



The log landing at a Hicks Logging job this summer in Alexandria, N.H. (Photo by Steve Bjerklic.)



In a tough market, Forrest Hicks attributes his ability to operate profitably on relationships and a talented team of employees. (Photo by Steve Bjerklic.)

Growing with Diversity

By Ed Witt, Madison Lumber Co.

Recently, loggers in New Hampshire have been challenged with unprecedented timber market changes, unpredictable weather, and increasing environmental regulations and challenges. Forrest Hicks, owner of Hicks Logging LLC in Jefferson, N.H., has proven that he is willing to meet these challenges head on with equipment and manpower capable of running a successful logging business.

Forrest's enjoyment of the outdoors led him to attend White Mountain Community College in Berlin to study forestry and surveying. After graduation he found work with a local logging contractor, and in 1996 he started logging on his own with a cable skidder. He quickly added a slasher, then a feller buncher and grapple skidder. As they say, the rest is history.

Over the past 20+ years Forrest has grown and diversified his business to include an impressive equipment line up. He currently runs two separate logging crews and hires subcontractors when needed. His longest-running operation is his conventional mechanical crew; equipment includes a John Deere 753J feller-buncher, three John Deere 748 grapple skidders, 384 Prentice loader/

slasher, and a Morbark 23NCL chipper. Forrest runs the slasher on this job.

"We were only working 30 - 40 weeks a year due to the weather," he says. "I could not sustain my company at this production level, so I added the cut-to-length (CTL) equipment three years ago." The CTL crew includes a John Deere 753JH processor with a Waratah 622B processing head and a John Deere 1510 forwarder. In order to increase production and meet the demand for the CTL crew, Forrest added a John Deere 753 feller-buncher and a second pre-owned forwarder, a Fabtec 548. CTL logging is environmentally friendly. It involves cutting and processing trees at the stump and hauling the wood out on a forwarder. No trees are skidded in tree length form, reducing damage to trees being left behind. "The CTL crew runs nearly 52 weeks a year," Forrest explains. "We usually take a week or two off in the spring for maintenance."

Hicks Logging hauls most of its own timber on five trucks, most of which are Western Stars. Forrest also has two excavators, a bulldozer, and two dump trucks to keep landings and roads built ahead and to perform job close-out work. Most jobs are within

a 50-mile radius of Jefferson, although recently some woodlots have been purchased farther south to take advantage of drier soils.

The company has quickly adapted to changing market and ground conditions by employing the most appropriate logging system for the current conditions. During his years in the logging business Forrest has certainly seen his share of change, both in timber markets and environmental demands. His word for the current timber market is "scary." Since 1999, the northern forest region (N.Y., N.H., and Me.) has lost 11 pulp mills. In the past two years the region has seen 2.4 million tons of low-grade wood usage permanently disappear. To put this into perspective, that is more than 200 tractor trailer loads of wood per day, 365 days a year! Excess logging capacity has flooded low-grade markets.

To adjust to these changes, Forrest has recently begun utilizing trees in a different way than he used to. When low-grade markets were strong, with high pricing and high demand, some marginal, low-value sawlog products were not utilized. Now that the low-



grade scenario has changed, Forrest is utilizing these products.

One recent market to develop is mat logs. A mat log is a hardwood log that must be at least 16 feet long and straight. It can be made from any species, except poplar, and has no restrictions on defects. These logs are used to make mats that are then used as wet-soil crossings for heavy equipment in construction projects such as power lines and pipelines. Forrest recently purchased a John Deere 753J with a Waratah 622B processing head to pair with his mechanical crew to facilitate the efficient removal of trees to manufacture into mat logs.

In tough times like these, Forrest attributes his ability to operate profitably on relationships and a talented team of employees. "I have a network of markets and landowners that I work with on a regular basis that keep the wheels turning," he says. Some names that he mentioned include Steve Pinkham at Catalyst Paper, Tom and Scott Dillon at TR Dillon, Tom Carney at Twitchell Heirs, Jeff Langmaid at Fountains Forestry, and Charlie Baylies at Whitefield Light and Power. "Without these long-term relationships and my dedicated employees, I would not

be around today," Forrest adds. Tom Carney states, "We have been working together with Forrest since 1999. He has always stepped up to accomplish what we need to do to manage our land in the best possible manner."

Hicks Logging is a Master Logger, accredited by the Northeast Master Logger Certification Program. The Northeast Master Logger Certification Program offers third-party independent certification of logging companies' harvesting practices. The certification system is built around standards that have been cross-referenced to all of the world's major green certification systems.

Outside the woods, Forrest Hicks is the consummate family man. Forrest, his wife Stacy, and their two children, Rebecca and Garrett, reside in Jefferson. Forrest has coached his daughter's softball teams up through the ranks. He continues to coach White Mountain Regional High School's varsity softball team, even though Rebecca graduated last year. Forrest has coached the Spartans to the Division III state championship game for the past five years and has won two state championships, including 2016.

He is so passionate about baseball and softball that he helped build a ball field in Jefferson, and he has a batting cage in his office. The ball field was dedicated in 2014 to his father, also named Forrest Hicks, who was a decorated Vietnam Veteran and long-time youth baseball coach. Garrett recently graduated from high school and is going to work with his dad in the woods. Forrest and Garrett are avid deer hunters.



Ed Witt is a former NHTOA director and president and is also a past recipient of the Kendall Norcott Award. He is currently a procurement forester for Madison Lumber Mill Inc., an Eastern White Pine sawmill located in Madison, N.H. Ed also manages timberland in northern Coos County. When he is not buying White Pine sawlogs or managing timberland, he enjoys snowmobiling, hunting, and wood turning. To learn more about his wood turning and to see some of his work, go to <http://whitemtwoodturning.com/>

