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## Western Logger Gets Jump Start in Firewood

*Wyoming Man Processes Logging Slash into Firewood with Wood Beaver Machine*

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*Walt Neiman cuts and splits ponderosa pine logs into firewood with a Wood Beaver 1X37 firewood processor; he also bought an optional two-strand live deck (shown) from Resource Recovery Systems.*

ALADDIN, Wyoming – Walt Neiman saw potential when he looked at piles of logging slash and tops – wood material that was no good to a mill. Walt, owner of W. Neiman Logging, decided to salvage the wood and process it into firewood.

“I got on the Internet,” said Walt, and began researching firewood processing equipment. He found Resource Recovery Systems Inc., which distributes firewood processors under the Wood Beaver name, and he obtained a video of its line of equipment. He made a buying decision after watching the video.

Walt chose the Wood Beaver 1X37 firewood processor. His firewood business, which he operates in addition to his logging business, was going strong by the spring 2008. He calls the enterprise WallyWood. Word-of-mouth advertising helped propel firewood sales. Customers buy firewood by the cord and pick it up from Walt’s wood yard.

The Wood Beaver 1X37 is the most popular model in the Resource Recovery Systems’ line of firewood processors. Walt

considered a bigger model, but he wanted to be sure he could make a go of selling firewood before committing to a larger machine.

The salvage wood that Walt is cutting and splitting is ponderosa pine, which has some big knots. The Wood Beaver 1X37 can work with a two-way or four-way wedge, and Walt has found they are best for the tough, gnarly wood.

So far, business has been brisk for WallyWood. “I expect the firewood market to double next year,” said Walt. Propane is a common heat source in the region, and homeowners are interested in a cheaper source of fuel.

Walt operates the Wood Beaver on weekends to produce firewood. He gets help in the summer from his son, Darrell, who is an outdoor education major at Black Hills State University in Spearfish, S.D. Darrell, a defensive back and kick returner on the football team, also works for his father during breaks from college.

The Wood Beaver 1X37 gets a good review from father and son. “It’s fast and it’s

dependable,” said Walt.

The machine has attracted attention from neighbors and customers. Some call to ask when the processor will be running so they can come by and watch. Walt is reluctant to turn down the requests, but he is not anxious that someone else would buy one and begin to compete again him, either. Resource Recovery Systems is headquartered in Hartford, Wis. Walt, who lives in Aladdin, Wyoming, got plenty of help when he bought the Wood Beaver 1X37. “Larry Wafer, their salesman, he brought it out,” said Walt. Larry set it up and is always available by phone to answer questions, explained Walt.

Aladdin is just 10 miles west of the Wyoming-South Dakota border. Most of Walt’s customers are in and around Gillette.

The Wood Beaver 1X37 is powered by a tractor PTO. “I borrowed a John Deere tractor from my in-laws,” said Walt. It has 70 hp, more than enough power to run the firewood processor. In fact, the Wood Beaver 1X37 requires only 20 hp. Walt plans to



*Resource Recovery Systems is the largest U.S. importer of firewood processors from Maaselan Kone Oy in Finland. The machines, powered by tractor PTO, are designed to be versatile, portable and economical.*

buy a used tractor eventually.

At first, Walt improvised to load logs into the Wood Beaver 1X37. He borrowed a truck and pulled up close to the processor to get the logs onto the deck. Now, he owns a Bobcat loader to set the logs on the deck.

WallyWood quickly became profitable, according to Walt, and is “carrying its own weight.”

Walt owns a Timberline stroke-boom delimeter. He collaborates with a nephew, Jeremy Sherrard, who is also an owner-operator. Jeremy has a Timbco harvester and a CAT grapple skidder. “He does the cutting and skidding,” said Walt, who uses his Timberline machine to remove the limbs and cut the logs to length.

“Jeremy also does all the little things,” added Walt, “like pulling trucks that have been stuck, tucking in brush piles, smoothing out rough roads and cleaning up slash – all the little things that are extra expenses to a logger. He does an excellent job and makes my life a lot easier.”

Walt’s older brother owns Bear Lodge Forest Products Inc. in Hulett, Wyo., which buys most of the wood that Jeremy and Walt produce. Bear Lodge manufactures building timber; it also makes pallet stock and manufactures pallets.

“We work all year-round, except when the spring break-up” makes for poor, wet and muddy logging conditions, said Walt. With the firewood processor from Resource Recovery Systems, now he can use that downtime in the spring to process firewood.

Walt grew up in a logging family, and his father was an innovator, according to Walt. “My father built the first rubber-tired skidder out of a Kenworth truck,” he said. “It was just an idea he had.” The home-built skidder ran on airplane tires and had 10 chokers on it and a big winch. It was used to move trees long distances after they were spotted to the trail with the skidding Cat,

saving wear and tear on the skidder.

Most logging jobs for Walt are within a 60-mile radius of Aladdin. Salvaging top wood, rotten logs and really crooked logs to produce firewood has drawn favorable comments from state forestry officials. The material otherwise would be burned on a logging job.

Walt has looked into packaging firewood, but for now he is staying with bulk sales. The packaging equipment would require an investment, and he wants to be certain of the market before he takes that step.

Walt has plenty of raw material. In December, there were still five truck-loads of wood left from the 22 truck-loads that Walt brought to his yard earlier in the year. Walt was preparing to add 10 more truck-loads.

Walt is getting a lot of satisfaction out of his second business endeavor. “There’re a lot of people getting a benefit from what we’ve been doing,” he said. His customers get a cheap source of fuel, and his business has created work for some people, he noted.

When fuel prices soared in the last few years, a number of area residents considered cutting and splitting their own firewood. They took to their wood lots with chainsaws, but many of them lacked the time and the experience of keeping up a chainsaw, said Walt. They have been happy to buy firewood from him.

The Wood Beaver 1X37 from Resource Recovery Systems has met all of Walt’s expectations. The processor will cut and split logs up to 15.5 inches in diameter. Most of the logs that Walt processes are no more than 12 inches in diameter. He processes logs that are 8-20 feet long.

Resource Recovery Systems promotes the Wood Beaver 1X37 as being able to produce two cords of firewood per hour. “I’d say it does that easy,” said Walt. “I think part of their ad is ‘prepare to be impressed’...and everyone who sees it is impressed.”

Maintenance on the Wood Beaver is

“pretty minimal,” said Walt. The saw chain requires periodic sharpening, of course, and after very long use, belts will wear.

The Wood Beaver 1X37 features a 16-inch bar saw for bucking. It is available with manual or hydraulic options for powering the bar saw while the splitter runs on hydraulics. Walt has a hydraulic powered model for bucking. An outfeed conveyor is standard on the Wood Beaver 1X37. Several options are available, such as a hydraulic log lifter, live log deck or gravity log deck. “I bought a two-strand hydraulic deck,” said Walt.

Manufactured in Finland by Maaselan Kone Oy, Wood Beaver firewood processors are designed to be versatile, portable and economical. In Europe, about 3,500 machines are sold annually under the name Hakki Pilke. Resources Recovery Systems is the largest U.S. importer of firewood processors from Maaselan Kone Oy.

A chainsaw has been part of Walt’s life since he began helping his father in logging. He still takes a chainsaw to big limbs, always using a Husqvarna.

Walt drove a logging truck for his first 30 years in business. He took a break from logging and went to work in a coal mine. After a hip replacement, he returned to logging, but this time it was as an equipment operator. “My older brother needed a boom delimeter” operator, he said. Walt tried it, liked it, and stayed with it.

“The boom delimeter is the only job I’ve ever done where you have to think all day,” said Walt. He likes the mental challenge of operating the machine, although he does not enjoy staying in the operator’s cab for long periods at a stretch. He appreciates the opportunity to get out once in a while if he needs to use the chainsaw.

In his free time in autumn, Walt’s first priority is getting to Darrell’s football games. He and Darrell also enjoy bow hunting for deer and elk.