

Old traditions used for environmentally sustainable logging

by Olivia Rutt

PUSLINCH - The brief pounding of hooves against dirt and the ripping of roots break the forest silence.

On his 25-acre private property, Greg Parker is busy removing invasive buckthorn from his forest with his team of Belgian draft horses.

Bill and Buttercup, weighing 1,500 to 2,000 pounds apiece, are Parker's perfect team. They mostly stand and munch on the leaves and trees, sometimes looking back as Parker and his two student helpers, Maryn Work and Léo Arseneault, chain trees for pulling.

When Parker gives the command "walk on," the horses move forward and with a quick tug, a six-foot buckthorn has been ripped from the ground.

It is easy work for the horses, as they are used to hauling much larger logs for much longer distances. Removing the buckthorn is a summer job, while hauling logs is easier in the winter when the ground hardens.

The thicket they are working in is at the top of a steep slope, where a machine would never be able to reach without destroying part of the mature forest.

"I didn't want machines, I didn't want the motor. I wanted horses. I was a rider. I worked on a horse ranch and rode," said Parker.

In under an hour, hundreds of buckthorns trees



Tradition - LEFT: Greg Parker with his horses Bill and Buttercup ABOVE: Parker drives the team as Maryn Work and Léo Arseneault look on.
photo by Olivia Rutt

have been cleared away, letting light into the dark forest.

Parker, who has been using horses to log for over 20 years, says it is a great way to manage his property.

"The horse taught me how to take care of the land, cultivate, grow and work the

Bartram added, "We thought we could maybe log our own wood lots using horses and that would be a bit of a niche where we would provide sustainable forest management service and do it with horses."

Using horses is not the

natured and strong and amazingly smart. Once they learned the job, the horses really (seemed to) enjoy the work," he said.

Parker said by using horses, people would hardly notice they were even there. It is an environmentally sustainable way to manage property, to get rid of invasive species and to log.

Both Parker and Bartram are now more or less retired from the business, but Parker still uses his horses to manage his property. He does not consider himself or his team antiquated, but his students don't necessarily agree.

"It is an odd job. You're the only person I know that does this," Work said to Parker, laughing. "It's really incredible, they're just such powerful creatures."

Arseneault agreed, noting he has seen big machines not be able to do the work the horses do.

Parker admits there are less people logging with horses than in the past.

Kim Davidson, past

president of the Ontario Percheron Association (OPA), said less than five per cent of OPA members use their Percherons, another breed of draft horse, for logging, but owners still use them for farm work.

"The art of logging is not lost, but it is in danger of becoming extinct with only a handful of skilled individuals practicing this profession ... we must seek them out and transfer those skills to others," said Davidson.

Not only do the horses pull logs, they can also remove stumps and boulders and cultivate gardens.

For Parker, it is not about being traditional - he genuinely likes working with his horses.

"I like not having to go and purchase energy, I can manufacture it right here," he said, patting Bill.

It's really incredible, they're just such powerful creatures.

- Maryn Work

land to our advantage," he said.

Parker went into business with Dave Bartram, a tree planter who saw the benefit of horses in the forest.

"We could sell (logging with) horses because it's easy on terrain, and it goes in difficult terrain, wet or hilly. It's very easy on the land," said Parker.

fastest process, and it is definitely labour-intensive, but horses do not get stuck in the mud or snow, they do not make a large trail in the forest, they do not destroy the natural growth and they do not pollute the air, said Parker.

Bartram added the horses are perfect for the job.

"They were gentle-



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