News from the
American Loggers Council

As We See It:
Improvise, Adapt, Overcome

By Danny Dructor, Executive Vice President of the American Loggers Council

Just recently, I had the privilege to work alongside Hancock Natural Resource Management Group, Thomas Johnson Logging, and John Deere to organize and implement a tour that involved taking participants from the Federal Timber Purchasers Committee to an active logging site. The purpose was to showcase the latest technology that is being utilized in equipment operating in marginal ground, while first thinning a 12 year-old loblolly pine plantation. The tour offered an opportunity to introduce US Forest Service employees from around the country to the in-the-cab technology that many operations are utilizing today to assist them with their efficiencies and productivity, recognizing that by planning timber harvests on US Forest Service land utilizing some of these same technologies as private industry, it could assist them in becoming more productive and efficient as well in both their sales preparation and sales administration.

Just prior to and during the tour, several issues occurred that had me focusing on what the challenges really are in the real world of forest management and timber harvesting, including an abundant amount of rainfall causing the contractor to move from the original tour site, a lack of cell phone service which made the “live” demonstration of the technology unusable, and finally ground conditions in a first thinning that were less than desirable due to the recent rainfall with more on its way.

What dawned on me by the time I was asked to summarize the tour two days later was the Marine Corps phrase, "Improvise, Adapt, Overcome." That is what professional timber harvesters must do on almost a daily basis, and land managers such as the US Forest Service should be ready and willing to do the same. When things don’t go as planned we can either shut down, or we can choose to…

Improvise. The best made plans for managing and harvesting a stand of timber can come to a screeching halt just as soon as an insect or disease infestation attacks the stand, weather events such as tornadoes, excessive rainfall, straight line winds or hurricanes impact the area, and even loss of markets that were within a reasonable hauling distance to the tract of timber suddenly disappear. Sometimes we are given a warning of impending issues, but more often than not, we are exposed to these threats oftentimes while operating in an area. The best way forward is to have a contingency plan for those times when you will need to rapidly adjust your original plan and be prepared to implement it. Most importantly, be flexible.

Adapt. While the best laid plans can take an unexpected turn, you should be willing to adapt to ensure your productivity and income does not. We should all be willing to take our contingency plan and adapt it to the ever changing environment around us. There are oftentimes no black and white solutions, but experience and knowledge and a good dose of common sense can lead to changes in an operation that result in the same- if not better- outputs.

Overcome. When we are challenged, we should face it head-on and work through it. Having a plan and a contingency plan are great, but the willingness to implement those plans completes that process of overcoming those obstacles that have tried to get in our way.

If the US Forest Service is going to be able to provide the management and harvesting levels that our National Forests desperately need to restore forest health, then they should train their employees to be willing to Improvise, adapt and overcome, just like the Marines. Handbooks and manuals are great guidance documents, but the on-the-ground managers of our nation’s forests must have the option of being flexible and stepping out of their comfort zone in order to be able to provide more operating days in a calendar year with different harvesting systems that can be deployed without fear of retribution for making a mistake.

Our Nation’s forests are renewable, and even if we have a small area where we made the wrong decision before correcting, those stands will still come back and be able to produce timber, provide wildlife habitat, and all of the other things that we manage or forests for including water quality and recreational opportunities.

The American Loggers Council will continue to seek to improve the sustainable management and timber harvesting of all of our nations forests, regardless of ownership, and we will continue to share your knowledge with those who have not had the privilege of planning and operating a sustainable timber harvesting operation.

We wish everyone a safe and happy holiday season!

The American Loggers Council is an 501(c)(6) not for profit trade association representing professional timber harvesters throughout the United States. For more information please contact the American Loggers Council at 409-625-0206, or americanlogger@aol.com, or visit our website at www.amloggers.com.