

Bennett Lumber Products, Inc.

Princeton, Idaho

TPM Member Since
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Bennett Lumber is the life work of Guy Bennett who came to Clarkston, Washington in 1939. Guy found employment with Potlatch Corporation as a utility worker. In his spare time he managed his family's seven acre dairy farm and apple orchard. Since Guy needed fruit boxes for his orchard, he used his ingenuity and made his own. Starting with little more than his resourceful and enterprising nature, Guy developed a sideline business sawing scrap lumber into 'shook' for building fruit boxes to supply the Lewiston and Clarkston orchards. There became such a demand for the wooden boxes, 12,000 to 14,000 boxes per week, that Guy quit the local mill to make them full-time.

Diversification and ingenuity became the heart of the company, with the coming of World War II, there was a need for ammunition boxes. By 1950, box production was impacted as cardboard became the material of choice. Again, Guy diversified and started custom lumber milling. The idea was to buy dimensional lumber green, dry and surface it, then ship it by rail and truck.



Bennett Lumber Products mill at Princeton, ID.



Bennett's scalers use a "Decimal C" scale stick to measure the diameter and length of each log, then calculate how many boards can be cut from each.

Guy's backyard operation soon employed 30 people and in 1957, the entrepreneur and his son Frank, began to search for another area mill to purchase. The father-son partnership ultimately put the Bennett name on mills in Moscow, Troy, and Princeton, Idaho, with another Clarkston site added in 1966. The once thriving box trade shut down entirely in 1968.

In the early 1970's, the family enterprise consolidated their holdings, dismantling the Moscow and Troy mills to focus solely on the Princeton location. Automated equipment was pioneered for the site, some modeling highly advanced Scandinavian technology. By 1972 a brand new state-of-the-art mill rose adjacent to the older Princeton mill. It was reputed to be one of the most advanced facilities in the area.

Meanwhile, construction of the Red Wolf Crossing bridge in Clarkston inspired Guy Bennett to relocate to the banks of the Snake River where better rail and water transportation were available. Ground was broken for the facility in 1977, the planer mill was built in 1980, and the entire ultramodern facility was up and running by the early 1990's.

In 1978, Bennett family members bought into Shearer Lumber in Elk City, Idaho. When the Ida-Pine mill closed in Grangeville in the early 1990s, it too was purchased, allowing for a planer mill and better shipping facilities for the Elk City mill. In 2002 the Shearer facility was split from the company. In 2003, the Guy Bennett Lumber Company merged with Bennett Lumber Products.

Today, with key locations in Clarkston, Washington and Princeton, Idaho total lumber production reaches 150 million board feet annually.

Improvements in technology have caused great advancements in the timber industry. Changes in computer technology have allowed better tracking and management of both timber and non-timber resources on the Bennett lands. Bennett Lumber's Geographic Information and Global Positioning Systems are now part of its everyday forest management activities. Bennett Lumber also tracks forest inventory using specialized software. The technology allows Bennett to make better management decisions about company landholdings.



Cants travel along transfer chains to the optimized cant edger. The edge lazer scans and aligns a cant to a bank of accurately spaced saws to get the most board production from each cant.

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Technological improvements in harvesting equipment have yielded new systems that increase utilization and have low impacts on long term forest productivity. Bennett Lumber utilizes cut-to-length logging systems as well as more conventional logging systems depending on the desired outcome. Foresters use methods of harvesting that seek to promote overall forest health and increase productivity.

Technology has made the timber industry one of the most efficient industries in the world today. Often in the lead in developing and utilizing new equipment, the Bennett mills utilizes, a “Maxi Mill End Dogger,” assuring maximum log usage. Because the primary cut essentially determines the rest of the cuts, scanners and computers must assist operators to meet the full potential of each log. The company was also one of the first mills in the region to install a “Triple Horizontal Resaw.” Precision blades saw cants into four sections in split seconds, thereby reducing the number of times each log has to be handled and processed.



WWPA-certified graders judge the boards for knot holes, warping, decay, bluestain and other limiting factors in about three seconds per board. After marking the boards, a computer scans and sorts the lumber by grade.



When a bin is full, it is emptied onto transfer chains where the lumber travels to the stacker.

Both Guy Bennett and Bennett Lumber Products have installed optimized edgers. Maximum recovery as well as highest value per piece has been achieved by utilizing this high technology equipment. The mills have installed Optimil edgers with Softac scanning. The Bennett Lumber Products edger has a four-inch scan density, while the Guy Bennett Lumber mill has a slightly more accurate one-inch scan density. Both machines run with close to 99% accuracy and the operator has the option of manually overriding and making any width available if he chooses. This feature comes in handy when running Ponderosa Pine selects. Both edgers come with four saws, with capabilities of making three board solutions. All solutions are dictated by wane parameters, price tables and size tables which are monitored and changed as needed, depending on sales demands and market conditions.

A primary focus of Bennett Lumber’s forest management efforts is to meet present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs by adopting land stewardship ethics that assure forests remain

healthy and continue to provide wood products, wildlife habitat, biological diversity, clean water, and recreational opportunities. Bennett Lumber’s commitment to sound environmental practices is an everyday effort.

When it comes time to remove trees, Bennett’s foresters manage with a light touch, removing unhealthy trees and planning for the needs of future forests. Most harvests are done to remove diseased and feeble trees to improve forest health. All harvest prescriptions favor leaving healthy native tree species. The foresters use a variety of silvicultural prescriptions to assure biologic diversity, protect water quality, maintain wildlife habitat, and preserve visual quality.

Bennett Lumber Products is also involved with the community and contributes to the Idaho Forest Products Commission for educational programs and workshops. They help with local community reading programs, scholarship awards, the Distinguished Young Women of Idaho program, 4-H and many other civic programs in its communities.

Staying abreast of the technology, contributing to the local community, employees and future, make Bennett Lumber an example of what works now and for years to come.



Finished lumber is bundled into units and shipped by truck or rail.

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