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July/August 2022

## ON THE COVER

Plikat Logging

### Your Only as Good as Your Horse and Crew (../2022-july-august/horse.php)

Nick Rodgers, a fourth-generation logger from Butte Falls, Oregon, started contract cutting right how of high school.

### Focus on Yarders (../2022-july-august/yarders.php)

First part on a two-part series about innovative yarder developments.

### Treat 'em Right and Work 'em Hard (../2022-july-august/treat-em-right.php)

Plikat Logging provides logging services for private landowners in the Umpqua Valley. It currently employs 70 to 75 full-time, year-round workers.

### Long-Term Stewardship Contracts and the Future Forest (../2022-july-august/long-term.php)

New ways of addressing important issues often present unforeseen challenges as well as opportunities.

### 2022/23 Buyer's Guide (../BuyersGuide.php)

Complete directory to products, manufacturers, distributors and services.

### Guest Column (../2022-july-august/guest.php)

Who Are the True Conservationists?

## DEPARTMENTS

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concerned agreed would have "...dire economic and social consequences..." On the forest side, the Malheur National Forests in the region were an "...overgrown, insect infested, tinderbox, ready to explode..." into a catastrophic fire event.

### Today the effort has proven to be a rousing success.

According to Oregon's two senators, Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, "This contract has by all accounts been a massive success. It enjoyed broad local support, saved the last mill in Grant County, reduced local unemployment by almost half, stabilized local school enrollment, reduced wildfire risks on more than 55,000 acres, and led to the restoration of nearly 140,000 acres of wildlife habitat..."

In recent communications with the Forest Service, Senators Wyden and Merkley have suggested the extraordinary success of Iron Triangle's work fulfilling the terms of the contract might serve as a template for similar contracts in the future. Recent legislation by Congress authorizing 20-year contracts indicates similar collaborative efforts could become the standard for enhancing forest health and resilience throughout the West.

### Challenges and Opportunities

New ways of addressing important issues often present unforeseen challenges as well as opportunities. According to Russ Young, Iron Triangle's owner, stewardship contracts are no exception, in large part because of some significant differences between traditional harvesting contracts and the requirements of stewardship contracts.



*Pictured: Caterpillar 545D and Komatsu 895.*

To that point, the Forest Service website explains that in addition to the ten-year timeframe, a company with a stewardship contract must "...account for accomplishing restoration projects including, a variety of activities, such as timber harvest; road construction, maintenance, or removal; treatment of noxious weeds; installation and/or removal of culverts; stream restoration; fisheries or wildlife habitat improvement; hazardous fuels reduction; and prescribed burning..."

Thus, "Preparing a bid proposal encompassing multiple and diverse tasks requires more time and is more complex than submitting a single price bid on a timber sale."

## LONG-TERM STEWARDSHIP CONTRACTS AND THE FUTURE FOREST

By Jack Petree

When TimberWest Magazine checked in with Iron Triangle Logging of John Day, Oregon, in 2017, the firm was four years into an innovative new approach (long-term stewardship contracts) designed to serve both forest-dependent communities and the health and resilience of the nation's forests.

Prior to the contract, the future was bleak in the John Day region Iron Triangle serves. John Day's only sizable sawmill had announced its closure due to lack of sustainable log supply, a closure all

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About the contracts Young comments, "The differences between perceived understandings and reality can often present difficulties. Stewardship terms, rules, and guidelines developed in offices (sometimes remote from the work) are often difficult to implement on the ground. We have all had to learn to work through these issues with communications."

### Flexibility Is the Key

"Putting current seasonal operations into the finite box of contract times can also present difficulties," Young said. "In the world of acquisitions management (AQM), all things tend to be black or white, while in the natural world, there are grey areas. There might be little understanding of the flexibility required in meeting the challenges of mud in the spring, fires in the summer, more mud in the fall, soft roads, wet snow, closed delivery roads, and a host of other challenges. Both Iron Triangle and the local office of the USFS have had to learn how to work within this framework to meet the hard deadlines required of us."

Young explained, "A traditional timber harvest is managed at the local level (a bottom-up approach) by personnel familiar with local issues and natural resource management." In contrast, he said the stewardship contract was from the top down. "Direction, guidance, and management decisions are all made by the contracting officer located in Wenatchee, Washington, based on advice from personnel in AQM who are proficient in contract management but not necessarily in natural resource management, especially timber management."

*Operator putting a Komatsu through its paces.*



Secondly, "This contract shifts substantial project management responsibilities from the USFS to the contractor, responsibilities generally handled by USFS personnel in a traditional harvest contract. The primary contractor is responsible for the management and accountability of sub-contractors who are included in completing the ecological restoration projects within the specified timelines and to the required specs."

### An Investment in Staff and Iron

A third, and major difference between a stewardship contract and a traditional harvest is the very large investment in new machinery. Young says, "Iron Triangle has invested over \$2,000,000 per year in new equipment. The operations required to accomplish the combined forest health and resilience operations of the stewardship contract in the protracted time frames, required Iron Triangle to invest in both the staff and the equipment necessary to carry out the removal of substantial volumes of non-saw biomass, reduction in fuel loading, rearrangement of fuel loads, reduction in juniper encroachment, and road maintenance called for in the contract."

Young adds that these investments included additional masticators, excavators for grapple piling, CATs, graders and brushing equipment to handle the miles of road maintenance, and line machines including a yarder with a motorized carriage, tethered assist capable processors, forwarder, and an anchor machine. "Iron Triangle also had to invest in additional trucking capacity to ensure rapid mobilization to projects."

When they earned the 10-year contract five years ago, Young said they had to significantly upgrade and they partnered with Komatsu. "They, along with Modern Machinery in Boise, Idaho, helped us supply the rapid increase of equipment we needed with newer and different machines."

Iron Triangle continues to rely on Komatsu and Modern Machinery today. Most recently the company added two 755 TimberPro feller bunchers, a 775 processor, a 735 processor, and a Komatsu 895 forwarder. A variety of Caterpillar skid machines, Hitachi and Volvo yard machines, and a Promac masticator help assure the company can accomplish the tasks required by the contract in an efficient and timely manner.

Last, Young says, "Given the accelerated nature of the work and the requirements of the contract, our equipment operators required additional training to ensure the prescriptions required by the contract were accomplished as desired. Iron Triangle has a great staff of highly qualified and experienced equipment operators who have stepped up and performed with true excellence."

According to Young the lack of local infrastructure presented both challenges and opportunity. There was no market for the non-saw green biomass that had to be removed, so Young says Iron Triangle invested in a post and pole plant. "It was a great risk and required substantial investment but has proven to be a good opportunity and has provided additional employment for the community. The post and pole plant and an associated firewood processing facility have been instrumental in meeting the needs of both current and future forest restoration projects."

### The Future of Stewardship Contracts

As Oregon's senators pointed out, the contract Iron Triangle is just completing has been, "a massive success" in meeting the environmental, economic, and quality of life goals set forward in the contract. What's next?

According to Young, forest health and resilience, as well as the continued health of the community require additional commitment. "This cannot be a one-and-done project. We cannot return to the old ways, which were unsuccessful and led to the need for this contract."

If anything, Young contends, the pace of stewardship work needs to be picked up, not only to sustain the forest itself but also to continue and expand on the benefits the John Day community received from the ten-year effort. From the standpoint of the entire western forest products industry, going back to the "old ways," would, he points out, mean mill closures rather than expansions, employment losses rather than increases in the number of jobs the industry provides, and the continued loss of forestlands throughout the West as fire and disease continue to run rampant.