

D. L. PHIPPS FOREST NURSERY

CONTRACT TREE LIFTING

by

Jack Hann

Supervisor of Reforestation and Nurseries

Oregon State Department of Forestry

Contract tree lifting at the Phipps Nursery started as a last resort in March of 1965. The nursery was flooded on December 22, 1964 for a period of from 12 to 20 hours depending on the particular elevation within the nursery. An overlay of silt of from one to eight inches in depth was deposited on the nursery beds. The 2-0 seedlings were the most heavily silted as the canopy tended to capture the silt particles from the current, burying the seedlings within an inch or two of the tips of the leaders.

The nursery is located about six miles south of the town of Elkton on the Umpqua River. Elkton's population is about 150 people. Drain is 20 miles from Elkton and has a population of a little over 1,000 people. Larger towns such as Sutherlin, Roseburg and Cottage Grove are an hour or more in travel time from the nursery. The local area is rural with occupations being in farming, logging and milling. Seasonal labor for lifting has been a problem each winter due to the inadequate local supply. As nursery production has increased from three to four million seedlings up to 15 to 20 million seedlings, seasonal labor became a really serious problem. The better class laborer is either working or drawing unemployment from a fair weather job and is not interested in mudding around in the nursery. This leaves most of the opportunity to transient labor or school dropouts which are not very dependable,

The silted condition of seedlings on top of an already inadequate supply of laborers required some drastic action. In the early part of February production was about one-third of normal, over half the trees were still in the beds and by April 1, dormancy would break and we could figure on losing most of the stock in the beds. The hired lifters considered the task impossible. It was necessary to dig out part of the seedling tops in order to grasp them and then lift twice the usual weight of silt and soil. These added problems were too much for most laborers and the crew dwindled down to six or eight men. Contract labor was a natural alternative since this is also one answer to field planting.

A bid form was devised setting forth the requirements of the job and the standard provisions such as performance bond, insurance, etc. This bid was advertised and mailed to planting contractors. Only two contractors were interested and neither one was particularly anxious to get the job. This was due to the fact that they were unfamiliar with this type of work and were understandably reluctant to be committed to performance when it appeared as if the nursery couldn't perform either.

One of the applicants was in reality a labor contractor for a group of Mexicans living near Independence, Oregon, about 125 miles from the nursery.

He was not able to qualify under state performance bond requirements, The other contractor, after looking the whole job over and getting all our available information on production per man day, bid \$6 per thousand. This was at least \$3 per thousand more than our estimates even with the extra work required because of silt, By throwing out this bid we were then able to negotiate which we proceeded to do immediately with the contractor having the Mexican labor.

After a considerable amount of discussion, offers and counter offers we finally agreed to a cost of \$2.60 per thousand for the lifting. It was probably a lucky circumstance that this contractor got the job. The Mexican workers were used to stoop labor and they were used to work. The crew consisted of 15 to 18 men, women and teenagers, They traveled by carryall each day from residences in Independence to the nursery and return, putting a full eight hour day on the nursery, They lifted 5,594 M seedlings in five weeks, completing the job on March 25 for a total. of \$14,544.

The crew did an excellent job of lifting in comparison with using hired labor. Under terms of the contract, the contractor was paid on the basis of sorted and counted trees.. Responsibility for proper lifting with minimum damage rested with the contractor. Empty field boxes were delivered at the lifting site and filled boxes were loaded and transported to the sorting room by regular nursery personnel, The regular nursery field foreman directed the work designating lifting by lot in the same manner as if a hired crew had been doing the work.

The inventory for the 1965-66 season indicated approximately 25 million seedlings to be lifted. This was approximately 8 million more seedlings than had ever been produced at the Phipps Nursery in the past, This looked like an emergency situation of another sort -- time to get all the trees out in 16 weeks between December and March 31. Another lifting bid was circulated with the same two contractors interested,

This time we knew that it would be a much easier job without the silt. The contractors recognized the change in conditions and this time the previous \$6 per thousand bidder was awarded the job for \$1,49 per thousand. Lifting got started on a small scale in the second week of November since we were fortunate in having weather conditions that hardened off the seedlings earlier than usual. Lifting was completed on April 15, considerably later than the March 31 deadline. A 3 or 4 day lay-off in January was caused by frozen ground; two weeks were lost in March because of' continued rain and some snow. The final lifting in April was transplant stock which helped minimize the loss of new growth which was well developed by the time the last tree had been sorted. A total of 23,632 M seedlings was lifted by contract at a total cost of \$35,211,58. Total lifting costs including state hired labor and supervision was \$1.75 per thousand, The contractor performed excellently in all respects although he was not too happy about the two week lay-off. He must have come out all right on the job since he was really interested in negotiating the coming lifting season at the same price per thousand. This fall, production will be approximately 20 million seedlings and we will expect to lift them by contract again,

## DISCUSSION

One reported that they require in their contracts that the planter haul the seedlings to the packing shed.

Q: What is the possibility of putting in a contract for a sorting job?

A: Good possibility, but some problems would be encountered. You might lose contact with regular personnel hired from year to year.