

## Wood from Water

### *Loggers are harvesting a new kind of sunken treasure*

Eyeing underwater wood is not new. In the 1980s, divers began salvaging logs that sank when trees were floated from forest to mill, but these logs were just a small fraction of the underwater wood supply: Scientists estimate that there are 200 to 300 million trees still standing on the beds of reservoirs around the world. When loggers first harvested these trees in the late 1990s, they simply plucked the tree—roots and all—from the bottom of shallow reservoirs, but this stirred up sediment that was often laden with heavy metals from centuries-past, up-river mining and industry. Divers developed underwater chainsaws to help harvest some of these trees, but they were limited to working in relatively shallow depths, and the work was extremely dangerous.



Chris Godsall, of Triton Logging, Inc., worked as a log salvager in Vancouver, but as the number of logs available for salvage began drying up, he saw an opportunity in flooded forests. “One of our great

strengths in British Columbia, is that we have strong forestry and marine technology industries,” Chris says. “They’d just never been brought together on one project.”

Chris married them together for the development of the Sawfish—a remote-controlled, underwater logging vehicle that weighs 7,000 lbs on land, but that’s buoyant in water. Eight video cameras, and sonar, allow topside

loggers to operate a feller grapple and 55-inch chainsaw. Powered by an electric motor, it uses biodegradable, vegetable-based oils and hydraulic fluids. Crews, working at depths up to 500 feet, can harvest twelve trees per hour.



One of the most novel aspects of the Sawfish's design is the inflatable, reusable airbags that

float trees to the surface. "Wood underwater eventually soaks up so much water that when you cut a tree underwater it falls to the floor of the lake. If the thing that cuts the tree retrieves the tree, it is hard to make the economics work," Chris explains. "The airbags allowed us to break through that economic barrier."

Not only are the economics working for Triton, but the Rainforest Alliance has recognized the wood with its *Smartwood* designation for "Rediscovered" wood, and its FSC certified.

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