

NC Loggers Come Together

By DK Knight

Southern Stumpin'

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Southern Stumpin' happily invited the North Carolina Association of Professional Loggers, Inc. to submit the following article that depicts the group's tremendous growth since its inception, and how it intends to carry this momentum into the future. Visit www.ncloggers.com; e-mail contact@ncloggers.com or call 919-271-9050.

It's been a fast ride for one of the nation's youngest logging associations. The North Carolina Professional Loggers Association, Inc. (NCAPL) pulled out of the station just over two years ago and has already made an impact on behalf of its members and those on the national scene.

A charter group of 12 logging businesses started meeting in the summer of 2007 at local restaurants to discuss logger training, trucking and tax regulations, a need to reduce spending on fuel and operating supplies, and focusing on state and federal politics where you take the initiative instead of dodging bullets and avoiding ricochets. Keith Biggs and Jimmie Locklear of Forestry Mutual Insurance had just returned from their first American Loggers Council national meeting and were impressed with a 100% dedicated logging association working at the national and state levels. "It was loggers dealing with logging issues at their table," Biggs recalls.

That observation was shared by several NCAPL founding loggers who were Forestry Mutual customers. "We had a 'critical mass' in hand as we looked into how a logger-run

organization would be a benefit in NC,” according to Chip Capps of Arcola Logging. Capps took the initiative to contact other state-based associations who had logging members and also canvassed select forest product companies to gauge how the new organization would be received.

The informal loggers group also had the foresight to form a non-profit corporation, request a tax number and start building a solid foundation for what was to come. Pretty soon, however, as Joe Ross of J&J Logging in Henderson notes, “We would leave our dinner meetings, do nothing and be back later talking about the same issues meeting after meeting.” Frustration is not what this small group needed. An association director position and how to fund it was discussed at length. Several persons were discussed but the conversation seemed to fall back on bringing in Doug Duncan. The NC native had already completed a 15-year stint in forest industry research, land management and procurement, 10 years as the NC Forestry Assn.’s leader in designing and implementing the ProLogger training program, and then a regional manager in a medium sized heavy equipment business.

Joe Ross was the logger assigned to close the deal. There was something mentioned about Joe having to buy a piece of logging equipment if Doug came to Henderson that afternoon. One group meeting later there was a handshake on a three-year commitment from all sides to get the NCAPL up and running. Two years later the small group of 12 loggers has grown to 90 logging businesses and 85 partner businesses representing equipment vendors, insurance, forest product mills, landowners, consultants and fuel companies.



Thinking Outside The Box

Staying financially viable while at the same time serving members has always been a top priority. Billy Corey, Chairman of the NCAPL Board and president of Tim-Con Wood Products in Roper, fully understands the priorities of running both a successful logging business and association. When the board was discussing finances above and beyond membership drives, Corey said not to rule out any possibility. As a result, NCAPL has been working “outside the box” in what would be traditional association member services.

Two in-woods equipment demos in 2009 were purchased by partner members in equipment and insurance businesses. They contracted with NCAPL to handle the events, including site selection, safety, accommodations and food, traffic control and publicity. Another tool added this year to NCAPL was the formation of Logging Services and Exchange, LLC. Available services and products are shown at www.loggingservices.biz.

Through this organization, loggers can list equipment for sale over the Internet that links to one of the major online equipment sales sites. It's not uncommon for loggers to receive calls from across the U.S. and internationally regarding their equipment. Aflac supplemental and primary health insurance is available to members. Waste oil pickups for disposal can be requested for shops anywhere in NC. Alerts for stolen equipment can be issued by members for communication across NC and adjacent states. Discount fuel purchases through a commercial fuel card program for highway diesel are available and discount bulk deliveries and fuel depot locations are being explored. A pilot program with a partner member was conducted that provided a \$30.00 per unit savings on bulk purchase of steering truck tires. The bulk supply purchase program will likely be expanded in 2010.

Another venture has been improving profitability through better hardwood grade utilization. NCAPL was awarded a regional grant through the USFS-Wood Education and Resource Center to help establish the very successful Hardwood Value Improvement Project (HVIP) in North Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia. Optimal bucking in the woods and on wood yards has been documented to add significant value to the bottom line. NCAPL will work closely with interested organizations to help establish a long-term HVIP effort in these states.

Major discussions are also being held with logging equipment manufacturers and educational groups on establishing "operator training" programs. NCAPL members have recognized that when the markets ramp back up there will be a critical shortage of trained equipment operators, which would surely become a limiting factor for logging businesses looking to expand.

Business improvement in the big picture means having access to markets. "We want traditional markets to thrive and expand in NC," says Perry Hunt, NCAPL Secretary/Treasurer and owner of Hunt Forest Resources in



Wake Forest. "We watch the slow but steady slip of pulp and other wood products companies away from NC and the U.S. Our loggers see this and also have to contend with an economic roller coaster ride in the meantime. We need growth in all market

areas and a more predictable business environment.”

NCAPL has embraced new and emerging biomass markets at all levels and has been the primary group to contact. “It doesn’t take long for a new venture looking at NC to appreciate that we have ample resources both in raw materials and feedstocks coupled with a progressive and eager to expand logging force,” according to Duncan. “We have built a network around the NCAPL that directs business inquiries to us. The network of universities, private researchers, equipment companies, economic development groups and even regulators know us and sends inquiries our way.”

Paving The Way For Projects

A significant effort in late 2009 was launched to provide potential forest products companies the forest resource and logging capacity data they needed. NCAPL has completed three resource assessment studies under contract with different county level economic development commissions. Many counties have brownfield or greenfield sites in a rural setting that could be well suited to a traditional forest products company or new biomass industry. “It’s unbiased resource data grouped according to the final manufacturing product for 100 miles out,” Duncan says.

In other words, if you are considering a co-generating plant that burns low cost forest residues as dirty chips, you have the annual sustainable availability for each 25 mile radius outward. Same goes for a wood pellet plant that will use both clean chips and residues, or a biofuels facility that will use pulpwood dimensional feedstock and also residues. The resource availability is then coupled with existing and anticipated logging capacity in the drain area. Combine that with an onsite facilities and infrastructure review that includes highway, rail, access to open water ports or barge landing, and natural gas and you have an excellent product to recruit new industry. The “new” industry interested in locating in one case happened to be a traditional forest product facility that had a shortage of local raw material in another state.

NCAPL has also become a sort of clearinghouse for information concerning the Biomass Crop Assistance Program (BCAP). New lists of “qualified receiving facilities” are posted and distributed as soon as they are issued and a long list of question and answer sessions are published at www.ncloggers.com. Individual logger questions are handled by e-mail or phone call.

Daily Communications

How does the NCAPL Executive Director Duncan view his job?

Foremost, he is quick to recognize that the association belongs to the members, but members need to manage and run their own demanding businesses. "This often puts members at a disadvantage in attending the functions and meetings where they need to be seen and heard," Duncan says. "It's often me filling the seat, but it's our members' needs that are being communicated."

The ease in communicating information up and down the line has become an association trademark. It's not many days that members don't receive an e-mail on relevant subjects or that www.ncloggers.com is not updated. It's interesting to note that the old way of doing business with face-to-face meetings and one-on-one phone calls is being replaced by e-mail, websites, webinars, and conference calls. Duncan relates, "It's funny, but today when someone calls you direct it almost means this is special or important. Everyone of our new members and renewing members gets a personal call to show we appreciate them and we are here to help. Personal level business still works and it flows both ways."

The daily challenge is to handle requests for member information and assistance that come from all levels, be it a corporate CEO or VP down to a log truck owner who can't find access around a posted bridge. A concern was also brought up to the board that is likely shared by other associations. NCAPL was receiving a large number of requests from non-members. The problem was not in the willingness to help but in the time requirements to do it in a professional manner for those who had not yet joined the association. The board decision was to begin the discussion with, "This is what we provide and do for our members," and end with a pertinent example. It doesn't take long for the caller to decide that there is value to becoming a member and supporting the NCAPL, which in turn benefits his business.

Frankie Arrants of Arrants Logging in Jamesville has watched the association grow in numbers and clout. "Lots of local businesses depend on my company being healthy," Arrants says. "I've made sure they have an opportunity to join the NCAPL as partner members to show their support. I'm also pleased with logger-to-logger contact we have at meetings and our ability to stay on top of state and national issues."

Maintaining Momentum

What's the future of logging associations, state, regional or national? As an essential link in the supply chain, they have got to be working bottom to top to be sure everyone is profitable. Loggers are in a unique position to see the stump to the scales, but understanding international market demand, new biomass markets, and impact of regulations and legislation will make

them stronger and significant players. It's a vision shared by NCAPL members and with the help of today's technology and ability to communicate, the road to success seems less bumpy.

Norman Nance, President of the NCAPL and owner of Pine State Group in Eden, summed up his commitment to the association, "I'm a third generation logger and in the business for 41 years. Logging has been my total life. We now have an opportunity to create that image of what a professional should be to the benefit of everyone around us. We are going to do this together."

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