

Hank Goetz

Blackfoot Community Project

This cut to length harvesting system has been used in Norway and Sweden for years and we've been using that more and more. The advantage of that system is you do leave slash in the brush and when that happens, then you have the option of leaving the slash out there over winter. That process then helps the return of nutrients to the soil. Or you can go ahead and dispose of it later by burning. The mechanized nature of this logging is actually a lot safer, a lot more productive than the old conventional chain saw and the skidder. It makes stands that were previously uneconomical to log economically feasible. We're now able to treat and manage stands that we just couldn't before.

Notice the size of the tires on those rigs. They are very big broad wide tires for a very, very low ground pressure. The other beauty of it is — if you notice the trees that we left standing-- that it will provide seed for the next crop because we're able to snip the tree, pick it up and move it around and set it down in an opening. The machine does not break tops out of other trees and knock branches off of leave trees. Then with the skidding system with that four rigger we are able to go ahead and again maneuver those relatively short logs onto the trailer. Another advantage of that system from the environmental standpoint is that then the forwarding machine is able to carry large loads of logs long distances. So it reduces the number of logging roads that you need in an area. Then, you don't have to worry about putting roads to bed or future erosion.

More roads lead to more disturbances, and obviously less productivity because you've got roads tied up in a travel area that is not supporting vegetation. You have trouble with stream crossings also the possibility of ATV use in the future. It's much easier I think long term to kind of lie as lightly on the land as possible and yet utilize the products that come off that land with a minimum of roads.

The system that we're using there to harvest that is a kind of a commercial thinning system. We're leaving the best trees standing and that does two things. One, it will allow the remaining trees to grow. It gives them more nutrients like water and at the same time it gives space between those trees for a new crop of trees to come in. So, unlike clear cutting systems which are used and very applicable in some species- lodge pole pine, western larch - you've got to treat those trees like kind, and let them grow then for 50, 60 years you may do a little thinning among those. And then get them to a hundred, 120 years, cut them all down and start over again. You tend to keep cover on the ground through the continuous cycle and by having the two layers or in some instances with the uneven age management, you have 3 or 4 layers in the stand. This provides, then, a wider range of habitat for birds and other residents of the forest.

Originally, we concentrated on the Blackfoot River with the Blackfoot challenge as kind of being the thread that tied everything together. The Blackfoot river has been a heavily used river in a lot or respects. Lewis and Clark split up in Missoula. Clark went up the

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Clarksford River. And Lewis came up the Blackfoot, crossed over near the headwaters and went down into the east front and then met up again with Clark at the fall, Great Falls Missouri. The first logging in Montana occurred along the Blackfoot river in the late 1800s. They floated logs down the Blackfoot river as recently as the mid 1920s. And what was interesting was, when you see old photographs of that river, it was wall to wall logs. But yet in the 1960s, it was nominated as a potential addition to the wild and scenic rivers. Where we really saw the difference in increasing use on the Blackfoot river was in the '60s and '70s as the population of Missoula and other towns in Montana started to grow.

We look at a healthy river as kind of like the proverbial canary in the mine. If the river is healthy the wildlife — not only the fish species — use the river; the eagles live on the river; the deer use the river; the elk use the river. Historically, I think both the native Americans and the early pioneers and settlers used the river in conjunction with the wildlife and so we look at it if the river is a functioning ecosystem we have the diversity and we have health in the uplands and in the tributaries.

I'm sure everybody's heard of the movie, "A River Runs Through It". It's been kind of mixed blessing to be frank with you. It has led us to go ahead and be able to raise more private funds for restoration projects because people know of the river. The downside, on the other hand, is that I guess there are people that are peak baggers, they run around the country climbing every peak so they can kind of chalk it up to doing it and there are fly fishermen and women that do the same thing. So we have seen a tremendous increase in the recreation on the river. And a substantial part of that I'm sure is attributable to the movie, so I guess the old saw about the knife cuts coming and going is applicable in this instance.

Norman McLean's phrase "A River Runs Through It" is so true because it binds the people in the community together. Some people use it for agricultural purposes; others use it for recreational purposes, others even for spiritual purposes. It's a common thread that the people who lived here for 4 or 5 generations relate to - as well to some of the newer folks that are moving in, who say we love this valley, this river. So, it's a focal point for a wide variety of folks and I think that is the critical point. It's a thing that brings us together and in this day and age, when trying to work things cooperatively from a conservation standpoint you need things that build a bigger middle versus standing at opposite sides of the fence and pitching rocks at one another.