

# Managing a Contract Cutter

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Logging operations on private land have the potential to leave the owner and harvest area devastated. Landholders often have little control over the state of the forest during and after logging. Private foresters are furthering their knowledge in forest management and are taking an active role in determining the operational boundaries. With harvesting operations there is a need for a detailed logging plan, including map and harvest agreement to ensure the sustainability of the forest management.

Knowing the history of your cutter is important in understanding their method of merchandising. A cutter who has only ever cut sawlogs may not recognize poles, piles, etc and this will translate into lower utilization. It is also important to know and verify whether the cutter is accredited and insured. The ability to communicate is essential in managing a logging operation. If there is a problem it has to be dealt with ASAP. In arriving at compromises, compensation may be needed for time and effort in the level of care that you require. Negotiate the cut rate and terms of payment right at the start and set this in the logging agreement.

If the stand is to be paint marked for retention ensure the cutter is aware of the codes/markings system that is being used. Any tree hang-ups should be removed straight away and all trees that have a scarf cut must be felled regardless of utilization potential. The cutter usually determines the utilization potential of each log. In some cases the cutter may simply snig the full merchantable length to the ramp and leave the product merchandising to the landholder or off sider. It pays for the landholder to have good product knowledge and understand how logs volumes and pole/pile classes are calculated. Knowing minimum small end diameters, log lengths and allowable maximum stump height will promote full utilisation. Stump height not only affects the utilization level of the tree bole but also the quality of the coppice/regrowth from the cut tree stumps.

Commonly underestimated is the need to clearly define the operation time frames. For example when the cutter starts and finishes work, what days of the week, when will operations commence and when does the harvest operation have to be completed? Harvesting operations can drag on, allowing for weather, define the timeline and set penalty clauses for failure to comply with the provisions of the logging agreement.

Basic stand hygiene including the disposal of oil filters, waste oil, rubbish, etc needs to be included in the agreement. Drainage of snig tracks for erosion control may require removal of logging debris, placement of whoa boys and the removal of temporary stream crossings. Major snig track location needs to be determined in consultation with the cutter as the type of logging machinery; special features and grade of slope can affect this. Loading ramps/log dumps should be located when ever possible in already cleared areas and topsoil replaced as part of the post harvest rehabilitation. Where trees are retained for future cycles it is important to protect the retained stems from smash and rub during snigging. Trees marked for removal may need to be temporarily retained as rub trees that the skidder or dozer operator pull logs around.

A risk assessment is an essential element to contractor management and no-go areas should be clearly marked. The landholder has a duty of care to the cutter. Power lines, major landslips, deep crevices, etc should be marked on the map and the cutter notified. The machinery used in the harvest operation needs to have appropriate protection in case of roll over or falling objects? If there is a safety issue or willful neglect of the harvest provisions, suspension of operations may be necessary.

Fence lines should be marked on the map, which accompanies the logging agreement and clearly state who is responsible for the repair of damaged during logging. Include a clear depiction of the logging area boundaries and fire lines (kept clear). Some properties are not accessible during periods of wet weather. Having areas that are more suited to wet weather operation identified can maintain continuity.

Regardless of all the regulations and codes, communication and negotiation are the keys to managing contractors. Remember that cutting, snigging, barking and merchandising is very hard and dangerous work. Be aware of what issues your cutter is faced with. The occasional walk through the harvest area and shared cuppa at smoko will help.