

# Logging outfits punished for labor violations

BY KEVIN MILLER  
OF THE NEWS STAFF

AUGUSTA — The U.S. Department of Labor has charged two northern Maine logging contractors with violating federal labor laws that require firms to recruit American loggers before hiring often lower-paid foreign workers.

The federal reprimands stem from allegations that loggers in northern Maine routinely lose jobs to Canadian crews despite laws aimed at ensuring that qualified U.S. workers have first dibs on jobs in the Maine woods.

Long-standing tensions over use of foreign crews in the Maine woods flared back up during the spring and summer after some northern Maine loggers found themselves unemployed for months at a time

while Canadian crews worked nearby.

The U.S. Department of Labor has notified two firms, E.J. Carrier of Jackman and Pelletier & Pelletier of Clayton Lake, that they will be barred from participating in the foreign worker visa program for two seasons, the Maine Department of Labor announced Friday.

Federal labor officials suspended the companies from the H-2A visa program for allegedly failing to recruit U.S. loggers for jobs in Maine and failing to comply with a federal audit, according to state officials.

A woman who answered the phone at E.J. Carrier referred a call to a company representative who could not be reached for comment Friday. Representatives from Pelletier & Pelletier also could not be reached for comment.

Additionally, the Maine Department of Labor has initiated charges in Aroostook County Superior Court in Car-



Jackson

See Logging, Page A4

# Logging

Continued from Page A1

bou against three other firms — A.D. Logging Inc., B.J. Jalbert Inc. and J.S. Logging Inc. — for allegedly violating state laws governing foreign laborers.

Maine Labor Commissioner Laura Fortman said this is the first time, to her knowledge, that federal labor officials have cracked down on Maine logging firms for visa program violations. She described the federal action as "significant" and noted that the U.S. Labor Department's audit is continuing. Federal officials have requested information on 36 logging companies that have applied for temporary foreign worker visas in Maine.

"Our goal has always been that if there are qualified Maine workers, then they should have an opportunity to access those jobs," Fortman said.

Sen. Troy Jackson, an Allagash logger, said it was unfortunate that it took so long for regulators to take action or that it even reached this point. But Jackson said he hopes the penalties will serve as a wake-up call for what he says are a large number of contractors who routinely flout the requirement to hire Maine loggers.

"I'm optimistic that finally they are on the right track with the feds," he said. "[Companies] blatantly thumbed their noses at the state and feds for so long, and I hope that this will make a difference."

Earlier this summer, Jackson rankled some landowners and logging firms by leading several scouting expeditions to logging sites throughout



BANGOR DAILY NEWS FILE PHOTOS

**A Canadian logger who identified himself as Mathieu Cloutier has been working in Maine for years and said recently that his father and he operate equipment that is owned by his mother.**

northern Maine. Jackson and other loggers were ostensibly looking for jobs but also used the trips to probe for evidence of anti-American bias among firms working in the woods.

Jackson said those trips, as well as numerous requests for documentation under the Freedom of Access law, revealed that dozens of firms were violating the state's laws on use of foreign workers while the Maine Department of Labor looked on. Many of those violations involved rules that prohibit Canadian crews from bringing their own heavy equipment into Maine.

In July, Fortman requested a federal audit of the H-2A



**A Canadian logging truck with a load of wood from Township 16 Range 14 heads for Canada in September.**

visa program in Maine's logging industry. On Friday, Fortman said the state and federal

attention to the issue might be changing practices on the ground.

"We are seeing Maine workers who are qualified getting jobs," she said.