

Reply from Jon Bell

This is Jon Bell. You may have seen my name recently in connection with a winching spar in the Tree Farmer newsletter. Wes forwarded your request to me and I'll send along some of my thoughts.

Tough break on the blow-downs. Was your earth super-saturated? We've lost more trees to wind-throw around here (west of Lyons) since the September flooding for that reason.

I can't help you personally because I've already got a full plate around here. And I can't spare my power spar because I use it regularly. Also, it's a little like loaning a chainsaw ... there are some things it is best not to loan or borrow but ideas are free so here goes.

With time so short before the Ips become active, you are wise to prioritize your efforts. As you pointed out, Ips do not go into Douglas Fir so they can wait awhile. Ips also do not usually go into logs with thicker bark such as the lower trunks of mature Ponderosa.

Your main focus should be to get all the blow-downs de-limbed and the brush and tops dealt with. Good thing you have lots of helpers because that can be fussy work. I have a few ideas on how to make it easier however.

*I referred to one of those ideas in the Tree Farmer Youtube video about the Power Spar. Watch the part about hand-chopping brush on a stump. Ips can reproduce in large, whole branches even after they are cut from the trunk -especially if they are stacked deep. But chopped brush will foil Ips because it will dry out quickly to the point where they physically can't survive/reproduce in it. (although they may waste time trying) Hand chopping could be useful for areas that are out of reach (or out of price-range) of a chipper. Chopped brush can be handled or stirred with a pitch-fork. Chopping brush significantly reduces its volume and its Ips threat. Keep the hatchet very sharp and keep a thick glove on the left hand. I use a Fiskar hatchet from Bailey's.

*Another idea for handling brush is what I call a Poor Man's Yarder. This will be a great help if you want to move a lot of brush from a higher point on the job to a lower point. It is simply a mainline cable stretched through the job from high point to low. The upper end of the cable is attached 15 or 20 feet up in a sturdy tree. The lower end of the cable attaches to a truck bumper after passing over a pulley which is fixed 15 or 20 feet up another sturdy tree at the low end. Start out with the cable laying on the ground. Pile a bunch of full-size branches on top of a choker which is attached to a running pulley on the main cable. When the truck backs up, the main cable tightens and lifts the choker full of brush off the ground. As soon as the bundle becomes airborne, it begins to travel on its own down the mainline as if it was on a zip line. The main cable can be 200 feet long or longer if it is only 1/4" cable. (too hard to get lift if the cable is too heavy) If you have several choker/pulley combinations, a person can walk the empties back up the hill while others are rigging and running loads. I built my Poor Man Yarder for under \$300.

There is a hand-operated log arch called a Blue Ox. It uses 2 wheelbarrow tires and can handle logs up to about 10" diameter. It has its own tongs and no winch. You tip up the handle to lower the tongs, then tip the handle down to raise the log off the ground. The handle is stout and wide enough for two people to pull on it. If travel is downhill or level, the Blue Ox can do a lot of work.

The Poor Man's Yarder concept could move quite large logs if you up-size the cable and use a skidder winch as the tightening power instead of a pickup bumper. Be careful though. The straighter the cable is pulled, the greater the forces are on it.

If a power spar would help you, show that video (and the spec sheet referenced separately) to a welder and see if you can get one built. It doesn't have to be pretty to be useful. Maybe also show the concept to your logger. Perhaps he could pre-bunch logs to minimize the number of skidder turns.

A warning about up-rooted trees: Root balls will sometimes fall back into their hole when (or after) the tree trunk is cut loose from the stump. Twice in my life I have heard of large falling root balls killing a child that was playing in the uprooted hole. Terrible.

Maybe you could wait until late fall or winter to move your larger logs. Then the ground would be drier and maybe even frozen so the work would do less damage. Also you'd keep the logs cleaner that way. If the brush is already gone, the log portion of the job would be much easier.

I don't have much to say about selling logs. Loading and transportation costs are hard to avoid and sawmills only pay so much. Maybe you can find someone with a portable band mill who could set up at your landings and at least cant out the larger logs so they load better on a truck. Maybe the band mill owner will saw for shares. If your Ponderosa are very fat, maybe someone will make slab furniture out of them.

Good luck with your project and you may write me if you want to discuss things further.

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