Many Able Workers Lighten the Load

During visits to SAF meetings this year, I have, on occasion, been able to get into the woods. Two trips to widely differing terrain have spawned some thoughts about our Society.

In Washington State, I saw a skyline yarder logging on steep ground. In Georgia, a skyline system was set to fish logs out of a swamp. I have always been intrigued with skyline logging and the skill it requires. I’m much like the greenhorn in the ditty who asks, “Hey, Mr. Lumberjack, is it one for stop or three for go?” and is answered, “Ask the Whistle Punk, kid, I don’t know.”

The coordination involved in a safe skyline operation is amazing. Fellers lay the wood so the yarder can pull it out. The rigging crew selects the tailholds so all the wood can be yarded without pulling the system apart. The hookers know where to hook the logs to pull them out of a bind. For their safety, they must have faith that the yarder engineer will respond instantaneously to their signals. They watch in all directions as tension lifts the lines, lest pieces in an unsuspecting location be flipped or rolled their way with fatal results.

With the timing and precision of a teenager playing a videogame, the yarder engineer pulls and releases the lines. Loggers must have a keen understanding of blocks, straps, deflection, and a hundred other important things. Lack of coordination anywhere along the line, and the operation risks a breakdown of hours or days.

SAF is much like a skyline logging operation. A diagram of SAF units and their interconnections is as complicated as the diagrams of skyline systems we studied in logging engineering classes. Maintaining clear communication among chapters, state societies, committees, and Council can be as difficult as sending clear signals between the hookers and the engineer on a windy day. Occasionally, when a unit begins to pull in one direction, it creates concern or disruption in unexpected places, straining efficient operations. For this reason, each SAF unit must trust others to do their part, just as the hookers trust the engineer.

When the SAF units are carefully coordinated and communicating well, we, like a West Coast yarder, can pull a “gigantic log out of the hole” without breaking the lines. Probably the best example of coordination among SAF units at the local and national levels is our annual convention.

I can’t think of any better introduction to this issue of the Journal than President Bosworth’s commentary. And, for that reason, I am going to keep my words to a minimum.

Using personal experience as a framework, Bosworth weaves together the worlds of logging and SAF in a manner that helps readers understand the importance of communication and cooperation among loggers and between loggers and foresters. In doing so, he sets the stage for the discussions that follow.

Authors in this issue represent national- and state-level logging associations, educational institutions and training programs, and health and safety organizations. In reading the articles, I noted a number of common threads that authors discuss from their particular perspective: safety, training, skill, excellence, professionalism, communication, interaction, partnership, trust, and commitment. All parties agree that developing the means of putting these ideas into action is essential to successful short- and long-term harvesting operations.

We hope you enjoy this issue on the world of loggers and logging. Moreover, we hope it serves to encourage cooperative efforts and improved communication between the forestry profession and the logging community.