



## Wood Beaver 16

### FIREWOOD PROCESSOR FOR A GROWING FAMILY BUSINESS

**Splitting and selling firewood has been a Williams family affair for the past seven years. With its new Wood Beaver 16, the family aims to expand Williams Wood's customer base and continue to build their small town business.**

**I**n 2015, Becky, Lee, and Bernard Williams sold about 50 cords of firewood in the small coastal town of Tillamook, Oregon. And that was quite an accomplishment considering the bridge over which their logs had to be transported was impassable for months.

But with the bridge rebuilt and a good source of spruce, alder, and hemlock ready to be delivered upon request, Becky believed the family could build their business. But they were using a locally built, one-of-a-kind splitter with a Deutz diesel engine and a 35-ton Split Master that just couldn't keep up with demand.

To build their business, they would require a faster processor. So she and Bernard began shopping. After scouring the market, the couple decided that the Wood

Beaver 16 fit their price point and would allow them to increase production. If this increase in capacity allows them to serve more customers, the long-term plan is to eventually invest in an even faster processor. It's a move in the right direction.

#### Williams Family Business

The family sells bundled wood to stores and gas stations and recently landed the first of what they hope will be multiple campground contracts. They also sell to homeowners. "One customer buys wood by the half cord to place at her beach house rentals," Becky explained. "The tourist and campground market is great for our bundled wood in the summer, and locals buy the cords to heat their homes during the winter months." A combination of these two distinct markets keeps the family busy year-round.

For Becky, the Model 16 was a good place to start. "I bought the Wood Beaver to speed up our process," she said. According to Wood Beaver, the Model 16 can process 2 or more cords per hour. After operating the splitter for the past eight months, the Williamses have found that a hard goal to hit consistently due to the species of wood they're processing.

"We're primarily sawing spruce, which can have knots that are as hard as steel," said Bernard. "So while the splitter may be capable of 2 cords an hour



Becky Williams operates the Wood Beaver using a simple set of levers. Her son, Lee, lowers the protective lockout cover before engaging the saw and splitter.

cutting some wood, we can't get that consistently with the type of wood we receive from our supplier."

Still, Becky is happy that she has increased her output to as much as 1.5 cords an hour, and that's a big improvement over the old splitters.

### Model 16 Walk-Through

The Wood Beaver Model 16 comes with a protective lockout cover and saw guard, which should be lowered into place before any cutting begins. This is designed to protect the operator from flying debris and avoid contact with moving parts.

Logs are placed on the 8-foot deck. "I can usually put about five on the deck and one on the belt and can cut 16-inch diameter," Becky said. By moving the deck forward, the next log is advanced toward the infeed table. The unit's "lift fingers" help the next log move onto the table while helping to stop the following log as well. This ensures that only one log at a time is placed on the infeed.

When cutting, Becky uses the Model 16's yardstick-style visual guide, or "log length adjuster." This allows her to set log length before advancing the log into the saw area using the infeed control. When the log reaches the set point, a positive log stop sets the length of the log cut. This helps to ensure the consistency of the firewood.

As the log advances toward the cutting bar, a manual "log hold-down" applies downward pressure on

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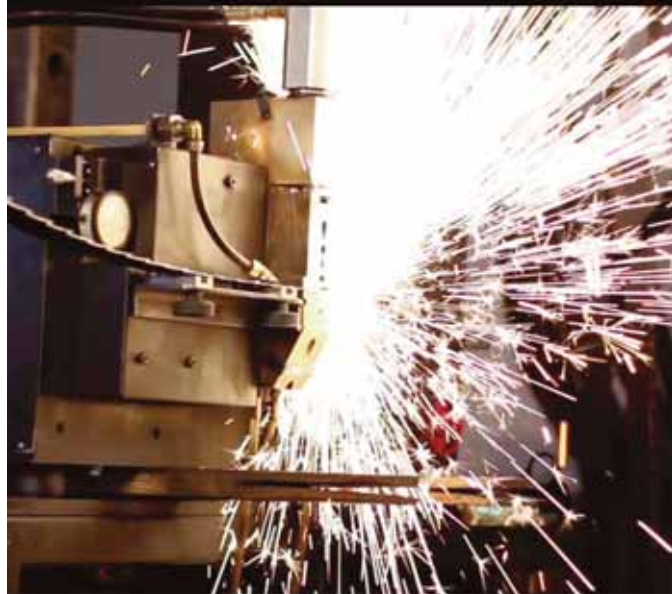
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***“I can usually put about five [logs] on the deck and one on the belt and can cut 16-inch diameter.”*** —Becky Williams

and guides the log to drop into the splitting well. There, a steel ram pushes the short length of log past the 6-way ax edge wedge. If the log were cut at an angle, it wouldn't seat properly in front of the square end of the ram, according to Bernard, which is what makes the log hold-down function so crucial.

The split wood then travels up an 8-foot discharge conveyer and drops on the ground.

Though Becky, who is the primary operator of the Wood Beaver 16, is pleased overall with her increased production, Bernard, who worked as a mechanic for 32 years, said he had some difficulty putting the Wood Beaver, which arrives in a crate, together. Wood Beaver estimates 4 to 5 hours for assembly, but Bernard said it took all day.

Also, he said, because of features like the manual log hold-down, it usually takes two people to run the mill. He would have preferred Wood Beaver's hydraulic hold-down, but it was not an option on the Model 16. It is, however, an option on the new Wood Beaver 18 “Bad A\*\* Beaver,” and is standard on the Wood Beaver 20 Bad A\*\* Beaver. Also, he said, in the Wood Beaver videos, the wood split like butter. “With such perfect logs, we could process 2 cords an hour,” he said. “But that just doesn't happen here.”

## Drying and Wrapping

After splitting, the Williamses dry their firewood in a converted greenhouse. “It was too hot for the plants, so we turned it into a kiln to ‘solar dry’ our wood,”



**By pulling the pin out, the log length adjuster can be set between 10 and 24 inches. Becky generally cuts her logs in 16-inch lengths, but can cut shorter for custom orders and smaller chimney-style firepits.**

the log to keep it stable during cutting operation. During operation, the hold-down rides along the top of the log with a steel roller.

When the log reaches the stop, it is ready to be cut. The Model 16 is available with either a manual (pull down) or hydraulic (actuation) saw. The Williamses opted for the hydraulic version, so the saw is activated using a simple joystick. The operator pulls a lever forward to activate the saw and pushes it back to stop and return to its upright position. On a large or particularly hard piece of wood, Wood Beaver says it may be beneficial to feather that control to slow the saw down slightly. The Williamses often find this to be necessary.

“Because of the wood we cut, we sometimes have to work the saw hard to make a cut,” said Bernard. “If we get a 16-inch piece with a knot in it, we have to drop it down, cut it in half, and feed it back through. So that slows us down.”

The spring-loaded log hold-down keeps the log in place for the final cut. Generally, this function does not require operator input. But the Williamses often find that the spring-loaded hold-down often fails to keep the log stable, and, as Wood Beaver advises in its manual, an operator—in this case, Bernard and Becky's son, Lee—must apply downward pressure to help stabilize the log and ensure a straight cut.

As the saw reaches the bottom of its movement, the cam action of the log stop causes it to move up and away from the log about 1/8 inch. This relieves the cut



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Becky explained. “It can get up to 180 degrees in there,” added Bernard. Becky places fans in the greenhouse to help remove moisture and says it takes about a week to dry a load of split wood using this innovative method.

The Williamses then bundle their wood for specific customers.

“We have three bundlers: a Twister, a Wood Beaver, and a Hudson,” said Becky. The Wood Beaver was added on as an option with the purchase of the splitter. With bundled wood being an important part of their business plan, ease of use is important to Becky. A manual bundler would be cumbersome, so electric is perfect for her needs. To promote continued business, they also mark their bundles. After she loads the split wood into the U-shaped forks, which hold 1 cubic foot of firewood, she then uses a foot pedal to run the wrap around the wood, stopping to insert her label before making the last two wraps. This gives potential customers a simple way to order more bundles of wood.

After she wraps the wood, Lee removes them and stacks them. But, because the wood is dried, it’s light



## Wood Beaver 16 SPECS

Maximum log size.....	16 in. diameter
Split size .....	3 in. to 24 in. length
Rated output .....	1 to 4 cords per hour
Power plant.....	28-hp gas engine
Slasher .....	Hydraulic saw, 18-in. harvester bar and 3/8-in. chain
Splitting cylinder .....	6-way
Splitting cycle.....	4 seconds
Dimensions.....	13 ft. long with standard infeed (14 ft. with standard infeed and conveyer folded), width 4.25 ft., height 8.5 ft.
Weight.....	3,500 pounds
Towing .....	3-point hitch or single axle highway legal with lights and tow package

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enough that Becky can move it herself if she’s working alone.

Becky explains that the fliers, wraps, handles, and time involved in bundling add to the cost, so the profit margin is only slightly better on each bundle than what she would get selling by the cord. The true benefit, she says, is that it gets her into the bundled wood market so she can sell to gas stations, stores, and campgrounds.

Currently, the family is splitting wood in the front yard, but they are searching for a bigger piece of property to accommodate the expected expansion of Williams Wood. And they’ve already added new customers, which they can serve faster with their Wood Beaver firewood processor. ■

*Scottie Barnes is an author, editor, and owner of a small piece of land in western Oregon. She grew up in a timber town and remembers the days of the one-log load.*

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