

Master Logger Officials Detail Audit Process

Field verification makes ML program true third-party certified.

Offering a true alternative to other programs, the American Loggers Council endorsed Master Logger Certification Program (ALC/MLC) is a true third-party certification for logging contractors. It involves on-the-ground assessment of a logging contractor's activities. This assessment is performed by independent and unbiased verifiers evaluating whether and how the logger meets the standard in their own way. We all know that the steps to achieve objectives can vary from one woodlot to another. This is also true for the loggers themselves: One logger may take a completely different path to achieve the Master Logger certification standard, but the important part is that whatever they do is done to a high standard that benefits everyone.

The ALC/MLC standard gives each state the right to adopt its own pro-

gram, under the "Seven Areas of Responsibility" that ALC adopted for all member organizations to follow, specific to each particular state. Each state submits a template to the MLC committee for approval. This template then becomes the basis for the program and how it is implemented.

One thing that is a requirement of the ALC/MLC program is a mandate that there is an independent field audit for each logging company that becomes Master Logger Certified both initially and on an ongoing basis. These can come in different forms and can come from different parties.

In Missouri, Michigan, Wisconsin and the states in the Northeast, the field verifiers are typically foresters or loggers who have a deep understanding of logging operations. There is a checklist that each auditor must review in the field to show compliance with the

"Seven Areas of Responsibility." They report on what they observe in the field and how it relates to the standard. The reports are required to be professionally written, of high quality and are to be produced in a timely manner. The field verification report is crucial for the certification board to understand the logger's practices.

After the application and interview process is complete, the Master Logger applicant will receive a call from a field verifier, who will ask for five harvest sites and their locations, with one of the harvest sites being active. The field verifier will schedule a time to meet and begin the audit and three sites will be chosen at random to visit. The field verifier will communicate with the logger to go over what to expect and what to have on hand at the time of inspection.

Warren Suchovsky has been a logger member of verifier teams in Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin since ML certification began in each of these states. He currently is a member of the Wisconsin Certification Board and still does field audits for new applicants in Michigan.

"I think that an important distinction between ML Certification and Logger Education Programs is that logger certification measures how well the loggers actually apply what they have been taught," Warren said. "It sets a higher standard for quality workmanship than does merely meeting a set number of hours of training."

"It is important to recognize that a Master Logger is responsible for the quality of workmanship of the company's employees and subcontractors," Warren adds. "They also need to challenge foresters and landowners when they feel an aspect of a harvest plan will probably have a negative impact on the sustainability of forest resources."

An opening statement once on the site of the first visit may be, "Tell me what you did here and how are you meeting the landowner's objectives?"



Master Logger Certification Program auditors ask for five harvest site locations, one active.

This opening statement allows the applicant to talk about the site prep, the harvest, the goals, the landowner objectives, and outcomes. This could lead to a discussion of the harvest plan and how that process was achieved.

Next, soil and water protection is examined. The verifier will inspect a water crossing, if one exists, and water bars or other water controlling methods. They will consider things including: How has soil been protected? Is there brush in the trails? Are there swamp mats at the landing? Flotation tires or tracks? This is an opportunity for the logging contractor to discuss their methods and how they achieve this standard.

Other questions a verifier considers include: How are aesthetics being managed, historical features and biodiversity maintained? This is an opportunity for the contractor to discuss how they interpret and meet the landowner's aesthetic objectives. Do they want the landing seeded? Slash management near roads and buildings? Have they minimized skid trails to the yard or contoured the trails with the road? Are there any historical features such as old homesteads? Rock walls? Cemeteries? If, so how did they address them? Were there any sensitive areas of biodiversity? Did the landowner have specific management goals for wildlife?

Safety of the employees and operational function is paramount for meeting the high bar set by Master Logger. A logger should expect to have their safety plan available. This is not for a simple tick of the box, but a logger must be ready to answer when the last time was that they used the safety plan and did it work correctly? Do they have first-aid kits available in each machine? Are people CPR-first aid trained? Does everyone know the emergency action plan? These questions are pretty standard during an audit. The auditor may also ask to look at a machine to determine things like: Are the seat belts functioning? ROPS? Does the operator operate in a safe manner? Is PPE being worn and hi-vis clothing?

All of these questions and fact finding are part of the auditing of field performance in Master Logger. For many candidates, they know they are meeting or exceeding the standard, now they just need an independent verifier to prove it.

Not everyone will meet this stan-



Areas examined include site prep, harvest, water control, wildlife, soil compaction and more.



Australian ML auditor David Bennett, left, and longtime Lake States ML auditor Warren Suchovsky, right



dard, but those who are and are willing to prove it will drive higher level expectations and improve the reputation of all loggers.

Matt Jensen, a longtime Master Logger and owner of Whitetail Logging, Inc. in Wisconsin, says, "I use the field audit as a way to keep me and my business sharp. Having a third-party look at my job reaffirms that I am doing a good job. The fact that the third-party auditing was built by loggers for loggers and endorsed by the American Loggers Council means it fits well and means a lot to me. I can tell people that I do a good job, but who says so but myself? Master Logger provides that extra set of eyes."

Jensen adds: "If you are someone who feels that it is someone just look-

ing over your shoulder then you probably are in it for the wrong reason."

In summary, the certification process to achieve Master Logger status is thorough and professional, but a logger doing quality work in the woods will often find they are already meeting its standard and certification is simply a matter of documenting this. The time commitment to become certified is not overwhelming, and because Master Logger is a standard created by loggers for loggers, it is a certification any professional logger can understand, appreciate, and realistically achieve and maintain. **TH**

Article submitted by Ted Wright with help from field auditors and officials with the Master Logger Program and American Loggers Council.