

Local timber companies preserve heritage together

By Kayla Peche

The logging industry has a rich history in Cornell, but some don't realize that rich history is preserved by two companies working closely together today – Mule-Hide Products and Chippewa River Forest Management (CRFM).

"We're the sole supplier of wood chips for Mule-Hide, which is a big responsibility," said Ken McIntyre, owner of CRFM and Lakes States Timber.

McIntyre began CRFM in 2006 with his partner, Stuart Smith. At this time, CRFM used a mobile wood chipper that would cut in the woods, and bring the chips directly to the mill.

"Stuart provided the initial financial backbone," McIntyre said. "My job was to run the day-to-day operations."

In 2009, Smith passed away, but McIntyre purchased the remaining 50 percent, now owning the company. CRFM supplied the Cornell mill with wood chips since the '90s, but that year McIntyre said "things began to change."

Mule-Hide updated their defibrator, a machine that mechanically grinds wood chips

down into fiber. The new unit is sensitive to the small sawdust sized particles: "pins and fines."

At the same time in 2009, McIntyre installed a chipper in the industrial park in Cornell to be closer to Mule-Hide, their main mill. From there, the chip plant could store the chips for Mule-Hide and screen them before they were delivered.

"We put the chip plant in Cornell in order to minimize that distance to our primary market," McIntyre said. "The further away you go, the higher the trucking cost."

A couple years later, the second major shift came for Mule-Hide and CRFM. McIntyre said Mule-Hide thought they could run "more efficiently and consistently" if they used 100 percent Aspen in their process. Mule-Hide also wanted the bark content down because bark becomes "sludge" waste in the process.

"We decided to start chipping 100 percent Aspen derived from roundwood down to a 4 in. top diameter," McIntyre said. "This meant no more whole tree chipping in the woods, but rather bringing in Aspen roundwood to the chip plant and chipping it on



After the wood is chipped, the pieces are pushed onto the conveyor, where a magnet pulls metal from the chips. The chips are then put through sifters that take out the pins and fines (inset) or other unwanted items. Chippewa River Forest Management (CRFM) built a wood chipper plant in Cornell to cut cost to the primary mill. Mule-Hide Products, Cornell, and CRFM work together to update and improve their companies. (Photo by Kayla Peche)



During the winter months, Chippewa River Forest Management collects a large number of roundwood, which is used during the slow harvesting months. The loader takes the logs to the chipper to be cut and screened, then hauled to the mill. (Submitted Photo)

site."

CRFM began this process, while continuing to use a magnet to pull out any metal or pins and fines. McIntyre said his company sells the pins and fines to local farmers for bedding and a man in Chetek, who burns them, so everything is used for profit.

"I look at the steps they've (Mule-Hide) taken over the past five-six years to improve how they run wood as a good thing," McIntyre said. "If it helps them stay competitive in their market place, we're just happy to help be a part of that."

In order to diversify his own company, McIntyre started Lake States Timber, which purchases standing timber from landowners, setting up their sales and harvesting wood – a way to directly collect the wood chipped.

"My job is to make sure they (Mule-Hide) never run out," McIntyre said. "So far they never have. That's part of the reason why I started Lake States Timber, so I'd have access to standing Aspen, regardless of what the overall aspen market is doing."

Lake States Timber has three in-house semi trucks to haul the wood, with two to three contract haulers for the company. The company can haul wood that is used for wood chips, but can also harvest and haul wood for other uses, making a profit for

themselves.

McIntyre said Lake States is "like a shock absorber" for CRFM. When the market eases and supplies from other loggers are more available, the Lake States crew shifts out of Aspen into other tree species to sell to mills.

Mule-Hide is CRFM and Lake States primary market, but other mills, such as PCA in Tomahawk, a corrugated medium mill, and Marshfield Door System, Inc., in Marshfield, buy from them.

"Mule-Hide has been a terrific partner for many years, and we appreciate their business very much," McIntyre said.

The two companies continue to work together, as McIntyre says there's a project in the works for 2016 that could possibly add chip volume for Cornell. He said the project is "definitely a go," but they have to see how the economics "shake out" to see if it still makes sense.

McIntyre said his favorite thing about his job is working with everyone as a team.

"They're all bright people who care a lot about their jobs and are good at them," McIntyre said. "I appreciate what I have and I wouldn't get very far without them."

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