

A Morning Ride Through Northern Minnesota's Working Forests

A firsthand look at land stewardship, wildfire recovery, and the dedicated people driving the regional timber economy.

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SPECIAL FIELD
REPORT



ON THE ROAD: Michael Sullivan (left), Program Director of ForestryWorks® of Minnesota, with Josh Hull of Hull Forest Products in front of his International semi-truck.

TWO HARBORS, MINN. — Early morning, dew still clinging to ferns and moss, I climbed into the passenger seat of a red semi-truck driven by Josh Hull of Hull Forest Products. The trailer behind us would soon be filled with freshly chipped wood. This was part of a day's work connecting Minnesota's forests to its mills.

As the miles rolled by, it became clear that this was more than just a logging trip — it was a first-hand look at land stewardship, wildfire recovery, and the people who keep Minnesota's forest economy moving forward every day.

ROOTS, LEGACY, AND MISSION

Josh grew up around sawmills in Two Harbors, dreamed of running a skidder as a kid, and after three Army tours in Afghanistan returned home to forestry with a renewed sense of purpose. From McCabe Forest Products to today's Hull Forest Products, Josh has built on a legacy of adaptability and integrity. Their company motto, *"Forestry Done Right,"* is a principle, not a slogan.

"Forestry done right means balancing economic needs with ecological care, always driven by hardworking people who make it all possible."

ON THE ROAD: FIRE CLEANUP & DELIVERY

As we drove, Josh pointed out active work sites along our route. One major stop included forestry mulching and land clearing in areas severely scarred by this year's Brimson Complex fires — specifically the Camp House and Jenkins Creek burns that swept through thousands of acres in Lake and St. Louis Counties.

Crews were actively clearing brush, grinding down hazardous fuels, and preparing the charred land for recovery — a vital and time-sensitive step in restoring the forest ecosystem after destructive wildfires.



FIRE RECOVERY: Heavy equipment clearing timber and brush on a burn site following the Brimson Complex wildfires.

From there, we continued down the road with a full load of chips bound for Minnesota Power's Hibbard Renewable Energy Center in Duluth. The facility represents an important link in the chain connecting sustainable management to renewable energy.



IN THE FIELD: A Vermeer WC2300 whole-tree chipper filling a chip van directly on site in northern Minnesota.



MILL DELIVERY: Hydraulic truck dumper unloading wood chips at the Hibbard Renewable Energy Center in Duluth.

PEOPLE POWER & WORKFORCE NEEDS

As Josh steered the truck along winding backroads, he spoke candidly about the industry's greatest challenge today: a critical shortage of skilled workers, especially professional truck drivers. Every log and chip load must reach its destination, and without drivers, the entire forest products supply chain stalls. Reliable hauling is the essential lifeline of forestry.

Beyond trucking, there is also strong, steady demand for machine operators running high-tech harvesters, equipment technicians maintaining fleets, and energetic young professionals willing to learn the trade.

This is precisely where **ForestryWorks® of Minnesota** and similar workforce development efforts are stepping in to engage, educate, and train the next generation of forestry professionals.



INDUSTRY LIFELINE: Hull Forest Products truck fleet operates out of Duluth, MN, ensuring timber reaches local mills.

WHY WORKING FORESTS MATTER

- **Community Resilience:** Rapid response following wildfires to clear fuels, restore land, and protect communities.
- **Sustainable Economics:** Supplying regional paper mills, sawmills, and energy facilities while supporting rural family jobs.
- **Ecological Balance:** Selective harvests, mulching, and land clearing set the ideal stage for healthy natural regrowth.
- **Regional Identity:** Working forests remain deeply central to northern Minnesota's culture, heritage, and economic future.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

Riding alongside Josh Hull wasn't just a day on the road; it was a firsthand look at forestry in motion. From wildfire recovery work to renewable energy deliveries, I saw how forestry done right means balancing economic needs with ecological care — always driven by dedicated, hardworking people who make it all possible.


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