

THE VOICE OF THE TIMBER INDUSTRY

# TIMBER BULLETIN

DULUTH, MINNESOTA

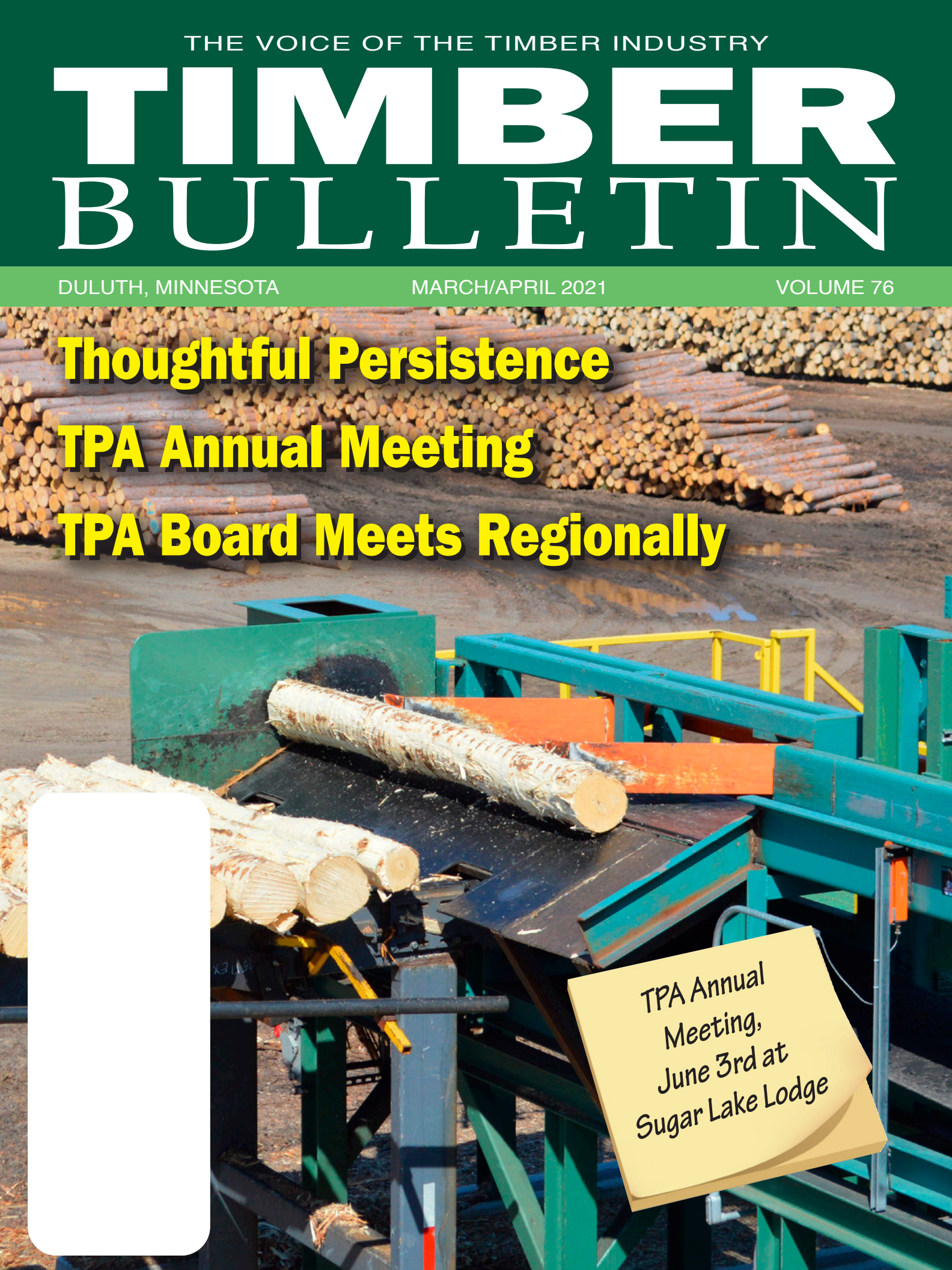
MARCH/APRIL 2021

VOLUME 76

**Thoughtful Persistence**

**TPA Annual Meeting**

**TPA Board Meets Regionally**



TPA Annual  
Meeting,  
June 3rd at  
Sugar Lake Lodge



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Volume 76  
March/April 2021  
Duluth, Minnesota

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### ON THE COVER

Debarked aspen logs head toward Maverick Wood Products' sawmill from its ring debarker. For more on Maverick, turn to page 8.

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## President's Column



Rod Enberg

**T**he 2020-21 winter harvest has given everyone some challenges. Things were rather unpredictable weather-wise, and that created some different harvest conditions to deal with. The mills seem to have filled up early, so forwarding had to be done by many of us to clean-up our swamp jobs. Then with early road restrictions, that became an issue to deal with, too. But with that being said, I hope everyone had a good, productive, and profitable season.

With spring, the regional TPA Board of Directors meetings took place. I attended the one in Bemidji, and the takeaway I felt was there are good issues for Mike and Ray to follow up on that plague all loggers one way or the other.

On April 8th, Ray came by and we attended a meeting at Central Lakes College in Staples with Congressman Stauber and Congresswoman Fischbach as representatives of the timber industry in Minnesota. There were folks from all over the state, including those representing cattlemen, healthcare facilities, and many other sectors of industry and government. The issues discussed were mainly related to workforce development and what is needed for the future. It was very interesting and hopefully we represented TPA and all loggers well.

As we work through spring, repairing and servicing our equipment, be safe and healthy. And always remember, TPA is our organization. If you have concerns or issues, be sure to contact Mike or Ray. They are our voice!!

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If you saw the movie Forrest Gump, you likely remember the line: "Life is like a box of chocolates."

According to Google, the phrase means "...life is unpredictable, and that you never know what you're

## Executive Vice President's

# Column



Mike Birkeland

impacts of Covid-19 this far into 2021. Thankfully, with vaccines and breakthroughs in medical technology and treatment, we're seeing fewer deaths from the virus – but the impacts are still wide-ranging and far-reaching.

Like schools, government offices, and some businesses, the Minnesota legislature provides a first-hand example of Covid-fallout. The Capitol has been locked down, and the legislature has been conducting business using remote hearings through Zoom and YouTube all session. Interaction with legislators has been limited to phone calls, emails, Zoom meetings, and messages.

Technology provides access – but I'd trade it for working face-to-face any day.

\*\*\*

TPA board members (at meetings in International Falls and Grand Rapids) had the chance to visit with a few northern Minnesota legislators first-hand just before

going to get." The phrase is especially relevant today.

We're well over a year into the pandemic, and at this time last year, I'm not sure many of us believed we'd still be witnessing the

Easter. Legislators were back home for an extended stretch over the Easter break, and with logger meetings scheduled, it worked out well to have Rep. Rob Ecklund (DFL, I-Falls), Senator Justin Eichorn (R-Grand Rapids), and Rep. Spencer Igo (R-Grand Rapids) join us to discuss key legislative issues for our logging and trucking community this session.

Among the topics: Turnbacks on state permits and timber sales relief for loggers because of the Verso closure last June. The issue has received bi-partisan support in Zoom meetings and at the legislature.

We're hopeful that support produces results before the session adjourns. The bad news is that legislators from opposing parties rarely agree on issues like taxes, budgets, and Executive Orders these days. And that means there is a strong chance that legislators will be called back for a special session to resolve differences after the regular session adjourns May 17.

That wouldn't be good news for loggers holding state timber sale permits that expire May 31 ... so our message is also focused on the need and urgency to get things done in St. Paul by mid-May. But in an era of strong partisan politics and impersonal Zoom meetings, a special session is very likely.

\*\*\*

The Minnesota House rolled out its budget in March. The \$52.5 billion proposal is larger than the plans Gov. Tim Walz and Senate Republicans rolled out earlier in the session. The proposed House budget is approximately \$300 million higher than the Governor's revised proposal and \$700 million more than the Senate's target.

Both sides also differ on tax proposals. Tax cuts to small businesses that received forgivable loans through the federal Paycheck

Protection Program (PPP) are in limbo. The House tax bill contains several controversial provisions, including a new fifth income tax tier, and limits on federal conformity for Paycheck Protection Program loans.

\*\*\*

As was the case last year, the countdown to adjournment this session is filled with uncertainty. Unfortunately, like the rest of the world around us, that's par for the course these days.

It makes the woods a great place to be. It's especially good when crews are working safely, and equipment is running well. So, stay safe – and if you plan to wet a line at your favorite fishing hole in May – enjoy!

Hope to see you at the annual meeting June 3 at the Sugar Lake Lodge too! More on that in the pages ahead.

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## Member Feature...



The staff at Maverick Wood Products gather on the steps of the ring debarker. From left: Allan Meyers, Andrew Donabauer, Travis Lynch, Chris Reinbold, Mike Blommel, Ethan Refshaw, Bradly Blommel, John Beechy, Jose Jimenez, Albert Adamietz, Allen Gronau, Michael Frey, and Pete Graphenteen.

# Thoughtful Persistence

**S**itting in his white pine-paneled office at Maverick Wood Products, Michael Frey isn't doing what he might have envisioned while pursuing his degree from the University of Minnesota.

These days, Frey is the owner of a state-of-the-art sawmill, situated along Highway 71, roughly midway between the Todd County communities of Clarissa and Browerville. Built in 2014, the mill cuts pallet parts and ships them to pallet makers throughout the Midwest. But nothing in Frey's

background would have suggested he'd end up in this business, which is among the reasons he named the business Maverick.

"It was a weird way to get into the sawmill business," Frey says. "Our backstory, the way we chose to leap into the industry, was kind of quirky."

Frey grew up in the Minneapolis suburb of Plymouth, and when he completed his finance degree and accounting minor from the University of Minnesota, he went to work for Alliant Techsystems, an

aerospace and defense company. Frey spent time in both the Phoenix and Twin Cities offices when a unique opportunity presented itself.

In 2012, Frey's father saw a newspaper article about the demise of the Verso Paper mill in Sartell, and with it, thousands of acres of hybrid poplar plantations.

"Investing in land has been his thing," Frey says. "When that newspaper article mentioned all this land, he started calling. It took a while to get going, but we ended up buying the land, and closing in late February of 2013."

It started out as a family project. Michael left Alliant to be actively involved, along with his brother, sister, and his father. Initially, they had no plans to build and operate a sawmill.

"All that hybrid used to be farm ground. The goal was to transition it back to the farm ground that it used to be," Michael says. "And then some local guys approached





**Harvested timber in Maverick's yard.**

and said, 'Have you ever considered using the timber for pallet lumber?' We said no, we had not, but we're interested."

The Freys gave it a shot, working with a small sawmill nearby to see if the hybrid poplar—basically a mix of aspen and cottonwood—was suitable for pallet lumber.

"They cut for us on a custom basis," Frey says, "and I sold the lumber and got customer acceptance."

To transition the land from hybrid poplar plantations to row crop farmland as quickly as possible, the Freys decided to build a mill. They traveled to places like Missouri and Pennsylvania to learn and look at equipment. Part of the purchase of the plantation lands from Verso was the site along Highway 71 that Verso had used as a wood yard.

"There were three huge reasons to build the mill here," Frey says. "It's on Highway 71, a 10 Ton Road, we had three phase power, and we had natural gas."

Construction on the mill started in 2014. But getting the place built was just the tip of the iceberg in terms of getting the business off the ground.

"I had to understand the industry," Frey says. "Buying and selling lumber. Figuring out who the customers are, how to market the wood, how to price it. Logistics."

On the operations side of the business, Frey had had some exposure to that when he worked at Alliant, so there was a learning curve in that regard, as well.

"I had to understand operations and a process flow. Dealing with

employees. We've got 15 employees here now. Legal, HR, payroll, and accounting. We had a blank piece of paper, and had to figure it out as we went.

"I will say that there was a period in there where I woke up with a pit in my stomach pretty much every day," he says. "But you know what? With thoughtful persistence we plowed through. I have become a big believer in getting the right people in the right spot. And so, some of that learning curve was figuring that out, understanding the importance of that. And then focusing a lot of effort to make sure that we have the right people in the right spots, so that things get done right."

Key to that was the hiring of Allen Gronau as plant manager, who started in April of 2015.

"Allen's been critical to our growth," Frey says. "He's the mill manager. His charge is this 18-acre site: production, employees, who's doing what, orchestrating that. He's making sure that the lumber's getting shipped and our residuals are getting shipped and working with our millwright to make sure that everything is maintained. He's been in the wood products industry pretty much his whole career. And he's a 'ten.' You look at our growth and our production, there's a direct correlation to shortly after his start date."

Frey also needed loggers to harvest timber from the plantations. Robin and Steve Walsh of Dick Walsh Forest Products was the main contractor, with others like Joe Dukek and Haverinen Brothers Logging also pitching in. By the summer of 2019, the last of the plantations had been harvested.

"We processed the last of our own fiber here in January of 2020," Frey says. "Since February 1 of last year, all of this has been outside wood."

Frey mostly buys wood from loggers on a delivered basis, but he also buys his own timber sales and hires logging contractors to harvest them. To help him learn that part of the business, he's leaned on advice from a variety of folks in Minnesota's timber industry, including Pete Aube, Howard Hedstrom, and Rod Enberg.

"I've been lucky," Frey says. "I've had a lot of good advice. The nice



**Bark is removed from aspen.**





Harvested aspen is loaded onto the feed deck of the ring debarker.

thing about a sawmill is that they've been around a while and there's been plenty of people that have done really well with them. I've gotten to know some of those people and we talk and I get input and opinions and it's my job to figure out what to do with all that."

The shift to buying open market wood has created a new set of

challenges. Initially, the mill was centrally located to the plantations, averaging a 20-mile haul. That's not the case since they started buying outside wood. As a result, satellite wood yards have been added in Bemidji and Grand Rapids.

"It can be a challenge," Frey says. "But we've got a lot of good things going on here. In January, we

invested in a new yard loader. I had one trucker come in last week, and he said that our unload time is the same as other places he goes. One of my objectives is to try to make this a desirable place to come. We pay weekly with ACH direct deposit. We have wood yards in Grand Rapids and Bemidji, so we can receive wood there, too. I feel pretty good about where we are."

Another advantage to buying outside wood is that it's much higher quality than hybrid poplar.

"We designed our mill around hybrid. But it was small and we'd get some knots and twists and turns. Crook, bow, bend, sweep. You name it, it's got it. But one thing we didn't have to struggle with was soundness. It was pretty much all sound, unlike native aspen, which is a total crapshoot whether you're going to get a rotten, punky core, or if it's going to be sound."

Because the mill was built to handle the hybrid, sawing other species is a breeze. In fact, Frey has learned this mill is incredibly versatile, able to saw anything. That means loggers looking for a home



Aspen bark from the ring debarker will be utilized for landscape products.





**Maverick Woods Products' ring debarker.**

for nearly any species can bring it to Maverick, except oak.

"Oak cuts extremely hard. It's one of the densest woods out there," Frey says. "That said, pine, softwoods, and aspen, that's predominantly what we cut. Right now in the yard we have a day's worth of birch, but everything else is pine, aspen, spruce, balsam fir, and tamarack. Species wise, we will take anything but oak.

"It doesn't get better than red pine for us, in terms of production efficiency," he says. "It debarks great. It goes through the mill very well. It cuts nicely. It's a different day out there on the floor when you're cutting softwoods compared to hardwoods."

Frey is also excited about the potential of sawing spruce and balsam, based on trial runs with both species.

"We tested them last summer," Frey says. "Our tests showed that they don't blue stain or mold like other species. Red pine, for all the great things about it, in the summertime when you look away, it's starting to turn green, it's starting to mold. Aspen's a lot better. But spruce and balsam showed extremely limited mold or blue stain. Our customers see blue stain and they think it's mold. We know it's not, but they don't want it. So, if you find these species that don't mold or blue stain, it's huge. That's what really excites me about those species.

"It goes back to what I said about

all the different species we will buy. We have these different sub-markets that we can go to with even the dense hardwoods, the maples and the birch. Tamarack is kind of that cool middle ground between a softwood and a hardwood. The customers love it. There's a lot of variety that we can take and a lot of different things that we can do."

In Frey's mind, it all ties back to the company's Maverick name.

"We'll take a look at anything, and we can cut pretty much anything out there if we can get our hands on it."

Maverick's main product is a notched pallet stringer, made in a variety of thicknesses: an inch and

an eighth, inch and a quarter, or an inch and a half most of the time. They're three and a half inches wide, and typically 48 inches long. The stringers are notched so when the pallet is complete, the forklift operator going to pick up the pallet can approach from any direction and slide the forks into it. Maverick also makes a limited quantity of deck boards, which are the thin, short pieces that are the platform on which the product is put on the pallet.

A critical decision Frey made was to purchase a ring debarker and integrate it into the mill's operation. It was a major investment, but is paying off.



**Bradly Brommel of Maverick Wood Products operates the sawmill.**



"It's kind of a double benefit, where it opened up a lot of residuals markets for us," he says. "We have more products to offer to a more diverse customer base. And by debarking, and detecting metal, we saw a tremendous bump in production efficiency, less frequent wear on the saw blades. They're not going through bark. They're not going through dust, rocks, nails. You take that out of the equation, and we have a clean chip product to sell and that opens a lot of avenues for us. Our products range from agriculture bedding, we can get into the landscape products like mulch, and then we can get into chips."

With day-to-day mill operations being handled by Gronau, much of Frey's time is spent on selling and marketing Maverick's products. He also still manages the old Verso lands, much of which is rented out for row crop production. As far as the mill goes, his brother, sister, and father are no longer officially involved, but they're still important sources of advice and support, as is his wife, Kristen.

"They offer that fresh perspective," Frey says, "which, for me is awesome because doing this day in, day out, sometimes I miss something really obvious. And it's staring you right in the face, but I don't know why, and I don't see it. And then my dad will send me a note or give me a call. I'm glad I have these people that care, who are looking and who are helping. And it goes back to what I said before about having the right people in the right spot. Whether that's advisors, my siblings, my dad, my mom, or my wife. I'm really lucky."

All that adds up to a sense of optimism for what the future holds for Maverick Wood Products.

"We've been in this for six and a half years now," Frey says. "We started with a blank sheet. We had to figure out everything. Now that we have a little bit of experience, with the right people in the right spots, there's a lot of opportunity out there. Especially within this segment of the lumber market. It's not flashy like dimension lumber and panels, but it's always going to be there."

"You gotta have pallets."



Residuals are loaded into a van for delivery.



Finished notched pallet stringers are ready to be shipped to pallet makers around the Midwest.



Mike Blommel and Allan Meyers sort wood after it has been sawed.





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# On the Markets

**T**he *Timber Bulletin* publishes information regarding results of a sampling of recent timber sales and other market indicators, as well as other market-related news items.

## Recent Timber Sales

**Average prices, as reported by each agency**

<u>Agency</u>	<u>Regular</u>	<u>Intermediate</u>
<b>Cass County</b>		
<i>February 27th—Sealed Bid</i>		
Aspen	\$40.23	\$33.27
Red Oak	\$40.23	\$26.24
All 7 tracts offered during the sale were purchased.		

### St. Louis County

*February 25th—Sealed Bid*

Aspen	\$32.67	NA
Black Spruce	\$21.89	NA
Ash	\$ 7.32	NA
Red Maple	\$11.68	NA
Norway Pine	\$13.11	NA
20 of the 25 tracts offered during the sale were purchased.		

### Cass County

*March 26th—Sealed Bid*

Aspen	\$37.24	\$31.58
Red Oak	\$33.86	\$31.60
Birch	\$18.62	\$16.48

All 5 tracts offered during the sale were purchased.

### Crow Wing County

*March 26th—Oral Auction*

Aspen	\$36.55	NA
Red Pine	\$96.38	NA
Oak	\$22.17	NA
Birch	\$19.91	NA
Maple	\$12.29	NA

10 of the 11 tracts offered during the sale were purchased

### Beltrami County

*April 6th—Sealed Bid*

Aspen pulp	\$42.23	NA
Birch Pulp	\$16.69	NA
Red Pine P&B	\$67.64	NA

6 of the 7 tracts offered during the sale were purchased.

### Koochiching County

*April 7th—Oral Auction*

Aspen P/B	\$35.37	\$37.66
Spruce P/B	\$24.96	\$26.78
Ash P/B	\$15.19	\$ 6.00
Balsam P/B	\$ 7.85	\$ 7.46

25 of the 28 tracts offered during the sale were purchased. 2 more were sold after the auction.

### Beltrami County

*April 8th—Oral Auction*

Aspen pulp	\$38.27	NA
Red Pine bolts	\$61.57	NA
Birch pulp	\$13.41	NA
Basswood pulp	\$15.42	NA

All 14 tracts offered during the sale were purchased.

### Products:

PB = Pulp and Bolts  
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# TPA Annual Meeting: June 3rd at Sugar Lake Lodge

**T**PA's Annual Membership Meeting returns on Thursday June 3rd, with a full day of activities at Sugar Lake Lodge in Cohasset.

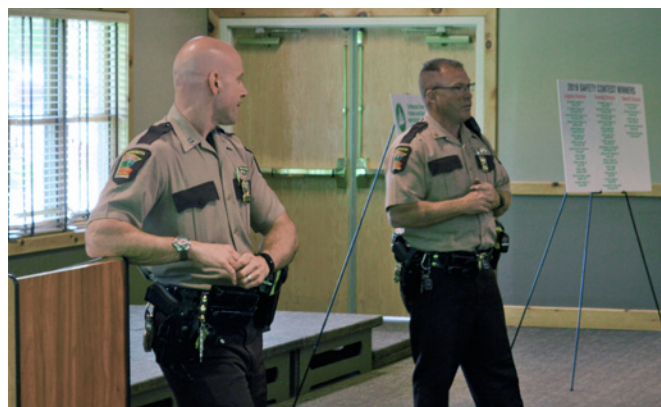
Speakers and presentations during the morning portion of the meeting will include several topics to help you run your business, as well as keep you informed on the activities of TPA:

- Executive VP Mike Birkeland's Report on Association Activities
- Election of TPA Board members
- Questions and answers with representatives of the Minnesota State Patrol's Commercial Vehicle Enforcement Division.
- Questions and answers with members of northern Minnesota's state legislative delegation
- Ryan Coole of Wheeler Associates, TPA's partner on 401(k)/retirement programming

Members who attend these presentations are expected to receive three hours of MLEP credit for 2021.

In the afternoon, attendees will be able to play golf on Sugar Lake Lodge's beautiful Sugarbrooke Golf Course, or fish on clear blue Sugar Lake.

Our Annual Meeting Social Hour and Banquet



Capt. Jon Olsen and Sgt. Jeff Shay of the Minnesota State Patrol have been regular presenters at TPA's Annual Meeting. The Patrol's Commercial Vehicle Enforcement Division will also be represented at this year's meeting on June 3rd to help TPA members understand state and federal regulations.

caps off the day's activities, featuring walleye fishing champion Scott Glorvigen. A native of Grand Rapids, Scott is not only one of the nation's most accomplished walleye tournament walleye anglers, but also a successful businessman in the fishing industry. He'll share stories of his years on the water, as well as talk about what has made him successful, both in tournaments and in business.

Registration forms for the 2021 Annual Meeting, and Golf and Fishing Event have been mailed. Call the TPA Office for more information. We hope you'll join us for these great events!

## Schedule

Thursday June 3rd

Morning—Annual Meeting

Afternoon—Golf and Fishing Event

Evening—Social Hour and Banquet

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Folks at the Expo love the big machines. The 67th Annual North Star Expo will feature plenty of them, at the Itasca County Fairgrounds in Grand Rapids on September 17th and 18th.

# Mark Your Calendars: 67th Expo North Star Expo Slated for Rapids

**P**lanning is underway for the 2021 North Star Expo, returning to the Itasca County Fairgrounds in Grand Rapids.

This year's event will be the 67th Expo, sponsored by the Minnesota Timber Producers Association, scheduled for Friday and Saturday September 17th and 18th.

Minnesota's timber industry always looks forward to the North Star Expo, and that's amplified even more this year because the 2020 Expo wasn't held due to restrictions related to COVID-19.

"Expo time is always a great time of the year," said TPA Expo Committee Chair Chad Lovdahl. "We missed having a chance to see everyone last year, and we don't want another September to go by without a North Star Expo. We're looking forward to it."

As always, the 2021 Expo will again feature the newest in logging equipment from all of the region's top vendors.

Day one at the Expo will be capped by The Evening Reception at the Timberlake Lodge on Friday September 17th, featuring a cash bar and free hors d'oeuvres. All are welcome to attend.

McCoy Construction and Equipment will also sponsor Saturday morning's pancake breakfast again in 2021, another

Expo tradition.

In addition to the latest and greatest from the industry's manufacturers, the 2021 Plans for the Future Forest Stewards event are underway, with high schoolers from around the region traveling to the

Expo to learn about logging and the forest products industry.

Vendor registration packers are available at [mntimberproducers.com](http://mntimberproducers.com), or by calling the TPA Office at (218) 722-5013.



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# Safety Pays Reducing Risk—Responding Well

By John Saccoman, Mackinaw Administrators, LLC.

**E**ven the most experienced loggers need to stay vigilant when it comes to working in the woods. The unpredictability of harvesting trees continues to make logging one of the most unpredictable and sometimes dangerous of all professions.

A recent accident at a small logging employer in southeast Minnesota gives insight on that unpredictability and danger. In contrast to many of its northern Minnesota counterparts, the employer does a lot of work by hand. Chainsaws are a mainstay. Ninety percent of what the logger does is hand-cutting by chainsaw.

The employer is in business to supply logs for other employers like pallet manufacturers, as well as providing logs for its own sawmill.

It was a nice November day. The ground was flat. The sun was shining. It was a typical day for the 4-employee, 65-year-old company.

An employee had just dropped a large white-oak tree and was working it free because it had become hung-up about 6 feet in the air.

"When he cut one of the limbs off, he didn't notice it had a high-pressure point on one spot and when he got through the tree, it kicked back about 6 feet and hit him right in the leg," the owner said. "It was pressured up against a little maple or elm and he didn't expect it to kick out the way it did."

Hindsight being 20/20, looking back at the situation and examining what could have been done differently, the owner said that there are a few takeaways from the accident:

1. Pay more attention to a tree that has been hung up to look for areas of stored energy.
2. Remember how important foot placement is when working.

"Most everything we do is with a chainsaw and when you're working with a 20-inch bar, you're pretty close to the tree," he said.

The injury happened to a seasoned employee.

"The guy has spent 30 years in

the woods," he said. "Sometimes you think you're good with what's happening and you're not, even when you're experienced."

To add insult to injury, it was the last tree of the day the crew was going to harvest.

"We were at the end of the day, so that could have played a small factor. You're tired and maybe reflexes aren't quite as good. Who knows?"

Many times logging operations are remote, making emergency response challenging, if not sometimes extremely difficult. The owner was proud of his company's response to the accident. Fortunately, in this situation, the accident occurred 5 miles from the company's office when the emergency call came in.

"We high-tailed it in from the office to the jobsite with our Polaris Ranger (side-by-side). My grandpa drove it right down the road. We got him out to the landing in the skidder and drove him right up to the hospital in that. It's only a mile away."

The employee later had surgery to repair multiple fractures to his leg. The procedure involved inserting a rod and screws to stabilize the fractures and allow the leg to heal.

According to a spokesperson for the employer's work-comp company, the employee faced 13 weeks of rehabilitation to heal both his tibia and fibula.

The employee basically couldn't return to work because the employer is small and has limited options for transitional (light) duty.

A spokesperson for the work-comp company said at the end of the day, there is some good news.

"He's kind of at the end of his care and it

looks like there probably won't be any permanency," she said. "That means the employee will return to work and should be able to resume his work duties with very limited or no restrictions. That's all assuming it continues to heal well. He's lucky."

According to the spokesperson, the total cost of the injury will most likely result in a spike year of about \$50-60K.

Such injuries can affect a company's work-comp rates for the next handful of years, sometimes leading to increased premiums. But, if a company with such a large accident can surround the spike year with years that have solid, low-to-no claims, the length of time paying increased premiums can be limited.

At the end of the day, the employer is most happy his employee came through the accident and is on the mend. At nearly 60 years old, healing times take longer. "But he's feeling better every day. So that's a good thing."

*Mackinaw Administrators, LLC is the third-party administrator of the TPA/Choice Insurance Workers Comp Insurance Program, working with program participants to increase safety, thereby reducing costs, including insurance premiums. For information on the TPA/Workers Compensation Insurance Program, call the TPA Office, or Jay Eystad (218-255-0446) of Choice Insurance.*






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# TPA Board Meets Regionally

**O**ver a three day span, TPA's Board of Directors met in four different locations—Duluth, Grand Rapids, Bemidji, and International Falls—giving members a chance to discuss issues in small group settings, as well as share concerns with TPA staff.

"The meetings are an important way for board members to discuss ideas," TPA President Rod Enberg said. "It gives us the chance to talk through issues and hear perspectives of fellow board members who might have different operations than the next person. I always learn a lot from hearing from my fellow members."

Proposed legislation currently making its way through the Capitol was a main topic of discussion, including the proposed Logger Timber Permit Relief provisions in response to the Verso closure last year. Meetings in Grand Rapids and International Falls included appearances by legislators, including Sen. Justin Eichorn (R-Grand Rapids), Rep. Spencer Igo (R-Grand Rapids), and Rep. Rob Ecklund (DFL-International Falls), who discussed a variety of legislative issues, and answered questions from board members.

Among other topics discussed were issues with DNR timber sales, MnDOT permit issues, as well as TPA activities like the North Star Expo and the upcoming Annual Membership meeting.



Rep. Rob Ecklund (second from left) listened to TPA Executive Vice President Mike Birkeland (left) and Board members Dale Erickson, Gordy Dobbs, and Monte Nelson at the Regional Board Meeting in International Falls.



Sen. Justin Eichorn (left) visits with TPA Board members Mike Rieger, Scott Pittack, and Cliff Shermer at the Regional Board meeting in Grand Rapids.



Rep. Spencer Igo listens to TPA Board members' concerns at the Grand Rapids Regional Board Meeting in March.





*Minnesota Timber  
Producers Association*

## **2021 TPA Annual Meeting Banquet**

**Thursday, June 3<sup>rd</sup>**

**Sugar Lake Lodge**



### **Scott Glorvigen Guest Speaker**

A native of the Grand Rapids area, Scott Glorvigen is one of America's top walleye anglers. Scott captured the \$300,000 first prize in the 2000 RCL Walleye Championship, as well as the 2004 Professional Walleye Trail (PWT) season crown. In addition, Scott and his twin brother Marty have become successful entrepreneurs and businessmen in the angling industry. After a long-running TV program, the twins launched Wired2Fish.com in 2008, which has become one of the largest and most influential media platforms in the outdoor industry. Wired2Fish.com reaches digitally over 2.4 Million people monthly, along with 6.3 Million video views per month.

Wired2Fish also has one of the largest outdoor social channel platforms connecting with a monthly audience of 1.6 million people via Facebook, Instagram, You Tube, and Twitter. In February 2021, Los Angeles-based Navio Networks partnered with Wired2Fish to launch a Global 24/7 CTV Fishing Channel "Wired2Fish TV" to connect with 60 million plus anglers in the US Market. Scott will share stories and insights from a thriving career in business and many, many years on the water.

**The Banquet caps a day full of events, including informative presentations at the TPA Annual Meeting, as well as the Golf and Fishing events.**

**For Tickets—Call the TPA Office at 218-722-5013!**

# Employees: Don't Skip the Match

By Ryan Coole, Wheeler Associates

**I**nstituting a retirement plan for your employees—whether it's a 401(k) plan or something else—can not only help you retain employees, but also help them save for retirement.

If you offer a retirement plan, the best advice you can offer your employees is: don't leave free money on the table.

What that means is, employees should take advantage of company matching programs and make sure those dollars are maximized. Here's a hypothetical example:

- An employee is 22 years old and earns \$50,000 per year.
- His/her employer matches 50% of employee contributions up to 6% of income.

- However, the employee only contributes 2% of his income to his retirement plan.

As a result, by not contributing enough to qualify for the full company match, the employee leaves \$1,000 in lost company matches "on the table" in one year. Over the employee's career, and assuming he/she never gets a raise, that means \$43,000 in company contributions are lost from ages 22 - 65.

Of course, retirement dollars in a 401(k) program are invested to help those dollars grow. Over the course of his/her career, had the employee taken advantage of the additional \$1,000 per month, assuming an average annual return of 10%, those funds would have grown to \$592,400 by age 65 for usage during retirement.

In conclusion, offering a retirement program can help your employees plan for their later years. Take advantage of the employee benefit being offered to maximize your golden years.

*Ryan Coole is a Qualified Plan Financial Consultant®, Chartered Retirement Plans Specialist®, and Chartered Financial Consultant®*

*for Wheeler Associates in Duluth and works with TPA members on the association's 401K program. Ryan can be reached at (218) 336-8526.*



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# Enberg Participates in Stauber Roundtable

**M**innesota 8th District Congressman Pete Stauber co-hosted a roundtable discussion on workforce development at Central Lakes College in Staples. Also leading the roundtable discussion was Congresswoman Michelle Fishbach, representing Minnesota's 7th District.

TPA President Rod Enberg was joined on the panel by stakeholders from a variety of segments of the state's economy, including agriculture, construction, education, mining, hospitality, and trade unions.

"It's always an honor to spend time with Congressman Stauber," Enberg said. "All of us in the logging community know how hard it can be to find good workers. I appreciate his work on this issue and his commitment to the logging industry."

Much of the conversation at the roundtable focused on the need for training programs at places like Central Lakes College, and what the federal government might be able to do to help. Rep. Stauber talked about the importance of trained, qualified employees, both for employers around the state, and also so everyone has the opportunity to contribute to Minnesota's economy.

"It's important that we recognize the dignity of the job," Rep. Stauber said. "Whatever job you have, do it the best you can. We honor that work, because before we can get a better job, you have to have a job."



TPA President Rod Enberg discusses issues with Congressman Pete Stauber at the Workforce Development Roundtable in Staples.



TPA President Rod Enberg talks workforce development at Congressman Pete Stauber's Roundtable event.





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# Federal Logger Relief Package Not Yet Finalized

**A** federal relief package for loggers totaling \$200 million, passed by Congress in late December and signed into law by President Trump, has not yet been finalized.

The logger-related package was part of the \$1.4 trillion Omnibus Spending Bill.

In March, the current US Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced at least \$6 billion is being dedicated to the development of a number of new programs, or to modify existing proposals using

## Timber Talk

discretionary funding from the Consolidated Appropriations Act.

Among the sectors being supported is “timber harvesting and hauling,” according to the release from the USDA.

Other sectors include dairy farmers, biofuels, specialty crops, beginning farmers, as well as developing infrastructure to support donation and distribution of perishable commodities.

The USDA is still working on setting up the program for loggers and truckers. Due to federal rulemaking process, the program may not be ready for applicants until sometime this summer.

# Autonomous Log Trucks to be Tested in Ontario

**A** partnership between two Canadian companies is combating a shortage of log truck drivers by testing autonomous logging trucks.

Nawiinginokiima Forest Management Corporation (NFMFC) and Provectus Robotics Solutions Inc. will be testing the autonomous trucks later this year in an area of Ontario between Thunder Bay and Marathon. An experienced logging truck driver will be in the lead, with two autonomous trucks following behind, closely duplicating the driver’s route and speed to ensure a safe passage from loading to the mill.

With safety being paramount, obstacle detection and avoidance technologies will be employed as well as a continuous and reliable link between the lead vehicle and the two autonomous followers. The project is commencing immediately with testing to occur in spring and summer of 2021.

“Bringing the advanced technology that has been developed for off-road applications in extreme climates from desert heat to ice and snow, has enabled us to bring a robust and viable solution to the logging industry,” explains Jason Scheib, Director, Business Development for Provectus Robotics Solutions. “We believe this will be a valuable advancement to address the driver shortage in Northern Ontario and around the world, while making the transport of lumber to the mills safer and more efficient.”

The autonomous trucks following the lead vehicle will be “manned,” in that a person will be stationed in the front seat of the truck. But that person won’t need Canada’s equivalent of the CDL, which will help deal with the shortage of qualified drivers.

“They’re there to intervene if there’s an event requiring human intervention,” Scheib said. “The project may evolve to where there won’t be any driver at all, but not at this stage of the project.”

The driver would also be available to deal with snow, ice, and other debris that may accumulate on the truck’s sensors, which are part of the autonomous control kit.

Provectus Robotics Solutions Inc. is the industry leader in advanced robotic system design, integration, and control. Located in Ottawa, ON, Canada, the company delivers robotic control software and services to the aerospace, agricultural, industrial, mining, military, and security industries. Since 2010, Provectus has participated in design and development activities on many different robotic platforms, while delivering systems to customers worldwide.

Nawiinginokiima Forest Management Corporation (NFMFC) was established in 2012 by the Province of Ontario as the first Crown corporation under the Ontario Forest Tenure Modernization Act. Located in Marathon, ON, NFMFC manages the Pic and White River Forests located in Northwestern Ontario.



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LOGGERS OF THE PAST . . .

## Skidding by Horse and Ox

by J. C. Ryan

This story is reprinted from an earlier *Timber Bulletin*—one of the first of “Buzz” Ryan’s ever-popular contributions to these pages. The *Bulletin* will continue to reprint selected stories from the memories he recorded for us.—*Editor*



After watching various rubber-tires skidders demonstrated at the annual TPA logging demonstration and having seen the many types of power skidders entering the north woods in recent years, one may wonder how the vast stands of virgin pine in northern Minnesota were ever logged, considering that loggers had to skid mostly with horses and oxen.

In the early days, when logs were skidded to the rivers and lakes, quite a few oxen were used. They were slow and powerful, moved well in the brush, ate less than horses, were less expensive and needed less care. The oxen were generally paired, but it was not uncommon to see four or six oxen skidding a large log.

In Minnesota, oxen were used mostly in the southern part of the pine range along the St. Croix River, the Rum River and up along the Mississippi River to Grand Rapids or to a short distance west. Very few were used in the northern part of the pine range.

Throughout the northern half of the pine range, horses were used for most of the log skidding. Two horses were used most often but with a small run of timber, sometimes a single horse was used.

When a large butt long log was too much for a single team, it was left until all the skidding nearby was done. Then four horses would go in and skid all the big butt logs that had been left on a certain tract. This was usually done late in the spring

clean-up.

I remember one spring at one of the Northern Lumber Co. camps run by Tom Henderson, an unusual number of pine butt logs were skidded. Early in April, they were left two and three on a skidway all along the railroad track in Section 30-53-12. Dan McCloud was scaling them as we happened along. We were estimating the number of board feet in each log. These ran from 900 to 1,200 board feet per log. They were all loaded at one time and made eight cars of the finest pine logs I ever saw.

Skidding tongs were used on most logs and they were skidded one at a time. However, when the logs ran small, a skidding chain was used and then two, three or even four logs were skidded at a time. Skidding usually was confined to about 40 rods from the skidway or about half way across a forty – logging roads usually went through the center of a forty if the terrain was level.

When skidding had to be done for any distance, a single-bunk dray with spikes along the tops of the bunk was used. The butt end of the log was then rolled onto the dray and the top end left dragging on the ground. Two or three logs could be hauled in this manner. With the front end of the log on the dray, pulling was much easier for the horses.

Ties, pulp, posts and other short products were skidded with a two-bunk dray – usually pulled with a team of horses – and about a cord was taken out each trip. Here

skidding was confined to less than one-fourth of a mile.

Some large logs were peeled or barked on one side and then rolled and skidded with the smooth side down to make the pulling easier for the horses.

Cedar poles, mining poles and long timbers were skidded similarly to logs, with the single-bunk dray used for longer distance skidding.

A team of horses and one man would skid up to 150 logs per day. There was usually one “swamper” cutting trails for each skidding team. Often, as many horses skidded as hauled logs in a camp. However, plans were to have most of the skidding done early in January before the snow got deep. Most sleigh-haul logs were decked in the woods so a whole load could be loaded in one spot and the sleigh not moved with half a load or several times while being loaded.

Only one company used the steam skidder with any success in Minnesota. That was the Crookston Lumber Co. of Bemidji, which did steam skidding in the Kelliher, Mizpah, Northome and Blackduck areas from 1910 to 1920. Several other companies tried this high-line cable skidding but had little success. The Cloquet Lumber Co. tried it in the Cloquet Valley Forest area.

The cost of log skidding was one of the factors a lumber camp foreman watched very closely. And he always tried to get a good straw-boss to handle the crews.







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To serve our readers better, the Timber Bulletin offers free classified ads of up to 85 words to all members and associate members of the Minnesota Timber Producers Association. All ads must be submitted in writing to the Association office. The MTPA assumes no responsibility for ad contents and accepts free ads on a first-come, first-served basis within space limitations.

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