



‘My forest smelled like a sawmill’ Woodlotters battle beetle at ground zero in Cariboo



At the height of the pine beetle infestation, Paul Galliazzo was fighting the battle by selectively logging the diseased wood and replacing it with a mix of species.

By SARA GRADY

Paul Galliazzo remembers the sights, sounds and smells of his ravaged woodlot during the height of the mountain pine beetle infestation. The rolling hills outside Quesnel in BC’s scenic Cariboo Country were a sea of red, dying pine trees. “There were so many beetles, you could almost hear them working away in the bark,” says Paul.

When he acquired WL#1520 in 1998 there

were scattered patches of red, infested trees. The focus was salvage logging.

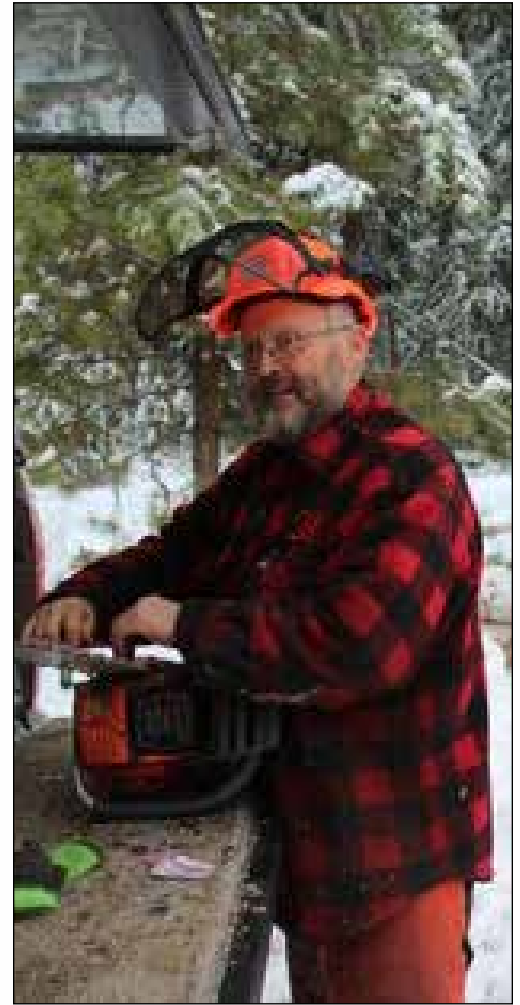
“We called it ‘snip and skid.’ You’d go into the bush with a can of spray paint, mark maybe 20 or 30 trees, build a long skid trail – sometimes as long as two kilometres – and pull out the dead wood selectively.”

He and his fellow woodlotters thought they’d be able to stop the beetle tide with their efforts, while still recovering some value from the timber. “By 2002 it became obvious we weren’t making an impact, and we were cutting bigger

and bigger blocks,” he recalls.

By 2005 Paul and his counterparts in the Cariboo had lost the pine beetle war, their woodlots turned into stump farms. He was fortunate: only one third of his 600 hectare parcel was wiped out – he had a good proportion of fir and spruce on his lot, along with aspen – and he managed to salvage most of the timber for a modest gain. But that wasn’t a given in the early days.

“It was a bit of a struggle at first, but local mills made the effort to take the beetle-kill timber over



Careful stand-tending by Paul Galliazzo for the last 10 years has allowed a new forest of spruce, pine and fir to grow where beetle infested trees once stood dying.

Paul Galliazzo

the more appealing, green wood,” according to Paul. “We’ve come a long, long, long way since then. It’s remarkable what the mills can turn into lumber now,” he says. “They’re working with timber that’s been dead for over 10 years.”

Mills at pine beetle ground zero have made adaptations to their equipment to accommodate the drier wood, finding ways to maximize the value from this degraded timber. And a thriving bioenergy industry has risen from the ashes of the pine beetle destruction.

Foresters in the region are now in “regeneration mode” – trying to get their woodlots back

to the government-mandated “free to grow” conditions: the point at which a forest would return to its original, pre-harvest state without continued man-made intervention or silviculture measures.

For Paul, this means waging a new war, against the weed-like aspen on his woodlot. Through a great deal of trial-and-error, he’s learned how to stop the aspen from choking out his spruce, pine and fir seedlings. Hiking through the forest with a specialized axe, Paul bends over the young aspen, making small scores in the bark. Too much damage to the

tree and it sends out clones, or suckers. Not enough and the aspen grows up, dwarfing the slow-growing conifers.

Paul is optimistic about the recovery of his woodlot. To date he’s planted approximately 190,000 seedlings – 50% pine, 30% spruce and 20% Douglas fir, at a cost in excess of \$85,000 (without factoring in the “sweat equity”). He projects that in two years he’ll have reached “free to grow” status, and in 60 years he’ll have a healthy, thriving coniferous forest. That’s a long time to wait, but as woodlotters will tell you, virtually everything they do “is for later.”



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