

Logging from 1A

We do the tough stuff," Dan said. R&R likes to log near the coast during the summer since the fire danger is relatively low compared to the Willamette Valley, but the steep terrain along the coast and the cascades means R&R can't be fully automated like other logging companies.

Before Dan and the team go in with the machines, a team of tree cutters went in on foot with power saws and cut the 45 acres of allotted trees by hand over the course of two months. Currently at the site, loggers are towards the bottom of the canyon feeding the cut logs into cables to be pulled up to the landing.

The setup on the landing consists of a dark yellow machine called a yarder, and it has a large pole sticking

straight up with multiple cables connected to it. These cables are called "guy lines" and they are attached to tree stumps around the site. These stumps anchor the yarder, which connects to the "sky-line" cable that runs from the top of the yarder down into the canyon, disappearing into the forest where it's connected to a CAT.

On this wire, an unmanned red sky car — much like an enclosed sky lift — is powered by an engine that moves back and forth across the cable.

The sky car hoists logs from down in the canyon up to the landing for the next machine, the processor, to be trimmed of branches, cut and sorted into varying lengths.

The logs, after being loaded onto a logging truck, are taken to the mills and made into lumber or other wood products.

Jennifer's parents, Bob and Kay King, own and are still actively involved in the business. But as partners, Dan and Jennifer have now taken on the business full-time.

R&R operates on N. Fork Road in Florence and has 65-70 employees. Oregon is the largest wood products producer in the U.S. according to Oregon Business, with much of the harvested wood bought in Oregon being made into products that are then exported around the world.

"When I was a kid, I used to elk hunt in this canyon," Dan said. "I found old railroad tracks in the bottom. There's old pilings in the tracks. So all this wood, the first time they logged it, went out by train and went into Winchester Bay. This timber was all logged in the early 1900s."

In many ways, logging Oregon land connects Dan to past generations of family loggers — even though many things have changed in the logging industry over the last century. For example, R&R King recently bought a drone to help them string up cables.

"What would've taken three hours or four hours for four guys to string cable, we'll do it in 10 minutes," Dan said of their new circular drone that's about five feet in diameter. The drone helps string haywire, which is a thin cable fitted with special hooks that helps to connect the heavier cables for the yarder and skyline.

While the logging industry is continuing to innovate, there are still prevalent challenges, such as the bidding process. The logging industry works on a process of bidding for jobs that private landowners or the state of Oregon present to logging companies. Ideally, the landowners or state will send logging companies a prospectus that consists of detailed information on the land.

This helps the logging companies determine how much money and time it will cost them to log the land. The logging companies are also able to see and walk the land before they determine their cost estimate.

"It's really tricky because you come out and look at a job, and there's trees. It's not like you can see. You have the timber crews and you have their map, but that's still somebody's opinion," Jennifer said. "Dan does a lot of walking the sites, but you really can't see all the time what's under there or if there's some rot in a certain section that you didn't plan on. So there's a lot of experience involved — and a lot of risk."

The logging companies then present their cost estimate to the landowner/state and bid for the job. "The other thing that is very challenging for our industry is, because you bid every job, you can't plan very far ahead. The equipment you're buying is a multi-year investment because it's a huge outlay of capital. But with the jobs, we have about four or five months planned until we have to find more work," Jennifer said.

R&R has set itself apart by earning a reputation for being able to log the difficult terrain here on the coast. "They love for us to do the tough terrain, the long distances. That's kind of our expertise," Jennifer said.

When bidding on a job, R&R look at the distance of the site to the mills, the volume per acre of timber they can log, and how close the site is to their shop. They also look at whether the site is on rock or dirt. If the site is on dirt, then they have to be finished logging the site once it starts raining for the winter or their trucks won't be able to get in and out of the site because of mud. "There's just a lot you really have to plan for," Jennifer said.

USA Today has named logging as the most dangerous job in America as of 2018. "Our workers comp rates are exorbitant," Jennifer said. R&R focuses heavily on safety with monthly safety meetings and annual companywide safety meetings where they do CPR training, hearing testing, and recently they were approved for a stokes first aid basket.

"If someone gets injured down in the canyon, you usually don't have much time to handle it. So you've got several factors. One: how do you get them to the landing? Do you wait for an ambulance? Do you call in a helicopter? Do you drive them and hope you get them somewhere quick?" Jennifer said. With the stokes basket, an injured worker in the canyon can be transported up the landing quickly, where a helicopter or ambulance can reach then safely.

"If somebody gets hurt down there, we can get them out of there in 15 to 20 minutes by attaching the stokes basket to the cables," Dan said. Now that R&R is certified for the basket, they created a protocol for using it and train all the loggers on how to use it in the field.

Despite all the challenges and risks that accompany logging, for the Wagoner's, it's their way of life. "It's all I've ever done. It's a lifestyle," Dan said. In 2015, R&R earned the Oregon Department of Forestry's Southern Oregon Area

Operator of the Year award for protecting a buffer along Little Paradise Creek where salmon, steelhead and trout swim.

Landowners work closely with the Oregon Department of Forestry to ensure they are following regulations for replanting after timber harvest, and that they are also designating tree buffers to be left to protect fragile ecosystems. "Usually when we come in, we primarily log for people that own the land, so they have all that written out," Dan said.

The logging companies are responsible for leaving two standing trees per acre as per regulations from ODF.

"I believe loggers are some of the strongest environmentalists," said Jennifer.

With the replanting regulation, landowners must have 150 trees per acre growing four years after logging takes place.

"If you were here in 1920 standing here looking down that canyon, that thing would have been completely neutered with train tracks," Dan said. "There wouldn't have been a stick left. But time heals. They didn't know."

With present concerns over climate change, industries are being scrutinized more than ever. The past reputation of the logging industry as largely hazardous to the environment hasn't completely been diminished, but Jennifer said she feels the more people know and understand about the logging industry, the more they can work with the public and governments to continue innovating and protecting the land they love.

"There's a love for what we do. We're always striving for that new things to do better. So back in the day, it was the best technology we had at the time," Jennifer said. "It wasn't like we were choosing to do things poorly or that would be harmful."

R&R says the logging industry is struggling to find steady loggers. "There is a need for young workers. We start at \$15 an hour. They only need a high school diploma. If they are driving the log trucks they have to come to us with their CDL license but for the machines, they don't need any prior training," Jennifer said. "We teach them everything and we hire at 18 years-old. It's really a great career."

But the primary crew members that R&R employs have been with them for decades. "A lot of people that work with us, they have been with us for over 20 years," Dan said. "The guy that runs the yarder, we bought that yarder 15 years ago and he came with it."

Dan said the connection between the land and his family is why logging continues to be the root of his life. "My great grandpa logged the Gardner Hill area over 12 years between WWII and the '50s. I went back and got to log that as well."

In many ways, the land holds their family memories and, every time he returns, he sees the history the land holds for his family — now and in the future.

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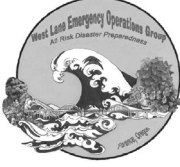


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