

Technical Bulletin

Colorado Wood Utilization and Marketing Assistance Center

Our Industry, Our Forests, and You.

As an owner and/or operator of a forest products business, or an individual involved with such businesses, we are all familiar with the scrutiny the industry can experience in the public arena on certain environmental topics. This scrutiny is often times a result of the public opinion that has been formed based on the information the public has been presented. This is one particular area where environmental groups have been so successful; they have been able to disseminate their message on a multitude of levels, from grassroots to mass media. The forest products industry has rarely been proactive in delivering its message. The industry tends to be more reactive, responding to issues after opposing groups have already established a foothold in public opinion. With this speed and effectiveness of spreading its message, these groups have been able to leverage a tremendous amount of power against their targets. Consider the outcomes of their efforts against Home Depot, Lowe's, and recently Staples.

With the exception of the giants, individual forest products companies rarely have a budget for promoting their stance on environmental issues, (in many cases, as you are aware, they typically have enough resources to promote their own products). Instead, trade associations, or industry groups are responsible for spreading their message. However, this is not an excuse for individual companies not to bolster the effort. Consider the amount of time you, or personnel in your company, spend interacting with the public. Have you ever stopped to consider how much weight these face-to-face opportunities carry in building a positive public opinion?

This Technical Bulletin was drafted to present some useful facts about our industry and about our forests. While everyone in our state industry has strong opinions, and first hand experience with many of these topics, this Bulletin was meant to help you to capitalize on an area of weakness that certain vocal opposing groups have shown – a lack of factual, and supported data in their arguments. Every statement and fact listed below is supported by a reference. If you would like a copy of any of these materials, please let me know.

Myth: Man's settlement in the United States has wiped out most of the forest land.

As of 1997, approximately 747 million acres, or approximately 33% of the total land area of the United States is forested. This area represents 70% of the land area that was forested in 1630, when European settlement began in this country. (USDA Forest Service, 2001)

Of the 1,315 million total acres in the Western United States, approximately 363 million acres are forested. This area represents 92% of the total forested land in the Western United States in 1630. (USDA Forest Service, 2001)

Myth: Forest lands in the United States have no protection from encroachment, development, or logging.

Parks, wildlife refuges, and other reserves, not including Wilderness Areas, account for 171 million acres of the total land mass of the United States. This is an area equivalent in size to the states of Indiana, Kentucky, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and a majority of West Virginia, combined. (NAHB)

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Wilderness Areas account for 95 million acres in the United States, an area equivalent in size to the entire Northeastern United States (Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, and the eastern portion of West Virginia). (NAHB)

Approximately 40 million acres of forestland are in reserve in the Western United States. This is area approximately 3.5 times greater than the total forest reserves in other regions of the United States combined. (USDA Forest Service, 2001)

In Colorado, 41 separate sites are classified as Wilderness Areas, covering more than 3 million acres of the state. (NWPS, 2003)

Myth: Commercial forest harvesting is wiping out our forestlands.

Of the 835 billion cubic feet of growing stock inventoried in the United States in 1997, 23.5 billion cubic feet was classified as growth, a volume greater than the removal volume (16.0 billion cubic feet), and mortality (6.3 billion cubic feet), combined. (USDA Forest Service, 2001)

In the Western United States, 6.3 billion cubic feet were classified as growth volume, again, a volume greater than the removal (2.9 billion cubic feet), and mortality (2.1 billion cubic feet), combined.

In fact, in the Western United States, removal volumes have fallen 28% since 1953, and 41% since 1986. (USDA Forest Service, 2001)

Myth: The forest products industry is actively, and unnecessarily consuming our public forest lands in Colorado.

Of the almost 12 million acres of forest in Colorado that are classified as timberland, over 72% is controlled by the National Forest or other public agencies. However, less than 5% of the timber cut in Colorado in 1999 came from public lands. (WWPA, 1999)

To put Colorado's forest products industry in perspective, consider the fact that in 1999, lumber production was calculated to be 93 MMBf (million board feet), while the lumber production for the entire Western United States was 17,529 MMBf, and for the entire United States lumber production was calculated to be 36,605 MMBf. Colorado's production makes up just .5% of the production of the Western United States, and just .25% of the production of the entire U.S. (WWPA, 1999) In fact, Colorado's production supplied only about 8% of the wood used in the state, in 1999. The remainder was imported from either out of the state, or from out of the country. (Lynch and Mackes, 2001)

Myth: Commercial harvesting is harmful to forests, watersheds, and ecosystems. The solution to improving forest health is to leave the forest alone, and let it heal itself.

Lack of large-scale disturbances is a cause of many of the State's forest health challenges. Colorado's forest landscapes are disturbance driven, meaning they require disturbances to rejuvenate. The practices of aggressive fire suppression and reduced harvesting activity on public lands has led to unnaturally crowded forests suffering from intense competition. In this condition, forests are vulnerable to attack by insects, disease, catastrophic wildfire, and other types of damage on an inordinately vast scale. (*Paraphrased excerpt from the Executive Summary on the 2001 Report on the Condition of Colorado's Forest, 2001.*)

What a lack of harvesting has gotten us:

The effects of drought, coupled with unhealthy forest conditions resulted in 3,067 fires in Colorado during 2002, consuming more than 926,000 acres, or 1430 square miles. (NICC, 2003) This is an area almost twice as large as Jefferson County. (State of Colorado, 1990)

Over 457,000 trees were lost during 2000-2001 to the Mountain pine beetle. (USDA Forest Service, Forest Health Management, 2002)

By the way -How many logs does your mill process a year ?

It is estimated that 855,000 cubic feet of timber are lost to Dwarf mistletoe on an annual basis in Colorado. Approximately 31% of the lodgepole pine resource in the state is infected. (Colorado Department of Natural Resources, 2001)

In addition, a study conducted by the Colorado State Forest Service in 2000, determined that over 6.3 million acres in Colorado can be rated as being at a high risk for catastrophic fire, and need to be treated. If 250,000 acres were treated each year, it would take over 25 years to treat the total area. However, in 2001 only slightly over 5000 acres were treated on National Forest Lands, and from 1997 to 2001, less than 28,000 acres total had been treated on National Forest Lands.

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