

California Contractor Specializes in Fire-Related Forestry Services

Thompson Land Management Adds New TimberPro to Fleet of Mulchers



Isiah Thompson

Tigercat machines mulching on flat terrain in the distance. This was a 1,400-acre burn restoration project, preparing the site for replanting.

By Mary Bulkwinkel

FALL RIVER MILLS, California – Thompson Land Management is one of the forestry companies doing the critical work of helping to prevent the spread of wildfires as well as restoring burned land so it can be planted again to forest. A new TimberPro machine is helping the company tackle the specialty work.

Thompson Land Management provides fire-related forestry services, fire prevention and burn restoration projects. Seventy-five percent of his company's work is fire prevention and 25 percent is burn restoration, according to company owner Isiah Thompson, who started the business in 2019.

The business is based in the small, rural northern California town of Fall River Mills, which is approximately between the Shasta-Trinity National Forest and the Lassen National Forest. The company also has a larger office, shop, and yard in Redding, about 70 miles southwest.

Thompson Land Management has seven to 10 employees, depending on the season. The company usually is performing about three jobs at the same time, with one crew on each project with two to four machines. Thompson also typically subcontracts one to five other machines – grapple-piling material or performing mastication – depending on the season and how much work he has.

Thompson, 28, grew up in northern

California. He studied construction management at Chico State University and worked in the construction trade until 2017 when he went to work for his uncle in New Mexico. His uncle's business, Forest Fitness, was doing much of the same work that Thompson Land Management is doing now. Thompson managed the mastication operations. He decided to move back to northern California and start his business in 2019.

Thompson Land Management specializes in all types of forestry mastication, including right-of-way vegetation removal, roadway clearing, fuel breaks, and habitat

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Company's newest machine is this TimberPro 745D with Quadco mulching attachment. Leveling machine is shown helping create a fire break.



Cat 299D2 skidsteer with Cat mulching attachment. The small skidsteer is effective at mulching but also preventing damage to residual trees.

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restoration work. It also can provide other forestry and land maintenance services, such as brush clearing, creating open spaces to defend against fire, habitat restoration, burn zone restoration, piling wood debris and logging slash, chipping, excavation and road construction, and consulting.

For both pre- and post-fire work, the company's equipment is used mainly for masticating or mulching existing vegetation or debris. The grindings normally are left in place to decompose and return nutrients to the soil. The land is healthier and more fire-resistant.

The company's newest machine is a TimberPro 745D track carrier, which has leveling capability. The TimberPro, purchased from Bejac Corp. through its Anderson location, is paired with a Quadco mulching head. It is used for mulching work on steep ground and for grapple piling debris. It is a very productive machine, said Thompson.

The TimberPro D series machines, available with or without cab leveling, are powered by a Cummins L9 Performance Series engine, either 338 or 350 hp; the engine

has increased fuel economy and longer maintenance intervals. It also contains an EGR-free architecture and compact Single-Module™ aftertreatment system. With the smaller emissions components, it meets all Tier 4 Final requirements yet boasts increased horsepower and torque rating. The machines have almost zero tail swing.

The TimberPro D series machines feature a larger cab with improved visibility both to the front and on the boom side. They have high output LED lighting for visibility at night. A digital climate control system keeps the cab temperature steady and comfortable.

"We bought our most recent TimberPro to add capacity," said Thompson. It features TimberPro's new universal hydraulic system. "It allows the 145cc pump to combine flow with the 45cc disc saw pump when a mulcher attachment is on to push a total of 121 gallons per minute to the head for more power."

Thompson has purchased most of his equipment from Bejac's Anderson dealership and dealt with sales representative Kevin Broderick. "They have been great and responsive," he said, "when the company needs support or service. 'We sometimes use Papé as well for service calls or maintenance that we don't do ourselves.'"

For masticating the company also has three TimberPro 735C track carriers with FAE mulching attachments, two Tigercat M726G mulcher carriers with Tigercat mulching heads, and a Cat 299D2 skidsteer with a Cat mulcher. The mulching attachments on the TimberPro machines are switched out with Rotobec grapples when they are used for piling debris. The company has another machine it uses for grapple piling, a Link-Belt 245 excavator. Other equipment includes a Case 1150 bulldozer and a Cat 518 skidder. A Kenworth T800 tractor with a Murray low-bed trailer is used for transporting equipment. The crews also have fully equipped company pickup trucks.

Thompson Land Management also has three Polaris Ranger UTVs (utility task vehicle, essentially a side-by-side all terrain vehicle) with Tri-Max CAFS fire suppression systems. The equipment is required on some jobs. The company occasionally does fire-fighting with CalFire, primarily mulching fire lines and fire breaks ahead of a forest fire.

The Tri-Max systems have 30-gallon tanks of foam, which is the equivalent

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Above and below, company has two of these Tigercat M762G purpose-built mulcher carriers. An optional multi-function hydraulic system and quick-attach boom adapter converts the M726G to a feller buncher for added versatility.

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of 350-500 gallons of water. The Polaris Rangers provide better access to fires than a water tender.

"Every job presents unique challenges," observed Thompson. "A significant portion of our work focuses on fire prevention clearing, which typically involves mulching trees up to 14 inches in diameter, along with brush. By removing ladder fuels and understory vegetation, we help prevent fires from reaching the canopy." The company also specializes in mulching areas that have been burned in order to prepare it for replanting.

"We have a very diverse fleet of machinery," added Thompson, "and we know what the right combination is for every job we do. We know exactly what the landowner needs to get the job done, and we know how to set a schedule so it gets done in a timely manner and produces a quality product."

Job pricing is based on numerous factors, including location, number of acres and terrain, the type, size and thickness of the vegetation, the presence of rock, the overall duration of the project, and whether the company is mulching or grapple-piling. Specifications for the project and the finished product also



are factors. "We engage in a range of RFPs," said Thompson, "from low-bid to best-value proposals, and we're fortunate to receive a significant amount of sole-sourced work."

The Tigercat M726G mulchers are very effective in flat, open areas and in bigger burned timber. They can cover a lot of ground quickly and do a quality job.

The Tigercat M726G is a purpose-built mulcher carrier. Powered by a Tigercat 340 hp engine, the machine is equipped with a boom float system so the mulching attachment automatically follows the contour of the terrain. An optional multi-function hydraulic system and quick-attach boom adapter converts the M726G to a feller buncher for added versatility.

The Cat 299D2 skidsteer is effective on both flat, open ground as well as moderately sloping terrain. With its compact size it is used in dense areas to prevent scarring residual trees.

Thompson works for a variety of clients, including local non-profit organizations, private landowners and federal agencies, such as the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management. He also has a number of what he calls "sole source" clients, meaning the landowner comes directly to his company for services. Clients include Sierra Pacific Industries, WM Beaty & Associates.

"We've become an established enough company...which means the organizations know we do quality work, and they enjoy working with us, and know we won't cause them any problems or issues," Thompson said. "They also know we will get the work done at a reasonable price."

Thompson Land Management has also built a win-win working relationship with logging contractors who work with the company on some jobs. "It enables us to provide quality opportunities to other skilled contractors thanks to our strong reputation. It keeps them going, and it keeps us from cutting each other's throats trying to get the same work."

"Our goal is to focus on our areas of expertise while leveraging their specialized skills," said Thompson. "This approach allows us to bid on the project while the logging team handles tasks like biomass processing, timber removal, and chipping." Teaming with other contractors "ensures that each aspect of the job is managed by professionals best suited for the work."

The company's operations manager is Clay Brock, who has experience in timber sales, marking, water course flagging, timber cruising, equipment operation, and mechanical repair. Thompson views him as a partner. "He knows everything about the company," he said. "I don't make any decisions without running it by him. I trust him with my life,

and I respect the hell out of him." He also spoke highly about his equipment operators, mechanic Rory Conlan, who also operates equipment, and business manager Tiffany Fulkerson.

Forestry mulching benefits wildlife, too, Thompson noted. "A layer of mulch on the ground can reduce soil erosion and promote the growth of new grasses and forbs." The vegetation provides food for deer and food and cover for small game and other animals. In addition, "By clearing dense underbrush, mulching creates open spaces, allowing






sunlight to reach the forest floor. This can stimulate the growth of a diverse array of plant species that benefit herbivores and pollinators."

Doing quality work is critical for a company's reputation, according to Thompson, and it pays. "I think it comes down to us genuinely being good people and always taking the high road to the point that it does harm us at some point," he said. "But I believe in karma, and I believe that if we are good people, it will always come back to us, and so far, it has."

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