



# New York State Logging & Forest Economy Workforce Development Programs



2016-2018 Summary Report



**WORKFORCE  
DEVELOPMENT  
INSTITUTE**

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*Growing & Keeping Good Jobs in New York State*

## About WDI

The Workforce Development Institute (WDI) is a statewide non-profit that works to grow and keep good jobs in New York State. We use a range of tools – including ground level information, workforce expertise, and funding – to facilitate projects that build skills and strengthen employers’ ability to hire and promote workers. Our work often fills gaps not covered by other organizations and is accomplished through partnerships and collaborations with businesses, unions, other non-profits, educational institutions, and government. Our Workforce Development initiatives respond to regional needs, identify growing sectors and provide resources and grant funding to remove barriers to employment and industry growth.

This report is intended to provide an update on WDI’s forest economy programs. We welcome questions and feedback that help advance understanding of this important industry and its workforce dynamics.

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*June 2018*



## New York's Forest Economy: Background & Current Challenges

The forest economy is a vital part of New York State's industrial identity. New Yorkers have been logging and producing forest-born products for centuries. Today, the industry has diversified beyond its initial output and its workforce has evolved right alongside. New York's forest economy employs tens of thousands of people and generates billions of dollars in output every year. New York State's wood basket is unique in the United States in the diversity and quality of its hardwoods. What is harvested in New York's 19 million acres<sup>1</sup> of forest is processed downstream into an impressive array of products: furniture, Christmas trees, pulp and paper products, firewood, home décor, building products and lumber, and wood pellets to name a few. Companies that consume New York's forest harvest can be found in every region of the state as well as outside our borders.

Logging companies function as the indispensable link between forest owners and managers and the many downstream businesses that rely on timber harvests. Logging is a demanding endeavor that requires skilled workers and significant

investments in safety and equipment. To stay in business, they must navigate challenges related to training, hiring, harvest size and timing, transport, and shifts in market demand.

A network of supporting partners contributes significantly to the sustainability and success of New York's forest economy. These partners play a number of

### What is the Forest Economy?

WDI defines the forest economy as the workforce, activities, trade, and equipment relating to the ownership, management, and harvesting of forests – chiefly trees - and the transport and processing of this harvest for milling, biomass, manufacturing, and other uses.

roles that help the sector to be safe, profitable, innovative, and sustainable. Through research and collaboration, these partners also identify internal and external factors that may offer opportunity or, conversely, inhibit growth and sustainability.

In recent years, a number of forest economy stakeholders have taken note of common or recurring challenges faced by loggers, mills, and other related businesses. These stakeholders have undertaken formal study of these challenges in order to identify contributing factors and potential solutions. Many of these challenges relate to

or have a direct impact on the forest economy's workforce. A 2015 joint report from the University of Maine and SUNY Environmental Science and Forestry underscored some key principles when it comes to the logging workforce. "Nothing is accomplished in the woods," states the report, "unless there is a motivated and skilled operator in the seat." Surveys done in support of the report found a "general sentiment that it

is harder to find quality employees than in the past." Drug tests, lack of skills, and not showing up for work were factors cited for this challenge.<sup>2</sup>

The New York State Wood Products Development Council, in its 2014 annual report, explored the interdependence of large

scale forest economy employers and their communities. "...[I]f a large manufacturer such as a pulp and paper mill were unable to secure the necessary fiber at a cost that allowed it to be competitive in the marketplace, significant job losses – both directly in manufacturing and through



<sup>1</sup> North East State Foresters Association, *The Economic Importance of New York's Forest-Based Economy published by North East State Foresters Association, 2013*, [http://www.nefainfo.org/uploads/2/7/4/5/27453461/nefa13\\_econ\\_importance\\_newyork\\_final\\_web.pdf](http://www.nefainfo.org/uploads/2/7/4/5/27453461/nefa13_econ_importance_newyork_final_web.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> University of Maine and SUNY ESF, *Strengthening Logging Businesses in the Northern Forest-Assessment of Best Business Practices and Innovation Activities*, 2015, <https://nsrcforest.org/project/strengthening-logging-businesses-northern-forest-%E2%80%93-innovation-and-best-business-practices>.

indirect activity – would fall upon a single region. Conversely, a robust and stable logging workforce could provide new opportunities for new forest manufacturers and existing forest manufacturers to expand production. The resulting jobs and economic activity would boost not only the host community but provide markets for forest landowners and loggers in that area.”<sup>3</sup> New York’s two remaining paper mills, International Paper in Ticonderoga, Essex County and Finch Paper in Glens Falls, Warren County, form the bedrock of their respective local economies, pumping life through their facilities and their network of suppliers. As these mills go, so go employment and prosperity around them.

Similarly, biomass producers rely on timber harvest to satisfy demands from consumers of firewood, chips, and wood pellets. These products constitute the “wood for fuel” side of the market downstream from logging operations. Fortifying the incumbent and future workforce for logging companies benefits biomass producers the same way it does for furniture manufacturers and paper mills.

The Adirondack North Country Association (ANCA) led a group of regional partners to highlight the cyclical nature of forest economy markets in a 2016 report, *Northern New York’s Forests: Timber Supply, Workforce, Infrastructure & Markets*. Companies surveyed for ANCA’s report emphasized their desire to engage in long-term (i.e. five years or more) workforce planning. This desire is in anticipation of a large percentage of logging company retirements in coming years as well

“...[A] robust and stable logging workforce could provide new opportunities for new forest manufacturers and existing forest manufacturers to expand production.”

-2014 New York State Wood Products Development Council Report

as concerns about worker shortages should demand for forest products see a strong increase.

ANCA’s report also notes the creation of a logger training program at Paul Smith’s College (PSC) as a positive development. PSC’s program is described in the report as a vital component in the workforce pipeline, especially for counties adjacent to PSC’s campus. Major recommendations from the report call on the industry and its partners to:

*Sustain and grow the forest products markets that exist today.*

*Sustain and grow appropriate state investment in the forest products industry.*

*Sustain and expand New York’s involvement in logger training programs.*<sup>45</sup>

## Supporting the Present, Planning for the Future

From these studies grew a momentum to take action on the workforce-related challenges facing the forest economy and loggers specifically. This momentum reached a critical point in 2016 when the Empire State Forest Products Association (ESFPA) worked with its partners in the New York State Legislature to secure a \$400,000 appropriation to be administered by the Workforce Development Institute (WDI). This appropriation was a proactive step by the Legislature intended to develop and deliver pilot programs that would grow the forest economy’s workforce while also supporting its incumbent workers.



<sup>3</sup> New York State Wood Products Development Council Report, *Annual Report 2014*, [https://www.agriculture.ny.gov/woodproducts\\_annual\\_report.pdf](https://www.agriculture.ny.gov/woodproducts_annual_report.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> ANCA November 2016 Industry Study

<sup>5</sup> While these studies focused more on the North County region of New York, it is a generally held view that the workforce findings are applicable in other New York’s other regions where logging and the forest economy has a presence.

WDI worked directly with ESFPA’s training arm, New York Logger Training (NYLT) and PSC to develop an implementation plan for the appropriated funding. This plan identified three main components to support development of the forest economy’s workforce:

1-New classroom and online training for NYLT and its certified loggers.

2-Resources for PSC to deliver an initial School of Logging pilot training program for new loggers.

3-A facilitated internship program for graduates of PSC’s School of Logging program.

“Nothing is accomplished in the woods unless there is a motivated and skilled operator...”

-Survey Respondent, Univ. of Maine & SUNY ESF Report

Having recently completed a workforce needs assessment, NYLT was well positioned to engage its network of subject matter experts in order to develop a series of new, industry-validated curricula. NYLT knew from its needs assessment and input from its Board of Directors that New York’s incumbent loggers had a strong desire for new course content. NYLT also recognized that the time had come for New York’s logging companies to have access to online and computer-based training resources. “As Loggers do NOT sit at a computer during the day, typical outreach has only limited effectiveness,” reports Muriel Church, Communication & Member Services Director for ESFPA, which runs NYLT.

NYLT issued a request for proposals for new curricula. From the proposals, NYLT and its Board of Directors selected the highest value and most relevant courses to stock its training library. These new courses are listed below by author and course title:

**Keister Consulting, LLC**  
Course: GIS for Loggers

**Northeast Forests, LLC**  
Courses: Timber Measurements; Small Business Class; Productivity & Continuous Improvement



**Rebecca Hargrave**

Course: Invasive Species for Loggers

**Lincoln Farms Timber Harvesting**

Courses: Apps and Technology for Loggers; Be a Go-To Logger: Professionalism & Advocacy

In addition to the above titles, NYLT contracted with Dr. Steve Bick of Northeast Forests, LLC to perform a

comprehensive environmental scan of available online training resources for loggers. Dr. Bick evaluated existing courses and programs to determine relevance to New

York State’s logging industry, potential interest to NYLT trainees, and accessibility of course material. His findings were compiled in a sourcebook that will guide NYLT’s online course offerings for years to come.

NYLT’s success in updating its curriculum library has reinvigorated its incumbent training offerings. “This project,” reported Church, “allowed NYLT to update and refresh several components and functional items of the core program as well – further strengthening the overall program for the loggers. These projects have exponentially improved how loggers are receiving our programming.”

The second main goal of the 2016-2017 appropriation was to fortify the pipeline of new workers entering

logging and related fields through a two-part approach: entry-level training and facilitated internships. WDI’s North Country Regional Director, Greg Hart, worked with PSC to organize an initial delivery of their School of Logging training program.

With PSC, WDI put in place a contract to pilot their summer training program.

“It is very difficult, but exciting, to start a new training offering from scratch,” shared Hart. “If WDI was going to develop a paid internship program that sought to open a talent pipeline from PSC, then the School of Logging had to run. We wanted to ensure that the



program had the resources it needed. We developed relationships with great partners who grew increasingly excited by what we were building.”

PSC’s School of Logging provided participants with an introduction to the knowledge and skills of logging while enabling participants to be vetted for potential placement in internships with logging and mill companies. With a strong multi-week curriculum in place, PSC launched the program during the summer of 2017 with a capacity of 20 students. Though initial interest was weaker than expected, PSC registered a total of 21 students by offering a \$1,000 scholarship toward the \$1,500 program cost. “The affordability was vital to recruiting students for a course with an unestablished track record,” explained Josh Pierce, who oversaw the internship program.

Nineteen students attended the first session on July 10, 2017. In total, seventeen students completed the program. Of those who registered but did not complete the School of Logging Program, two cited personal reasons for not completing, one accepted another job offer, and one provided no explanation. In sum, PSC’s School of Logging produced 17 graduates who would make up the pool of candidates for the facilitated internships. These graduates hailed from eight different New York counties, with one coming from out of state.

**2017 PSC School of Logging Graduates by County**

<u>County</u>	<u>Graduates</u>
Clinton	5
Franklin	4
Delaware	2
Cattaraugus	1
Chenango	1
Oneida	1
Otsego	1
Oswego	1
Out of State	1



Many of the School of Logging participants had some orientation to forest harvesting and its occupations since they were recruited out of similar technical programs at the high school and post-secondary levels.

By completing the School of Logging, they gained additional, industry-validated expertise in logger rescue, harvesting techniques, log bucking, forest ecology, and other skills. These curriculum elements constituted a strong selling point for employers to accept interns from the School of Logging’s pool of graduates.

To design and implement the facilitated internships, WDI engaged Josh Pierce, a Plattsburgh-area BOCES instructor in environmental conservation and forestry as well as an alumnus of Paul Smith’s College. Pierce’s years of experience in the forest economy and familiarity with students and employers positioned him well to implement the pilot internship program. The internships were designed to introduce newly trained loggers to the industry and connect them to existing businesses in need of labor. Pierce, in his role as Timber Harvest Internship Coordinator, was responsible for recruiting intern candidates, marketing the internships to potential employers, matching candidates to employers, overseeing payment and contractual documentation, and consulting with WDI’s Hart on program budget, purpose, and progress.

The internship was structured as a wage reimbursement program, which Pierce managed. Employers who accepted interns would be reimbursed up to 480 work hours at a rate of \$15 per hour.<sup>6</sup> Employers were notified that they could pay above that rate but reimbursement would be capped at \$15 per hour. Internships did not cover commuting costs, room, or board. Pierce noted that these limitations might have hindered recruitment to employers and interns located close to PSC.

<sup>6</sup> Overtime was not included as part of intern pay. Employers were solely responsible for paying these wages.

Pierce conducted concurrent outreach to employers and to intern candidates enrolled in the School of Logging program. Initial interest was high among employers and Pierce was able to line up eight to accept interns. On the intern side, Pierce had at length conversations with the candidates to explain the program, learn about their professional goals, and facilitate connections.

Employers would be able to place interns in their operations as they saw fit and would provide mentoring and all necessary safety support. If the intern-employer match was not mutually beneficial, both parties had the right to terminate the relationship before the agreed-to time period. Conversely, employers had the opportunity – and were encouraged – to hire interns into full-time positions if the intern’s performance was good and there was an available opening. The chance at full-time employment was a real selling point for intern candidates.

“While we had the potential to place nine interns with eight employers,” Pierce reflected, “we were only successful at placing six interns at five locations.”

Pierce cited a variety of reasons for the lower-than-expected placement rate from the School of Logging graduates. “It seemed that a few of the students were very indecisive as to what they wanted to do for a career. Only one intern was willing to relocate to be able to be hired for his internship.” Richards Logging of Tupper Lake, Franklin County accepted two interns. Russell Bass & Sons Lumber (Delaware County), T & T Leasing (Clinton County), Top Notch Timber Harvesting (Broome County), and the Catskill Forest Association (Delaware County) also accepted interns.

Despite the challenges noted above, Pierce reported that four of the six placed interns are still employed by

“These projects have exponentially improved how loggers are receiving our programming.”

-Muriel Church, ESFPA & NYLT

their respective companies. In addition, two other School of Logging graduates accepted job offers, one with a logging company and one with a utility tree company. For these first-time pilot programs, looking to establish a track record and deliver results, WDI and its partners agree that these initial outcomes were a sign of success and strengths to build on in the next few years.

## Building on Success

Based on the success of the 2016-2017 logging workforce pilot programs, ESFPA secured a second appropriation to build on the School of Logging program, the internships, and the logging course procurements. ESFPA worked with the Legislature to obtain funding, which would again be administered by WDI.



Greg Hart, in close collaboration with ESFPA, PSC, and Josh Pierce, identified three program areas of focus for the second appropriation. The broad goals of this second appropriation are to work with NYLT to integrate their new courses into the schedule and to run “Train

the Trainer” classes to develop new instructors. WDI is also currently working to ensure the School of Logging has the support it needs. Further, WDI is providing support and funding for the newly created Troops to Timber program. These collaborations align with recent guidance from the New York State Wood Products Development Council. In their 2015-2016 Annual Report, the Council recommends that, “...selected members of the forest industry partner with PSC to assist with the design and development of its nascent program to ensure that the training best meets the needs of the region’s logging and trucking businesses.”<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> New York State Wood Products Development Council Report, 2015-2016 Annual Report,

[https://www.agriculture.ny.gov/Press%20Releases/WPDC\\_Annual\\_Rpt.pdf](https://www.agriculture.ny.gov/Press%20Releases/WPDC_Annual_Rpt.pdf).

As in the previous year, candidates for the facilitated internship program will be recruited from the School of Logging. The strength of the School of Logging curriculum and its hand-on, industry-validated approach mean graduates are well informed and prepared to serve as interns with logging and milling companies. Josh Pierce has agreed to head up intern recruitment and employer outreach again. The internship program retains its reimbursement structure and pay rate of \$15 per hour for a maximum of 480 hours per intern.

Hart incorporated important lessons learned from the first pilot School of Logging and internship programs. Among these lessons were the role of marketing to a broader audience and finding new and creative ways to introduce careers in the forest economy. It was a natural fit, then, to involve the Ft. Drum army base, which is located roughly two hours west of the PSC campus. Hart, together with Pierce and PSC, worked with Transition Services Program personnel at Ft. Drum to create the Troops to Timber program. Troops to Timber is a first-of-its-kind career exploration program that exposes soldiers to career opportunities available to them in logging and the forest economy. Ft. Drum markets Troops to Timber to soldiers and personnel who are close to the end of their service. PSC conducts outreach at Ft. Drum events and offers information sessions on logging and its job opportunities. The first round of Troops to Timber, which included two separate information sessions, saw a total of 16 people participate in hands-on demonstrations of tree climbing, chainsaw use, and other skills.

“We developed relationships with great partners who grew increasingly excited by what we were building.”

-Greg Hart, North Country Regional Director,  
Workforce Development Institute

For Hart and others, confidence is high when it comes to the potential for the School of Logging and the facilitated internship program to strong pipeline for careers in logging and the forest economy. “Going into the second year and projecting into year three,” reflected Hart, “it becomes clearer that PSC will be able to identify the true cost of the School of Logging program. There are opportunities for the School of Logging to become a key center for preparing high school graduates, people looking for a career in forestry and logging and potentially new hires of incumbent workers to build their skills.”

## Acknowledgements

WDI thanks for following individuals and organizations for their invaluable contributions and on-going support of New York’s forest economy workforce:

New York State Senator Betty Little

The New York State Senate

The Staff and Board of Empire State Forest Products Association and New York Logger Training

Josh Pierce, Timber Harvesting Internship Coordinator

President Cathy Dove, Brett McLeod-Forestry Chair, Dave Falkenham-Forest Manager and Logger Program, and the School of Logging Team, Paul Smith’s College

Lorrie Guler, Soldier for Life-Transition Assistance Program, Ft. Drum