good things" list goes on, just look for it! Remember to spend some extra time with family, the trees will be there.

Executive Committee

Kurt Benson: 218-835-4525
 Rod Enberg: 218-352-6175
 Corey Lovdahl: 218-244-4580
 Dave Berthiaume: 218-380-9783
 Kelly Kimball: 218-849-5222

TPA Staff

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The news hit like a brick to the head. Verso recently announced it would be “indefinitely idling” its Duluth mill at the end of June.

The mill opened in 1987 and produced paper for newspaper inserts and marketing publications. End-use product markets had been

Executive Vice President's Column



in decline, but the coronavirus shutdown dealt a crushing blow to

graphics paper markets.

The closure leaves a huge hole and big questions for spruce and balsam markets in the state. The

news impacted more than 220 employees at the mill as well as TPA members who have long supplied wood to the Duluth facility.

The company indicated it will explore several alternatives going forward. A restart, if possible, would depend on market conditions and could also include the possibility of different ownership. With the lingering effects of the COVID-19 crisis still upon us, the cloud of uncertainty hangs over potential options.

Prior to the shutdown, Verso had been working on plan to convert production to packaging. The conversion would likely have reduced wood consumption at the mill.

It's not the first news of this kind that we've faced as a logging community. The formula for surviving downturns is never easy, but from what I've seen since stepping into this role, TPA is made up of resilient and resourceful members who adapt, adjust, and modify operations as needed, when needed.

We're living through one of those periods in history – and the ability to hold down costs, adapt, and adjust is more important than ever. The TPA Executive Committee and Board of Directors recognize that as well, so we're working with others—legislative and agency leaders—to find ways to help.

The way the world has been turning as of late, it seems that living and working in the woods is an especially good place to be.

Challenges related to human decency, respect, race relations, novel viruses, social distancing, and social disobedience dominate daily news cycles. It doesn't do us good to stick our heads in the sand, but living and working in rural areas does provide distance from the challenges facing cities across our nation.

The divide on many fronts is real. Whether it is urban versus rural, left against right, or black and white tensions. Events of the past few weeks have reopened wounds that have long simmered beneath the surface of our culture and our nation.

So why revisit these issues in this space?

Because TPA advocates for your interests, your values, and your business with public agencies and at the state capitol where the kinds of issues that dominate headlines are front and center. In the middle of that, our job is to make sure issues that are important to you, your communities, and your livelihood are heard and considered among many other competing voices, issues, and interests.

In doing so, TPA has long been known as an effective, respected, and respectful voice in a political environment that is increasingly combative and divisive. We approach agencies, legislators, allies, and opponents with dignity and respect. These values might be considered old-fashioned, but they still work. And the approach is still effective.

It doesn't mean we agree with our opponents, and we may not agree on tactics that other organizations take – but we're not in the habit of demeaning others. It's not TPA's approach.

As a result – we're at the table. We're in the room. We're talking with, and influencing, leaders and decision-makers – and they seek our position when issues arise that are important to Minnesota's logging community. The approach makes a difference for you and your business.

Here are a few issues TPA has influenced the past few months:

- We advocated for lower base prices on state DNR auctions, resulting in reduced prices on softwood species.
- We advocated for the forest products industry to be designated as “essential critical infrastructure” with the Governor's office. As a result, the entire forest products supply chain in Minnesota – from logging to manufacturing was listed as an essential industry. It was an important, and “essential” listing to ensure loggers, truckers, and mills could continue to operate during the pandemic.
- In a climate of COVID-19 confusion, we also worked to make sure public agencies were on the same page and working to support your business interests. Here's an example:

“I wanted to write you and tell you thanks for sending the email supporting keeping all forestry workers in place. My entire department, including me, was told to take two weeks off and stay at home. It took the CISA document and yours to help convince County Administration to keep the NRM Department open.”

*Richard A. Moore
Beltrami County NRM Director/
Land Commissioner*

We had similar communication with other agencies as well, including the DNR and USFS. Sometimes the little things, the interactions behind the scenes, go a long way to help make a difference.

Whether it's a public setting or behind the scenes – we'll continue to effectively advocate for you and your livelihood. And our approach, our “tone,” will be focused on generating results for you while treating others with dignity and respect – even those who differ from our approach and our views.

Stay safe and well this summer. I'm hopeful we'll return to some form of normalcy soon – and that we're all better off, and wiser, because of what we've seen, heard, and learned these past few months.



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Member Feature...



Seth, Danny, Connie Johnson, and Dale Lee of Johnson Logging in Cannon Falls.

Bouncing Back

Like so many in Minnesota's timber industry, Danny Johnson looks back to the housing downturn of 2006 as a watershed moment in the family's logging and sawmill business.

At that time, Johnson Logging of Cannon Falls had roughly a dozen employees. On top of that, they employed a couple of independent loggers and utilized another sawmill, as well as an independent grading crew.

"Back then, we just sawed" Danny says. "We'd just call up places and say we had a load of lumber or pallet parts, and they'd say, 'okay,

we'll come and get it.' We just hammered the wood out. Logging was the same way. We just cut."

But by 2006, the Johnsons had an inkling things were about to change.

"We saw it coming like six or eight months before the housing people did," he says. "Lumber prices were steadily dropping and dropping. It got to the point where we got put on quotas and you had to get a purchase order before you could sell anything."

Over the next three years, the company's headcount went from twelve to three. And yet the Johnsons were able to settle in and find their niche. Today, Johnson Logging continues to

harvest hardwoods in southeastern Minnesota—mostly with a chainsaw—and they continue to operate the sawmill, servicing customers around the state and around the country. It's a story of the rebound of a business started by a man who spent much of his life bouncing back.

The patriarch is Connie Johnson, who grew up south of Cannon Falls—in southern Minnesota, just under halfway between St. Paul and Rochester—in a township locals call Skunk Hollow. By the time he was 16-years-old, Connie was ready to drop out of Cannon Falls High and go to work at the nearby sawmill owned by Dean Poe. That was 1953.

By 1955 he'd married his sweetheart Carol, working both in Poe's sawmill and driving CAT on his woods crews. But a series of mishaps taught Connie the true art of rebounding:

- In 1956 he broke his leg falling trees when the crew was shorthanded for the day and Connie figured he could handle the chainsaw. He found out otherwise.
- In 1957, still recovering from the leg injury, Connie was driving truck for Poe when—get this—the roof of an oncoming cattle truck blew off. A two-by-four came off the roof, under the dash of Connie's truck, piercing his belly and slicing out through his back.

"The doctor came out there and they had to saw the two-by-four off to get me out of the truck because it was wedged under the dash," he says. "They got me out of the truck, left the rest of the two-by-four in me, put me on a stretcher, and took me to Rochester.

- Not long after returning to work from the two-by-four accident, he was driving his logging truck on Highway 52 when a car in front of him hit a patch of ice, causing it to swerve. Connie's truck hit it broadside.

"I got some broken ribs and a punctured lung, and my teeth were rearranged. I tried to get the steering wheel through my mouth, but that didn't work," he says.

All of that might cause a guy to get out of the logging business—which Connie did, finding work in excavating. But that didn't last.

"I'd sit on the backhoe and I'd see a truck go by with a load of logs, and thought I should be in the woods."

Connie went back to the woods, starting his own logging business, harvesting logs that Poe would saw. Son Danny came along in 1963, and by age ten, he'd already pulled his first tree out of the woods with a CAT. When he graduated high school in 1981, Danny joined his dad in the woods. Two years later when Poe was ready to retire, Connie bought the mill, combing and the logging business outright.

Under Connie's guidance, the



Dale Lee uses a Jonsered chainsaw to harvest a tree. Most of the timber harvested by the Johnsons is felled by hand.

company grew. They harvested by hand the hardwoods that grow in the area: white oak, bur oak, maple, basswood, ash, hickory, cottonwood, and walnut. Sometimes they bought DNR timber sales, or else farmers in the area wanted to have their trees cut to help them access their fields for corn, beans, or alfalfa. Once they had the wood, the Johnsons sawed a lot of ties and grade lumber for cabinet makers or pallet mills around the state.

"We'd sell the lumber to folks who would dry it, then surface it

and plane it," Connie says. "Then they sell it to the next step in the process, the cabinet makers and that stuff."

Business was good, and the company grew. By 2007, Connie was ready to sell to his son Danny—whose son Seth had graduated from nearby Farmington High and joined his father and grandfather in 2002. And then the markets crashed.

"Come the summer of 2008, that was the worst," Danny says. "You couldn't sell a stick of lumber if you tried."



Seth Johnson drives a Timberjack 360 grapple and cable skidder.

Yet the Johnsons never laid anyone off. When someone left, he wasn't replaced, making do with who was left until it was just Danny, Seth, and Dale Lee—he's been with the company 35 years—running both the sawmill and handling the logging, with Connie helping out where needed.

But while grade lumber markets dried up, the Johnsons were able to keep sawing cants, runners, and top board for pallets. Plus, they found a couple of niches that kept things running: trailer decking for lowboys, and most notably, blocking for house movers or heavy equipment operators like rock crushers or conveyers, the kind of timbers needed to put under outriggers for leveling cranes, for example.

"We usually cut that out of bur oak and white oak," Danny says. "We've made that stuff for years. It was just one of those things. We got known for making this blocking and then the trailer decking."

"With the white oak and bur oak blocking that we've cut," Seth says, "we've been part of some of the biggest moves in the U.S. A lot of stuff out of the port of Houston on its way to Canada, nuclear transformer stuff that goes on a 160-tire lowboy. To do a 90-degree turn empty takes a truck like that 45 minutes."



Harvested walnut destined for Hawkeye Forest Products in Trempealeau, Wisconsin. The folks from Hawkeye have already come and graded the logs, and the tags stapled to each one includes a barcode indicating the length and grade.

It's funny how the name of a little sawmill in southern Minnesota gets a nationwide profile, but the Johnsons have several stories of just that happening.

"There's a crane company out of Chicago," Danny says. "The guy purchasing their blocking used to work for crane company near here. When they were having problems getting the quality blocking they needed down there, he called us and we got hooked up with them."

"Another time there was a transport company—heavy haul company—about twenty miles away from here. They had their trucks parked down in Las Vegas for Christmas at a guy's yard. And that guy said, 'Where do you get that blocking?' He told them about us. The guy in Las Vegas called us up and ordered three semi loads. He drove empty from Las Vegas to here and got his wood. They did that three times, just so he could get this kind of wood."

"Last year a guy from Nebraska called and had been buying his blocking from a real little mill south of Rochester. Well, they quit sawing, so that guy conveyed my name to them to come here. That's how we got started with them."

This time of year the focus of the business is on the mill. In the winter, the Johnsons try to focus on logging, only sawing when necessary.

"I'd say this last winter, we ran the mill about one day a week," Danny says. "Sometimes we went a couple, but it was maybe one day a week on average, only to fill an order."

On this day, they're sawing 3x4s to fill an order and also some pallet stock, mostly to customers that build their own pallets within 25 miles of here. Danny runs the saw, while Seth and Dale sort the products.



Seth Johnson loads mulch into the truck of a nearby farmer using a Case 621B loader. Seth's son Braxton is riding shotgun.

"We have a double-end trim saw," Danny says. "We'll cut the boards to length, and then we have a resaw. We'll size it down to the width and thickness that we need."

"We're constantly turning the log, looking for the best lumber. If we're making blocking material or trailer decking, we're looking to see if it's solid, or if we can saw out any defects, especially for crane blocking. They like good solid wood, so if the log has a little defect on one side I'll start sawing that out if I need to."

As for the logging side of the business, most of that is done in the wintertime, although they'll harvest this time of year when needed. When they're in the woods, Danny handles the trucking, Seth runs the Timberjack 360 grapple and cable skidder while Dale hand falls with a Jonsered chainsaw (in fact Connie was the local Jonsered dealer at one time). The Johnsons also have a John Deere 643D rubber-tired feller buncher they use on occasion for timber sales north of the Twin Cities, but that's rare. The terrain in southern Minnesota makes using a buncher extremely difficult.

"I'd say 99% of the timber cut down here is still cut with a chainsaw," Danny says. "I think we're about the only ones around here that even has a feller buncher."

Most of what the Johnsons harvest ends up in their own mill, but when they get the chance to cut some high value, high demand species, they'll market the log to a mill like Hawkeye Forest Products, 110 miles away in Trempealeau, Wisconsin.

"Everything that's in here right now will stay here, except we have some walnut that was just sold to Hawkeye Forest Products," Danny says. "They make grade lumber. Their biggest markets are in Asia."

The Johnsons have other products, too: Local farmers will come purchase mill residues for either cattle bedding or mulch, and then there's Seth's firewood business called Split Fire. He started it while in high school, 26-miles away in Farmington, where he notably was the 2002 Minnesota State FFA champion in forestry, and also played on the Tigers hockey team. Now 36, Seth is running a Blockbuster 1520 processor when he's not skidding in the woods or



Danny Johnson operates the company's sawmill.

helping out in the sawmill.

"It runs all year when I have the free time," Seth says. "We sell mostly to campgrounds in the area. I use any secondary products we get like basswood or anything we don't want to saw or sell. We also have a kiln for heat treating to be USDA certified. I run the kiln as much as possible because I don't keep inventory on hand, so I use it for the treatment part and to dry it also."

Seth has been active in the state's logging community, serving on the board of directors of the Minnesota Logger Education Program—which

Connie helped start—since 2005, including two terms as MLEP board president.

So, the Johnsons have found their niche. Business could always be better, but so far they've weathered the storm brought on by COVID-19, and will continue with the markets they have, always trying to do things a little better.

"We'll keep servicing the clients we have," Danny says. "We'll look for new opportunities. We're still buying equipment, taking care of the mill, always trying to be more efficient."



Seth Johnson processes firewood with a Blockbuster 1520.

Verso Duluth Idled Indefinitely

In a June news release, Verso Corporation announced the indefinite idle of the company's paper mill in Duluth, as well as its mill in Wisconsin Rapids, Wisconsin.

The company cited unprecedented market decline due to the COVID-19 pandemic for the closures, with hopes to reposition the company for future success.

Verso's announcement said it is exploring viable and sustainable alternatives for both mills, including restarting if market conditions improve, marketing for sale or closing permanently.

"The decision to reduce production capacity is driven by the accelerated decline in graphic paper demand resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic," the news release said. "The stay-at-home orders have significantly reduced the use of print advertising in



various industries, including retail, sports, entertainment and tourism.

According to Fastmarkets RISI, North American printing & writing demand fell by 38% year-over-year in April, and operating rates are expected to drop well below 70% during the second quarter.

The Duluth mill was expected to be idled by the end of June, while the Wisconsin Rapids Mill would remain open through July 2020. In all, approximately 1,000 employees would be laid-off, roughly 225 of them in Duluth.




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Safety Doesn't Cost: It Pays

By John Saccoman and Ron True
Loss Control Consultants of
Mackinaw Administrators, LLC

Profit margins in the logging industry are thin enough. Extra expense spent in areas that can be controlled, or at least closely managed, is something most loggers do not need. That's why logging safety, and in turn keeping employees from having injuries, is vital to companies saving money. And more importantly, sending all employees home each night free from injury.

Nowadays, the company costs related to an employee injury are expensive. But it doesn't have to be that way.

There's an old saying when it comes to safety. "Safety Doesn't Cost: It Pays"

The point is that logging companies that make a commitment every day, everywhere to the safety, health, and well-being of the company's most important asset—its people—will in the end save both time and money. Safety really is everyone's responsibility and is an integral part of everyone's job description.

So what are the costs associated with an injury?

One of the tools used to explain the cost of injuries is the iceberg model. Visualize an iceberg. The section of the iceberg above the water, one that is visible to all, is considered the **direct costs**. Direct costs include such items as medical expenses and repairs or replacement of damaged equipment. Those costs are typically known around the time of the accident and employee injury. Direct costs can be roughly 10-20 percent of the cost of the event.

Indirect costs are the hidden costs associated with accidents and injuries. These costs may not be known for some time and can be upward of 80-90 percent of the event. Items such as lost supervisor time, loss of production, overtime to catch back up, hiring costs, cost of training replacement employee, clerical costs, and other overhead costs if work is interrupted are below the water and unseen.



The key then is to identify what are the major causes of accidents, injuries, and property damage. If we can identify them, we can formulate a plan to attack the causes and hopefully prevent the accident. What are they?

There are seven common causes of accidents, injuries and property damage.

1) Taking short cuts to get the job done faster. Not wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) is an example, and so too is improper tool use. Substituting these "time savers" is dangerous for your crew's safety.

2) Never start a task without complete instructions and knowledge of the task. Learn all you can about the job. It is called a job hazard analysis (JHA). Essentially, JHA identifies the hazards of the job and implements solutions to mitigate the hazards.

3) Ignoring reliable, time-tested safety procedures when performing the job. Such action can eventually lead to employees being hurt or worse, killed.

4) Being overconfident about the work you are to do. Overconfidence usually leads to omitting proper safety procedures, using improper tools, allowing employees to hurry, or just making stupid decisions.

5) Poor housekeeping at the job site. Poor housekeeping many times indicates the worker doesn't really care, may have a bad attitude,

allows sloppy work, and permits the disregard of safety for himself or of others.

6) Allowing mental distractions to hinder focus and concentration on the job. In simpler terms, it's called carelessness. We could write a book about what factors lead to carelessness. But, just know that the more attention that is paid to the task being performed, the better the results.

7) Lastly, failure to plan your work. Recognize the hazards of the job. Plan the safest way to do the job and in turn, reduce the risk of an injury or accident. Simply put, plan your work and then work your plan.

In the end, the total cost of safety and preventing an injury cannot be underestimated. Workplaces with safety concerns tend to have lower employee morale and productivity. That said, if everyone is accountable and looks out for the best interests of others, there can be an avoidance of workplace injuries. As we head into the summer season, take time to do your job to the best of your ability and avoid the iceberg.

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.



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U Scholarship Honors Wayne Brandt

Thanks to an anonymous donation of \$25,000, the University of Minnesota's Department of Forest Resources has endowed a scholarship in the name of Wayne Brandt. The *Wayne E. Brandt Forest Industry Scholarship* will be awarded yearly to a student in the University's forestry program.

Brandt served as TPA's Executive Vice President for nearly thirty years before losing a battle with pancreatic cancer in September.

"Wayne was a strong supporter of the University of Minnesota's Department of Forest Resources," said Professor Mike Kilgore, head of the Department of Forest Resources. "Not just of our forestry program, but also our faculty, staff, and students. This scholarship creates a legacy that honors Wayne and his many contributions by providing financial support to students who are training to enter the forestry profession."

The first scholarship recipient was

named in May. Adam Sauve lives in Savage, Minnesota and is a former U.S. Marine, serving in Iraq in 2004 and 2005. For the past six years, Sauve has been a member of the Marine Corps League Two Eagles Detachment which provide Color Guards for funerals for service members, raises money for veterans and their families in need, as well as for scholarships in honor of a fellow service member who died in combat. In 2018, Sauve received the Marine of the Year Award for his volunteer work with the Marine Corps League.

Since the initial anonymous donation, the endowment has doubled in size. To learn more about the Wayne E. Brandt Forest Industry Scholarship, or to make a donation, visit:

<https://give.umn.edu/giveto/brandt> or contact Amy Alch, University of Minnesota Senior Development Officer: amyalch@umn.edu or at 612-210-5775.



Wayne Brandt

Checks can be made out to: The University of Minnesota Foundation (indicate the gift is for the Wayne E. Brandt Forest Industry Scholarship #21513) and mailed to: The University of Minnesota Foundation, P.O. Box 860266, Minneapolis, MN 55486-0266.



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Preparations Continue for 67th Expo North Star Expo

With summer events all over the state being canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, preparations continue for the 67th Annual North Star Expo.

This year's event, featuring the latest and greatest in logging equipment from the region's top vendors, is scheduled for September 18 and 19 at the Itasca County Fairgrounds in Grand Rapids.

Ultimately, state and county health department guidance will dictate whether the Expo can be held.

"We've been in constant contact with the folks at Itasca County," says TPA Expo committee chair Chad Lovdahl. "We're all watching the pandemic numbers very closely and for now they seem to be trending in the right direction. The State Fair and the Itasca County Fair have been canceled, but we're hopeful that by the time September rolls around, things will be opened up and we can safely get together for the Expo."

Vendor registration for the Expo started in May and so far, response has been strong, with more vendors signing up by mid-June than a year ago at this time, even though registration in 2019 opened up a month earlier than this year.

"We're appreciative of the support vendors give our event every year, Lovdahl says. "Particularly this year with so much uncertainty. But the Expo is the highlight of the year for the logging community and I know I speak for a lot of us when I say we're looking forward to getting everyone together as we traditionally have."

For more information, including on how to get your business involved in the Expo, call the TPA office at (218) 722-5013, or visit www.mntimberproducers.com and click on the North Star Expo button.



Admiring one of the Best Load entries at the 2019 North Star Expo. This year's event is scheduled for the Itasca County Fairgrounds in Grand Rapids on September 18 and 19.



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Fjeran Forest Products Named 2020 Minnesota Logger of the Year

The Minnesota Sustainable Forestry Initiative® (SFI) State Implementation Committee (SIC) named Fjeran Forest Products of Two Harbors, owned by Blake Fjeran, as its 2020 Logger of the Year.

"This highly-respected and long-time northern Minnesota logging company promotes the ideals of sustainable forestry throughout its business," said Minnesota SIC Chari Mary Perala. "Fjeran Forest Products represents the very best in logging in our state. It is an honor to recognize to such a highly respected company in our industry."

Established in 1986, Fjeran Forest Products is a second-generation logging business. Blake followed his father Bruce into logging, joining the business when he graduated from Two Harbors High School in 1993. Now 45, Blake Fjeran has been active in the state's logging community, serving on the Board of Directors of the Minnesota Timber Producers Association.

The Logger of the Year Award recognizes outstanding independent logging contractor performance in our state. Fjeran Forest Products' logging operations are testimony to what a modern-day business focused on timberland management can accomplish. The family-owned enterprise supplies wood fiber to Minnesota's forest products economy, while at the same time harvesting trees in an environmentally sensitive manner.

Sustainable forestry is practiced throughout the company's operations, particularly when placing roads and landings and working along streams, lakes, and rivers. In addition, Fjeran Forest Products takes safety seriously and makes it an important business goal. Employees utilize personal protective equipment and crew leaders are trained in CPR and First Aid. Personnel receive training through the Minnesota Logger Education Program (MLEP).

Fjeran Forest Products received a plaque and a check for \$500 for



(L-R): Blake Fjeran, his wife Sue, daughters Sasha and Sarah, and son Brock. Fjeran Forest Products was named Minnesota's 2020 Logger of the Year.

the recognition, and now becomes Minnesota's nominee for the Forest Resources Association's Lake States Outstanding Logger Award, to be announced this fall. The last five Lake States regional winners have come from Minnesota, as have two of the last four National Outstanding Logger honorees, exemplifying the outstanding work done by Minnesota's logging contractors in sustainably managing our state's forests.

The Minnesota SIC includes

representatives from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Minnesota Forest Industries, the University of Minnesota, the Minnesota Logger Education Program, Minnesota Timber Producers Association, Minnesota Tree Farm Program, Society of American Foresters, American Bird Conservancy, and SFI-certified county land departments. The SIC promotes and advances SFI principles of sustainable forestry in the state.



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TPA Annual Meeting & Banquet Re-scheduled

Mark your calendar for October 8th at Sugar Lake Lodge south of Grand Rapids for the TPA Annual Membership Meeting and Banquet.

The Annual Meeting was originally scheduled for June, but was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, the Golf and Fishing event won't

Timber Talk

be held, with the Annual Membership Meeting to be held in the afternoon.

The agenda is still being

finalized, but will include the Annual Report of Association Activities, as well as presentations from various policy makers and stakeholders to not only help you make decisions about your business, but who will also be available for your questions.

A tentative schedule for October 8th:

Morning - TPA Board of Directors Meeting

Afternoon - TPA Annual Meeting

Evening - Social and Banquet

MLEP credit is expected to be available for members who attend.

A registration packet will be sent to members in the coming weeks. Watch the *Timber Bulletin* and other communication as speakers and other arrangements are firmed up.

Forest Service Permit Extensions Available

The following information was included in the last issue of the *Timber Bulletin*, but bears repeating in light of the announced closure at Verso's Duluth mill:

The Forest Service has issued a Significant Overriding Public Interest (SOPI) to address potential

delays as a result of COVID-19.

It will provide up to 2 years of contract extensions for all Forest Service timber sale contracts, including salvage contracts and Integrated Resource Timber Contracts (IRTC Stewardship Contracts), regardless of the amount of time or volume left in the contract.

TPA was among 37 organizations signing onto a letter to U.S. Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue urging the SOPI designation.

If you have a federal timber sale you will need to reach out to your Contracting Officer to request a SOPI extension.

Pre-Employment Drug Testing Three-Month Waiver Granted

In June, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration granted a three-month waiver for truck drivers subject to pre-employment drug and alcohol testing due to the

COVID-19 pandemic.

FMCSA granted the waiver to allow furloughed commercial motor vehicle drivers to return to the workforce, as well as to reduce the regulatory burden on trucking companies.

The waiver was granted June 5 and runs through September 30, 2020.

Other Trucking Requirements Extended

In addition to the Pre-employment Drug Testing Waiver:

- CDLs that would have expired after March 1, 2020 continue to be extended. Right now, with Governor Walz's Peacetime Emergency having been extended until July 12, all CDLs remain valid until 8/31/2020.
- FMCSA lengthened the extension for those with expiring DOT health cards on or after March 1, 2020, provided they have proof of a valid medical certification that was issued for a period of 90

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days or longer at that time. Drivers with expired health cards will now have until September 30, 2020 to renew.

Sign up for TPA's Safety Contest

Each Year, TPA's Safety Contest recognizes members who focus on the safety of their employees. Cash prizes totaling \$1000 will be awarded to participating companies: one \$500 cash prize among those with no lost-time accidents, and for all who participate, there will be a drawing for two \$250 cash prizes. Drawings are held each year at the TPA Annual Meeting. The 2019 Winners were:

\$500.00 Lake Nebagamon

Trucking

\$250.00 Rieger Logging

\$250.00 Two Inlets Mill & Building

We have three separate divisions: Logging, Trucking, and Sawmill. Your company must be engaged in one or more of these operations to qualify for entry. A minimum of 350 hours is required for participation. The contest is open only to members in good standing (dues paid for the year ending December 31, 2021). As an employer, you may also include your own hours worked.

For more information, Call the TPA Office at 218-722-5013.

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Ruffed Grouse Society Focuses on Timber Harvest

The Ruffed Grouse Society & American Woodcock Society (RGS & AWS) announced it is re-structuring, replacing its three regional biologists with a new forest conservation directors.

The change is among RGS & AWS efforts to increase engagement in forest management issues. With expertise in forest management and market economics, the Forest Conservation Directors will lead new efforts, which will include re-investment of timber sale proceeds into conservation.

“We have been working on re-organization plans over the past 18 months,” said Ben Jones, RGS & AWS President and CEO in a news release. “To be clear, this re-structure does not suggest past efforts have failed; rather, we are seizing a growth opportunity that will ensure each volunteer hour, every dollar is maximized.”

The move is an attempt by RGS & AWS improve grouse habitat by promoting timber harvest.

In an article in the Minneapolis Star Tribune, Jones said, “We’re going forward with timber economics as part of our operating model. We believe we can create and protect more habitat this way than we did previously, and ultimately that it will help increase our membership.”



In the article, Jones went on to say, “In some cases we will cruise the timber of a potential sale, mark the timber and help administer the sale.”

“We should be shooting for 700,000 acres each year, not by decade. The need to scale up has never been greater and our network of volunteers, members, and donors is motivated and wanting for more.”

To support grouse populations, RGS & AWS biologists participate in several grant and funding programs like those available through the Lessard-Same Outdoor

An advertisement for Hancock Fabrication Inc. The background is a grey, textured wall. On the left, there is a large piece of black machinery, possibly a log loader or skid steer, with a large circular component. Below it is a white truck with a long black hydraulic arm extending from the back, ending in a grapple. The arm has a red warning label that says "DANGER STAY CLEAR". The company logo "HAN FAB" is prominently displayed in the upper center. To the right of the machinery, there is a white box containing text about their services and contact information.

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2020 Legislature—Regular Session Re-cap

“This was unlike any other session we’ve ever had.”

--Sen. Majority Leader Paul Gazelka:

When Minnesota’s 2020 legislative session adjourned on May 18 with much work left to do, a special session was inevitable, and was gaveled into session on June 12. But even though no major bills had passed in the regular session—other than relating to the COVID-19 pandemic and insulin relief—it doesn’t mean nothing happened.

The **regular legislative session commenced February 11, 2020** – the second year of a two-year biennium – a **“bonding” session**. It began as most do, with posturing from both sides about how much will be borrowed to fund major investments throughout the state for roads, bridges, water treatment systems, and other infrastructure. Everything changed in mid-March.

House and Senate leaders closed the Capitol and announced an “on call” legislative process March 15, 2020 because of the coronavirus pandemic. State buildings were closed to the public. Legislators went home – so did nearly everyone else – including lobbyists. The Capitol was a quiet place.

Legislative leaders communicated behind the scenes from March 15 through April 14. Limited, modified floor sessions began again in mid-April. Committee meetings, with legislators participating from home or legislative offices, were conducted via YouTube and Facebook. The hearings were often chaotic, technically challenged, unorganized, and provided minimal opportunity for public input.

Just before going home in mid-March, the Legislature passed bills totaling more than **\$500 million to fight COVID-19** – ensuring funding for PPE, ICU beds, and preparation



for anticipated COVID-19 peaks.

Because face-to-face contact with legislators was impossible, **we maintained contact with key legislators on key issues by email, text, telephone, and mail.**

The governor issued his first “Stay at Home” order March 25, shutting down schools, churches, and many businesses throughout the state. **Anticipating the announcement, MFI/TPA submitted a letter to the Governor’s office March 20** requesting the Governor support Department of Homeland Security guidance on essential critical infrastructure and the March 19 Memorandum on Critical Infrastructure Workers (which includes the forest products industry).

The governor and his staff agreed. The forest products supply chain in Minnesota – from logging to manufacturing was listed as an **essential industry**. It was an important, and **“essential” listing to ensure loggers and mills could continue to operate** during the pandemic.

Other states, such as Pennsylvania and Michigan, did not include all forest products operations as essential.

We received strong support for our position, with a letter to the governor from Minnesota’s Iron Range delegation (**spearheaded by Rep. Rob Ecklund**), and a letter from state Senator Erik Simonson (**DFL-Duluth**).

Clean Energy First

The COVID-19 crisis initially disrupted the push in the House and Senate for Clean Energy First legislation. Both bills, though widely different in scope, mandated an accelerated transition to future energy generation sources using “clean energy resources” and providing cost recovery mechanisms for utilities to drive renewable energy investments.

We worked with industry allies and made the case that Clean Energy First would kill jobs and impact the competitiveness of large power users. The bill nearly died in the House Jobs and Economic Development committee BEFORE COVID-19. The House turned to other priorities during the stay at home lockdown.

In a last-minute surprise move, the Senate’s Clean Energy First Act was resurrected by the Finance Committee on Friday, May 15 – just days before the end of the session.

Amid the chaos of the bill reappearing, we – along with business and industry allies – mounted a campaign and began emailing and texting legislators (including Sen. Majority Leader Gazelka) requesting the Senate drop the bill.

The effort produced the outcome we worked for: The bill was laid over in committee and did not make the floor of the Senate. But Clean Energy First is not going away. Both versions of the bill will be back next year in both bodies.

According to a Center of the American Experiment’s analysis, if the legislation passed, it would cost **BILLIONS** for ratepayers. CAE estimated that **“Greater Minnesota**

would suffer the most under the Clean Energy First legislation," because of thousands of jobs dependent upon energy intensive industries—such as manufacturing.

If you're crunching numbers, here's a cost comparison: **Great Britain's electric rates rose 75 percent over a ten-year span when solar and wind resources were imposed** into the nation's power supply portfolio from 2004-2014.

Taxes

An important tax issue for businesses that looked like a given before the session remains unresolved as of the end of the session due to the ongoing bonding, tax, and spending discussions. **The Senate passed a tax bill with Section 179 conformity. The House bill was held up when House leaders tied it to a compromise on the bonding bill.**

Background: If Minnesota were to fully conform with federal law, Section 179 conformity would allow a business to write off the entire purchase price of qualifying equipment for the current tax year (rather than deduct the depreciation over a period of years). Minnesota does not currently comply with Federal law. If Section 179 re-emerges as written in the Senate bill, it would allow the entire cost of qualifying equipment to be written-off on tax returns (up to \$1,040,000) retroactive to tax year 2018.

For more information on Section 179 Expensing: https://www.section179.org/section_179_deduction/ or <https://>

www.revenue.state.mn.us/section-179-expensing-addition

Bonding

Any hope for an agreement on a bonding bill unraveled during the final weekend of the regular session.

Senate Democrats derailed the Republicans bonding proposal – after House Republicans had done the same to House Democrats. The Senate Bonding Bill totaled **\$998 million** (Republicans could not bring themselves to borrow \$1 billion). The House version: **\$2.5 billion (the largest in state history)** fell short by six votes (bonding bills need a three-fifths majority to pass).

It is expected bonding will be the focal point of the special session, along with a new issue – police reform (more on that below).

Both bonding bills contained funding for DNR forest roads and bridges, but DNR reforestation was not included.

Budget: In May, the *Minnesota Management and Budget office released a revised budget forecast. It reflects economic issues created by the pandemic.*

The MMB said: "Minnesota's budget and economic outlook has significantly worsened since the coronavirus pandemic. **A deficit of \$2.426 billion is now projected** for the current biennium, which is almost a \$4 billion change compared to the February forecast. **Revenues are expected to be \$3.611 billion lower and spending, including appropriations enacted since February, is expected to be \$391 million higher.** Given the

uncertainty about the path of pandemic, the economic outlook will remain volatile for some time."

This drastic change in the state's fiscal outlook will drastically affect how decisions are made during this summer's special session—including on potential timber sale relief related to the closing of Duluth's Verso mill.

The highly unusual and memorable session came to a mostly quiet end May 18. As noted above, neither the House nor the Senate agreed on bonding or tax bills. A solar energy incentive bill sparked heated debate in the Senate (among Senate Republicans) over an amendment to use Xcel Energy's Renewable Development Account to help businesses impacted by the Benson biomass plant closure several years ago. After a recess, Senate Republicans withdrew the biomass amendment.

The Senate Energy Committee chair indicated a second RDA bill could be considered prior to a Special Session, which could include funding for businesses impacted by the biomass plant closures.

Between the close of the regular session on May 18th and the start of the special session in June, the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis sparked a conversation on the role of policing in our state. The Governor and legislative leaders have indicated those issues will be discussed at the Capital this summer, affecting every other piece of legislation considered.



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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

Beltrami County

April 16—Sealed Bid

Aspen Pulp	\$36.36	NA
Jack Pine P&B	\$29.66	NA
Red Pine Pulp	\$14.45	NA
Red Pine Bolts	\$70.13	NA

All 16 tracts offered during the sale were purchased.

Crow Wing County

April 24—Sealed Bid

Aspen	\$44.51	NA
Oak	\$34.46	NA
Red Pine	\$65.69	NA
Birch	\$24.09	NA

All 12 tracts offered during the sale were purchased.

Cass County

April 30—Sealed Bid

Aspen	\$46.85	\$35.27
Birch	\$18.40	\$21.75
Red Oak	\$40.16	\$27.32
Bur Oak	NA	\$18.12

6 of the 7 tracts offered during the sale were purchased.

DNR—Park Rapids Area

May 12—Sealed Bid

Trembling

Aspen (PB)	\$39.14	\$33.13
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Nrthrn

Hrdwds (PB)	\$22.35	\$20.10
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Oak

Species (PB)	\$42.76	\$27.43
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Norway

Pine (WST)	\$97.50	\$68.59
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All 22 tracts offered during the sale were purchased.

DNR—Cloquet Area

May 14—Sealed Bid

Aspen

Species (PW)	\$17.76	\$28.36
Paper Birch (PB)	\$12.00	\$23.39

Maple

Species (PB)	\$ 9.90	\$17.85
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13 of the 14 tracts offered during the sale were purchased.

St. Louis County

May 14—Sealed Bid

Aspen	\$29.56	NA
Birch	\$ 9.52	NA
Black Spruce	\$24.57	NA
Balsam	\$12.15	NA
Sugar Maple	\$11.27	NA

23 of the 31 tracts offered during the sale were purchased.

Pine County

May 13—Sealed Bid

Aspen Pulp	\$35.98	NA
Ash Pulp/Logs	\$10.37	NA
Maple Pulp	\$18.40	NA

All 6 tracts offered during the sale were purchased.

Carlton County

May 14—Sealed Bid

Aspen	\$30.27	NA
Nrthrn Hrdwds	\$12.05	NA

6 of the 8 tracts offered during the sale were purchased.

DNR—Aitkin Area

May 18—Sealed Bid

Aspen

Species (PW)	\$31.90	\$26.91
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Aspen

Species (PB)	\$28.48	\$20.53
Red Oak (PB)	\$19.57	\$18.23

16 of the 42 tracts offered during the sale were purchased.

Aitkin County

May 18—Sealed Bid

Aspen P&B	\$35.82	NA
Maple P&B	\$11.22	NA

Basswood P&B	\$11.40	NA
Red Pine P&B	\$52.32	NA

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

DNR—Sandstone Area

May 22—Sealed Bid

Aspen

Species (PW)	\$29.71	\$12.00
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Norway

Pine (PB)	\$55.18	NA
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Maple

Species (PB)	\$10.35	NA
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7 of the 25 tracts offered during the sale were purchased.

DNR—Hibbing Area

May 26—Sealed Bid

Aspen

Species (PB)	\$30.06	\$20.92
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Black

Spruce (PW)	\$19.74	\$25.92
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Norway

Pine (WST)	\$85.56	\$69.92
Balsam Fir (PW)	\$20.17	\$11.45

15 of the 24 tracts offered during the sale were purchased.

DNR—Deer River Area

May 26—Sealed Bid

Trembling

Aspen (PB)	\$16.23	\$33.86
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Aspen

Species (PW)	\$38.53	\$36.04
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Norway

Pine (WST)	NA	\$66.45
Ash (PB)	\$18.99	\$ 9.88



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All 16 tracts offered during the sale were purchased.

DNR—Backus Area

May 27— Sealed Bid

Aspen

Species (PW) \$24.85 \$28.82

Paper Birch (PB) \$13.48 \$22.90

Norway

Pine (WST) \$90.07 \$63.55

Oak Species (PB) \$30.73 \$26.13

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

Cass County

May 28— Sealed Bid

Aspen \$46.85 \$30.52

Birch \$21.47 \$17.90

All 5 tracts offered during the sale were purchased.

DNR—Tower Area

June 2— Sealed Bid

Trembling

Aspen (PW) \$45.49 \$30.61

Aspen

Species (PW) \$10.95 \$29.62

Black

Spruce (PW) \$ 9.76 \$17.60

Norway

Pine (WST) \$40.89 \$50.60

13 of the 16 tracts offered during the sale were purchased.

DNR—Two Harbors Area

June 3— Sealed Bid

Trembling

Aspen (PW) \$ 6.35 \$21.75

Balsam Fir (PW) \$ 8.43 \$10.75

Mixed

Spruce (PW) \$11.02 \$10.42

Paper

Birch (PW) \$ 2.81 \$ 9.60

9 of the 16 tracts offered during the sale were purchased.

DNR—Littlefork Area

June 4— Sealed Bid

Aspen

Species (PW) \$33.02 \$27.91

Mixed

Spruce (PW) \$35.66 \$22.21

Balsam Fir (PW) \$24.49 \$14.39

Pine Species (PB) \$ 8.95 \$29.95

Black

Spruce (PW) \$28.52 NA

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

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LOGGERS OF THE PAST . . .

Days of Busy Tote Roads

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*



Persons not familiar with the logging industry of the past often refer to the ice logging roads as tote roads and tell of some tote road running across some big swamp. But “tote roads” were the routes over which supplies were “toted” into the camps – and rather than running across swamps and low lands, they wound around on the hills.

“Toting” is a little known part of the early logging industry, but a very important part. In a way, tote teamsters and horses were the most important part – because before a camp was constructed a way had to be found to bring in lumber, tarpaper and nails; and as soon as camp work began, supplies and food for the men and horses were needed regularly – including a good amount of “tobacco and snuff.”

Whenever it was decided just what tim-

ber would be cut in the winter ahead, the “walking boss” and “timber cruiser” would lay out the route for toting in supplies from the railroad, lake or river. Tote roads were laid out as much as possible on high land and often wound around and around on the hills to avoid swamps and wet areas.

Some lumber for new camps was usually hauled in on the snow the winter or spring before. Much of the toting was done in early fall before the ground froze or the first snow fell. Some swampy and wet places had to be corduroyed with timber cut from the sides of the road before horses could cross.

In heavy clay of Koochiching County the problem was how to get through the mud that always developed during the rainy season of the fall. I have seen the wheels of wagons ball up with clay so that they could

not be hauled with six horses – and the empty wagons had to be abandoned until the weather dried out. Some of the worst of these mud roads were in the area around Northome and Wirt.

The whole of St. Louis County had its rocky tote roads, with the Thompson Rapids tote road east of Shiels and the Britton Rapids tote road along the Cloquet River being the very worst.

“Tote wagons” were heavy wagons, built to carry heavy loads and to stand the bounding from rock to rock on northeastern Minnesota roads – and to survive the mud and sand of the western part of the state.

Usually four horses were used to haul these wagons, but it was not uncommon to see six horses hitched to a single wagon. In the fall when camps were just getting

Tote team and wagon depart camp, near Alden Lake Dam, early on a spring morning in 1918.



started, several six-horse teams were used – one following the other. Tote teams were different than the heavy sleighs horses – they had to be fast afoot and able to cross swampy areas if necessary.

Tote teamsters were also a special breed of lumberjacks and got top pay in the industry. They were all great men in handling horses and usually had their pick of the best horses available, as the companies recognized how important it was to have supplies reach the camps on time.

These teamsters had to know how to get the teams and supplies over the bad roads. Bunk houses were filled with stories about which tote teamster was the best and which company had the best tote team.

In my opinion, the greatest of all of these was Frank McMinn – a quiet Scotsman who drove for the Cloquet Northern Lumber Companies. His four horses – Baldy, Pete, Nig and Rowdy – were known by all the lumberjacks. And when the camp clerk told them that the camp supply of snuff and tobacco was running short or all gone until the tote team arrived, they would all feel relieved if they knew Frank McMinn and his trusty four horses were on the tote wagon.

In his later years, Frank worked on the Cloquet Fire Patrol for me and told me of his many days as a tote teamster. He lived to be over 80 – a great tote teamster and gentleman – and was found frozen to death in his cabin on Pequaywan Lake.

Most all camps had from one to two trips a week for the tote team when camps were

in operation. Supplies were brought in by railroad to some siding where the tote teamster picked them up. Often the companies had a man stationed at the railroad siding to bring perishable supplies inside so they would not freeze while awaiting the arrival of the tote team. Weekly supplies were mostly food for the men and horses and plenty of snuff and tobacco. Hay, as a rule, was hauled in over the ice logging roads during the winter months – usually on Sundays when logs were not being moved. In the earlier months, hay came over the tote roads.

Most toting was usually from six to 12 miles, but there were places where toting was done up to 75 miles, and there were places where supplies had to be toted to a lake or river, loaded onto a boat and hauled across, and then loaded again onto a tote wagon for the trip into camp. This was true for some of the very early camps, such as those operating along the Littlefork River, where supplies came in from Tower across Lake Vermilion and were then toted to the camps to the west.

Considerable toting was done out of Duluth for the logging camps that operated within 25 miles of town, and at one time there were 10 tote teamsters working out of the old Palmer House Hotel on First Street.

Most tote teamsters worked the year around, making their two or three trips a week with supplies during the winter, supplying the wanigans during the drives, and hauling lumber and building supplies to

new camp locations during the summer.

They often left camp before daylight and returned after dark. On longer roads, they left camp before daylight, stayed the night at the railroad or source of supply, and returned to camp the next night.

Some tote roads were so long and so tough that they had to change teams half way to give the horses a chance to rest up. Toting was no doubt the hardest work for both men and horses that the logging industry had to contend with.

As a rule men were not allowed to ride on the tote wagons on their way to and from camp, but they could put their “turkey” or packsack on the wagon and walk behind. This was often easier than riding the wagon as it bounded from rock to rock to rock.

Many of the Forest Service roads of today follow the routes of the old logging camp tote roads. But most of these old tote roads are now grown over with alder brush in the low spots and have trees 18 inches in diameter growing in their centers where they cross the high lands. But on the crest of almost every ridge of high land, one can find evidence of where men and horses struggled in their efforts to keep supply wagons coming and timber rolling in the lumber camps of the 1890s and early 1900s.

When zooming down these forest trails on your snowmobile this winter, try to reflect on the hardships to man and beast as they worked over these tote roads in the early days of logging.

Heavy tote sleighs moved supplies into camps during wintertime.



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Great Lakes Trailers	16
Hancock Fabrication Inc.....	22
Hedstrom Lumber Co.....	27
Klinner Insurance.....	25
Lunemann Equipment Co.....	26
McCoy Construction & Forestry	31
Mid-States Equipment.....	4
Nelson Wood Shims.....	5
Northern Capital	17
Northern Timberline Equipment	23
Otis-Magie Insurance Agency	20
Pomp's Tire	5
Rice Blacksmith Saw & Machine.....	13
Rihm Kenworth.....	17
Schaefer Enterprises.....	4
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Ziegler.....	7

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