

Westek Ltd. provides an integrated service package for conservation-minded landowners

By Dian McClurg

With 26 years experience in the woods, a background in engineering and a passion for working with landowners, John Zapel and Westek Forest, Ltd. is a one-stop service center for the conservation-minded landowner. Though self-conscious about saying so, Zapel knows that a landowner in the Pacific Northwest would have to search long and hard to find another company like Westek. "What sets us apart is our extremely high-level of integrated services," Zapel said, referring to his expertise not just in logging, which he prefers to call silviculture, but also in engineering and building fish passage structures, bridges and roads. Many Northwest Certified Forestry members are familiar with Zapel's work in the woods. He's completed projects on public and private land ranging from first-entry thinning young stands to building bridges and more.

A recent project brought him to Onalaska, Washington, where Zapel worked with landowners Karen and Mack Knutsen to help solve the problem of a high-density young stand. The Knutsens own 90 acres of timber, most of which was planted to Christmas trees over 25 years ago. Zapel used advanced Scandinavian technology, including a harvester to fell, delimb and buck the trees and a forwarder (right) to carry the logs from the stump to the roadside landing or truck. Unlike a skidder, a forwarder carries logs clear of the ground, which can reduce soil impact. With mechanized logging, the idea is "no feet on the forest floor," and the harvester and forwarder allow this to be achieved. This operation was "revenue neutral" - the Knutsens won't earn any money from the harvest, but it won't cost them anything to perform the first entry thinning (right) either. "But we're gaining a great deal," Mack said. "The trees will be healthier." And the sale of the logs pays the cost to do the work at this point. "In 12 years, these trees are going to double in diameter, making the next entry profitable for the landowner" said Omroa Bhagwandin, senior project developer at Westek. [Click here](#) to watch a video of John running the harvester in the Knutsen Forest.



Zapel often works with Forest Stewardship Council-certified timber owners to help sell their logs. "We can help them find a market edge, a niche, for maximizing the value of their logs," he said. And the process works, as evidenced by a thinning operation completed just last year on Bhagwandin's place, also in Onalaska. "The high-grade Alder veneer logs alone we pulled off his place made him a five-figure profit," Zapel said.

Getting involved in forest-road engineering and construction was a natural evolution

for Westek. Sometimes forest projects include components of watershed restoration, or perhaps a landowner needs a new culvert put in or derelict roads decommissioned or repaired. Westek's work with the U.S. Forest Service has grown to now include three multi-year contracts for road repair and construction as well as road decommissioning on the Olympic National Forest.

An additional market Zapel has started to work in is biomass to energy. "Biomass, in the form of low-value timber and waste material, is readily available out here," he said. "And it's cheap, carbon neutral, and can be very efficient." He hopes to aid rural schools, government and businesses around the Northwest make the switch to bio-energy through these combined heat power plants.