

The IFIC Story, told by Don Foley

The objective of this packet of information is to make you aware of a program whose conception began in November 19, 1987. A program that few really could foresee the tremendous impact it could, and would have on the logging and sawmill industry in Indiana. A program that first developed a strong working relationship with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources Division of Forestry (IDNRDoF) and a voluntary organization called the Indiana Forest Industry Council (IFIC). The success of the programs that have been developed have not only benefited the IDNR, logging and sawmill industry but also landowners, insurance companies, and the residual timber stands growing in Indiana.

Now that I have your attention, let me begin back just a few months prior to November 1987; August 5, 1986, to be exact. That was the date that the Indiana Forest Industry Council was formed. The founding of the organization was due to problems the head of the Indiana Forestry Division, John Datena, and logging and sawmill industry people recognized. Just a few examples were: damage to timber stand during harvest, lack of trained professional loggers, loggers workmen's compensation over \$30.00 per hundred, plus a 25% pool cost, mis-manufactured timber and logs, little or no proper safety habits in a very dangerous environment, a poor understanding of the timber resource, and a poor communicative network among all parties listed above.

Our first efforts were to develop a brochure to explain good timber management, and to train loggers in its use. This brochure continues to be printed at industry expense, and used by our industry personnel as a timber management tool.

After that combined effort by IFIC and IDNRDoF, a grant of \$40,000 was obtained by IDNRDoF through a Focus Funding Project for Educating Loggers in Directional Felling and Skidder Operation. The objective of the grant was to develop a logger training program. The results far exceeded anyone's expectations. The different types and levels of training, that were obtained at the end of November 1990, the time the grant monies and matching funds were exhausted, is enclosed. Also enclosed is the training update, February 1, 1996. After comparing the two training reports, one can see the strong commitment for the continuation by both industry and the forestry division, to expand and build upon a successful program.

The logging industry and the State Forestry Division knew they had a diamond in the rough. Our next objective was how to polish this jewel, and to bring it to the level of a lasting, quality, hands on logger training program. Hands on means, you don't sit all day in a class room; but you take your saw and equipment to the woods, and cut trees under the guidance of, Soren Eriksson and the Game of Logging Training. To accomplish the training we needed the availability of woods, money, personnel and the incentives for loggers to attend. Over 60% of the training was accomplished on State Forests. These areas were timber that had been sold under the timber management practices on State Forests, by a sealed bid process to private individuals or companies. The successful bidders were asked if logger training could be conducted on portions of recent purchased timber. In the spirit of the program, no one has said "no" to that request. The other 40% has been conducted on private lands owned by individuals or companies. This is only one of many benefits State Forests can, and do provide. It should be noted that many state personnel attended various parts of the training, not to be timber cutters, but to correlate the harvest with forest management. You could call this a renewable, living outdoor classroom.

The next challenge was money. Due to the prior successes, and the quality of the programs, IFIC charged an individual \$100.00 a day to take off from his or her job, to go to the woods to learn how to properly harvest trees. Up to 4 training days are required spread over an 8 to 12 month period, to complete the logger training program. That relates to a lot of money, commitment, and effort on a loggers part. Makes you wonder if we hadn't fallen off the punkin wagon one time too many. After the woods and money requirements were being met; then the next hurdle was someone to coordinate the logger training, and to see that it didn't falter or stop. Being a voluntary organization, IFIC membership consists of small businesses and individuals who spend their working days making a living, and supporting their families. Thank God, and we mean that with all sincerity, for the Indiana Department of Natural Resources Division of Forestry. They have seen the enormous benefits of the logger training program, and dedicated one of their forest specialists to support and coordinate this tremendous cooperative effort. They realized that by having trained professional loggers in Indiana's woods, that they were not only involved in people training, but the original goals of protecting the residual stand during a harvest by directional felling, and proper skidding methods were being accomplished.

Some of the other spin offs have been addressing water quality through voluntary, Best Management Practices (BMP's). BMP's, in its more simpler terms, are practices that control soil movement and pollutants from getting into our waterways. Also consulting foresters, industry foresters, and state foresters as well as landowners, are requesting that these felling techniques be applied to their timber sales. Another major factor is that we are making the woods a safer work place, (more on safety later). Every time the State makes a mandatory personnel cut in the Forestry Division in Indiana, the forest products industry shudders. For the economic impact, and the long term positive effects we are having on the State and private forest in Indiana, we ought to be cloning more individuals to support and promote these types of programs. The costs are absorbed by the industry, the logistics are coordinated by the Forestry Division. This has proven to be an excellent partnership. The final hurdle of selling the program to loggers and sawmills is an on going process. We have been able to show the logger, that a substantial gain in production or harvesting of timber could be accomplished by using our methods of logging, as high as a 25% net gain in production of timber have been shown. Next we offered a program that strongly promoted logger safety in the work place, meaning the woods.

The importance of maintaining a safe work place is paramount in our industry. We have had one of the highest workmen's compensation rates in the State, and in addition to rates, insurance companies classified our logging industry as a high risk occupation. This meant that not only were we paying one of the highest compensation rates in the state, but we were being put into pools which cost an additional 25% premium. Visualize paying \$30.00 per \$100.00 worth of payroll, plus another \$7.50 for being in the pool. For an employer who was in the pool, who pays an employee \$30,000 per year, he had to pay up to \$11,250 for workmen's compensation for that one employee. If not in the pool his rate was \$9,000. For every three workers, an employer was paying enough workmen's compensation to hire another person. This is one of the highest non-productive costs that the logging industry has. IFIC is not so naïve, as to say that the logger training has been the sole reason for workmen's compensation rates declining in Indiana, but rest assured we know we are a major factor for safety in the woods. Another spin off is, that we now have insurance companies soliciting the business of the logging industry. The insurance companies are not requiring the loggers to go into a pool, but they are requiring loggers to participate in at least two logger training sessions. Field inspections are made by the insurance personnel to enforce the safety standard that loggers learn during training. They know the importance of training and also

recognize how good our programs are. As loggers continue to participate in logger training, and word of mouth and our advertisement, continues to spread that word on meeting the needs of the logging industry and Indiana's forest; our programs will grow.

At this point, I would like to relate a true story. A logger who was financially strapped, approached a sawmill owner and asked the sawmill owner if he would see his way clear to pay for two future logger training sessions. This logger did not work for that mill. The sawmill owner agreed to pay the \$200.00 no strings attached, to the logger. Several months later the logger made an unexpected visit to the mill owner. The logger stopped in front of the owner, stuck out his hand and said, "I want to thank you for saving my life." Needless to say the mill owner had no idea where this guy was coming from. The explanation was short coming. The logger holding in his hand a hard hat, with a crack in the top of the hat, said "Before I took this logger training program, I went to the woods wearing a baseball cap, jeans and tennis shoes. After the training I realized the danger I was exposing myself to, and I also thought, could my wife and family function without my pay check? It was then that I got a hard hat, chain saw chaps, boots and other equipment to make me more safe in the woods." We in the logging industry know that 75 to 80% of woods accidents happen to the timber cutter, and a lot of accidents are from widow makers, widow makers are dead debris, or tree limbs falling out of the top of the tree while it is being cut. This is what happened to this logger. Fortunately the limb that struck this logger only cracked his hard hat, and did not fracture his skull or kill him. How do you put a price tag on that experience? Needless to say there are two people who know the highest value of the timber cutter program, for a life had indeed been spared. This is not an isolated testimony, many in the logging profession will attest to personal safety equipment keeping them out of harms way.

I know that to put 9 to 10 years of dedicated work by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources Division of Forestry and the Indiana Forest Industry Council, into several pages of information and explanation, does not give justice to the total relationship between landowners, the timber resources industry and the IDNRDoF. However this is not the end, for additional cooperative projects are being planned and implemented. With the additional funding of \$30,000, around January 1995, IFIC and IDNRDoF, are drafting a more detailed Skidder training program. Once again the funding money was used for development and training. The program is almost ready to be a self-supporting program. The program goals remain the same, safety, production, protecting the residual timber stand and BMP's.

With all the hype and bull that the preservationist groups and the news media flies every day, we thought a most appreciated program should be highlighted and evaluated. Highlighted, because it shows a cooperative effort towards common goals and needs, and evaluated, for industry felt the State should step back and say, maybe we don't need to dictate and regulate, but support and communicate towards renewable, healthy private, state and federal forests and a productive forest products industry.

Thank you for taking the time to read this document, from the Indiana Forest Industry Council.

Don Foley