

WESTERN FORESTRY LEADERSHIP COALITION

RESOURCES, PARTNERSHIPS AND SOLUTIONS FOR WESTERN FORESTRY CHALLENGES

Keeping Working Forests Working for Healthy Ecosystems and Communities with a Vibrant Forest Products Industry in the Western U.S. Issue Brief and Recommendations from the Western Forestry Leadership Coalition

Our western forests and communities have suffered even during strong economic times. As U.S. demand and prices for wood products in residential and light commercial construction peaked in the 1990s, the wood products industry in the West began to shrink and shift. Harvest limitations on federal lands in the West pushed production and profits to the South where restrictions were not so severe on the largely private timberlands. During this time, the seven largest forest products companies in the west cut their mill capacity by 35%, while mills in the South increased capacity by 121%.¹

The U.S. housing market began to plummet. The largest user of lumber and wood products in the U.S., the housing market, has been the hardest hit by the current recession. This has struck another blow to the already struggling western forest products industry. With the decline in markets leading to temporary and permanent mill closures (see map²), employment and labor income in the western primary forest products industry have declined by 25% and 33% since 2005.³ The number of facilities in the west have dropped from 1,300 in 1986 to about 900 as of June 2009.³ This is comparable to the loss of jobs in the U.S. auto industry within the last year.

What is bad for the economy is even worse for the environment. Unlike some industries, where environmental impacts of production are overwhelmingly negative and need to be offset or mitigated, an appropriately-sized and diverse forest products industry is essential in creating and maintaining healthy forests. An economically-viable wood products industry in the west is the best option we have to be able to thin dense forests vulnerable to insects, disease, and catastrophic wildfire. A robust industry and western markets will also keep timberlands in production and profitable, rather than subdivided and sold for development. At a time when we need our forests most to mitigate and adapt to climate change and provide valuable ecosystem services, many forest owners are forced to convert their lands to other, more profitable, uses.

The Time to Act is NOW. For each mill that closes, trained personnel move away from rural communities to seek employment elsewhere, harming local economies and quality of life for more than just the out-of-work mill employees and their families. When a mill is closed, it is removed from the property tax rolls, reducing local government revenue and associated services. The homes and land sold by those leaving the community are often converted to recreational uses like vacation homes. New residents may not have the same connection to the land and understanding of forestry, and may resist beneficial forest management, whether for profit, ecosystem restoration, or wildfire risk reduction. The rural landscape and our forests, which we all depend on for the ecosystem services they provide, will change forever.

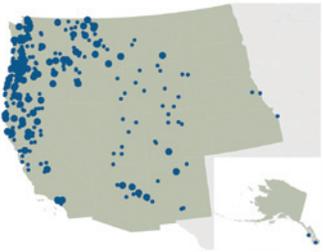
¹ SIC 2421 Sawmill and Planing Mills, General, www.referenceforbusiness.com/industries/Lumber-Wood/Sawmills-Planing-Mills-General.html

² Based on Pulp and Paperworkers Resource Council Mill Layoff map, <http://www.pprc.info/html/millclosures.htm>

³ Developed by forest industry researchers at The University of Montana's Bureau of Business and Economic Research, July 3, 2009

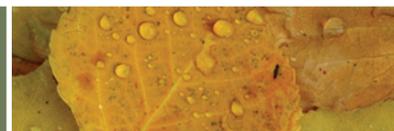


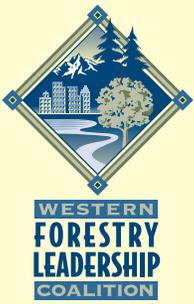
Saw, pulp, lumber,
and other mill
closures have affected
rural economies
across the entire
Western U.S.



Western Mill Closures, 1989-2009

● = 1 ● = 2 or more





WESTERN FORESTRY LEADERSHIP COALITION

RESOURCES, PARTNERSHIPS AND SOLUTIONS FOR WESTERN FORESTRY CHALLENGES

The Western Forestry Leadership Coalition believes we can make a difference now with the support of Congress and the public.

ABOUT WFLC

The Western Forestry Leadership Coalition is a State and Federal government partnership. The members of the coalition include: the 23 State and Pacific Island Foresters of the West and the 7 western Regional Foresters, 3 western Research Station Directors, and Forest Products Lab Director of the US Forest Service.

OUR MISSION

To promote science-based forest management that serves the values of society and ensures the health and sustainability of western forests.

Recommendations from the Western Forestry Leadership Coalition:

These ideas can be developed to suit varying needs across the west.

- **Explore new markets for small diameter logs and woody biomass.** Take advantage of new financial incentives and grant programs that can put businesses back on the map and keep healthy forests on the landscape. Support new and existing businesses that are diversifying their portfolio by using tools such as zero interest loans, loan guarantees, and revolving loans to provide up-front capital for installing wood-fired boilers in community and state facilities.
- **Link ecological and economic forest management goals.** Pursue timber management and ecological restoration in concert to create and sustain a viable forest products industry and our desired future forests. This means managing the nation's forests to produce and create value for multiple ecosystem services, including timber, carbon storage, wildlife habitat, clean and abundant water, scenic and recreational values, and others.
- **Compete globally to maintain the benefits of forests.** Work towards a national policy goal related to maintaining the global competitiveness of the forestry sector to support places where large scale production is still a workable alternative. A consistent and sustainable supply of timber, as well as the mill infrastructure to create products, is in demand.
- **Rethink traditional markets.** Localize or regionalize the production and use of wood products to help revive lost industries and deal with high transportation costs. Specialty and niche market products from large diameter timber may be more viable now than in the past.
- **Explore innovative uses for wood.** Continue and increase the use of residues from harvest and manufacturing to run boilers used to dry wood, generate electricity, produce biofuels, and create other high value products. Energy policies will drive much of this creativity by increasing state, regional, and national requirements for the use of renewable energy. Woody biomass and forest products from western forests must play a role in bioenergy opportunities to support the industry. Implementation means taking advantage of financial incentives through the Farm Bill, American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, and making greater use of stewardship contracts.
- **Enhance federal, state, and private forestry partnerships.** Working forests support local economies and the long-term sustainability of our nation's forests. Partnerships that secure access to timber supplies on federal lands; improve relationships among the U.S. Forest Service, state forestry agencies, and other land management agencies; and enhance delivery of technical assistance to non-industrial private forest landowners are all in demand.

Watch the New Video!

Forest Products and Forest Health Conversations with the Western Forestry Leadership Coalition

www.wflcweb.org

 Printed on recycled paper.

