

\$AFETY SAVES

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The first thing I saw when I turned off the highway and onto a county road was a *Log Trucks Hauling* sign and shortly thereafter a *35 MPH* sign. This county road would eventually turn into a USFS road where there was an active logging operation. The road was a narrow two-lane paved road and after several miles it narrowed up a bit and turned into a gravel road. At this point, there was another *Log Trucks Hauling* sign, a *25 MPH* speed limit sign and the start of mile markers. I slowed to 25 MPH and continued on... and shortly thereafter a vehicle came up behind me and I could tell they were having a coronary because I was driving 25 mph and they couldn't get around me.

There is no doubt had I not been in front of them they would have been driving much faster. This road contained blind corners and the road was slick; not a good combination for meeting a loaded log truck! I couldn't help but think "Didn't you see the signs? Do you know what happens when your half ton pickup crashes into a loaded log truck? You will lose!!"

From the looks of their gear when they went around me they were hunters and, yes, they were from out of state. In this case the logging contractor had done everything right; the road was well signed and the USFS had lowered the speed limit to 25MPH to reduce the chances of an accident. These folks were heading to the woods, and with it being the day before general hunting season, they were joined statewide by thousands more; hopefully, most of which were a bit more observant.

Hunting season in Montana starts in early September with bow season and goes through Thanksgiving weekend; or at least it used to. Now, depending on the area, we have shoulder seasons for elk that can start August 15th and run through the 15th of February. As we all know, hunting seasons greatly increase traffic in the woods and thus increases the hazards of driving to and from work and hauling logs. These opportunities bring folks onto forest roads without radios and many times without any woods-related driving experience or knowledge that they could be meeting a semi on one of these small roads.

Needless to say, make sure your open to the public roads are well signed and if the traffic seems to not be manageable you may want to talk with your sale administrator and see if there are some other options such as closing portions of the road, reducing speed limits, or getting law enforcement involved. Good communication on both high band radios and CB radios has always been one of the keys to safe woods road traveling. Stress with everyone the importance of good communication, especially in these times.

By the time this newsletter goes out, the general hunting season will be over... however, the elk shoulder season, as well as the mountain lion, wolf and bobcat seasons will run into March. These later-in-the-winter seasons bring with them another set of problems. The roads into your job are plowed and, thereby, guides the traffic right to your operation. This especially rings true for hound-hunters as many times they drive roads waiting to cut a fresh track or have their dogs "strike" from the truck. When yours is the only plowed road in the drainage, it naturally brings them onto the logging roads and into your logging jobs. Furthermore, plowed roads in the winter also bring firewood cutters; and winter conditions also bring our slickest and hardest-to-stop road conditions that greatly compound the hazard of unexpected traffic encounters.

Myself, like many other folks, continue to live in Montana in part due to the hunting opportunities. The number of folks participating in these activities are increasing every year and this trend will continue to bring challenges for folks that work in our incredible forests. To mitigate this ever-increasing hazard, it is imperative we all stay diligent with road signage, communication and driver awareness. Make sure all pickup drivers and log haulers on your job are reminded when hunting seasons start; it could be a safety meeting topic every year around the middle of August and continue to be an important topic until breakup.

Be safe out there and hope you had a safe and successful hunting season! *Safety Saves*