

THE CUTTING EDGE:
News From Around the Woods for the Progressive Logger
A publication of the Maine Master Logger Certification Program
Katherine Albert, Editor

Special Bridges Issue

In hoping that you've "weathered" all the rain that's fallen on us recently – at least as best as can be hoped for – this issue of The Cutting Edge aims to provide some practical guidance. Because soon enough that rain will be snow, and you'll have much less time ... we'll catch you up on certification and alternative forest product market news next month. Aside from an interesting bit of news regarding the Forest Service's new relationship with certified wood, this issue is dedicated to bridges.

In past issues, I have emphasized the Maine MLC Certification Board's goal of raising the bar for water crossings in Maine forests. The problem is...where to get temporary, or portable, skidder bridges? It's a problem we understand and have been working on solving. We've been keeping our ears listening and our eyes open for signs of anyone who can produce them, and guess what? If you have the interest in and capability of building these bridges, it seems there may be a bear market awaiting you!

Attached to this newsletter are plans for building portable wooden skidder bridges in case you're interested in building some for your own company, or ready to start a new business venture. These plans are provided by the Forest Service and are ideal for creating water crossings with minimal disturbance

If you're looking for something more durable that can support the weight of very heavy equipment and have more funds to invest, we've also included some information about what you'll need to build steel bridges. The bridge pictured was custom-built for a Master Logger by Dan Doughty of Union Hill Machines in Fryeburg. For more information, you can contact Dan at (207)925-1186. This particular bridge was built to hold the weight of a tractor trailer, but other designs are available for a variety of needs. These bridges are also flanked by tubing on either side so that the sections can be chained together for additional security

In the meantime, we'll keep scouring the region for new sources and producers of bridges for your water crossings. Let us know of any providers you're aware of and we'll publish their contact information in our next issue.

Forest Service tries for 'green' timber

JEFF BARNARD

ASSOCIATED PRESS

GRANTS PASS, Ore. - Private timber companies have been getting "green" certifications for the past decade to boost sales among consumers who want to be assured that forests are not harmed by producing the lumber they buy.

Now the U.S. Forest Service, battered by court battles over balancing logging against fish and wildlife habitat, is looking into it.

A portion of the Fremont National Forest in southern Oregon and the Allegheny National Forest in Pennsylvania will be the first of seven national forests to undergo an audit under the standards of two major systems: the Sustainable Forestry Initiative, developed by the U.S. timber industry, and the Forest Stewardship Council, an international group based in Germany that grew out of the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro.

The Forest Service said it is following a global trend to have third parties declare forest management as sustainable, and needs the public's confidence as it faces new challenges, such as invasive species, global warming and combatting unauthorized off-highway vehicle trails. Wanting to go slowly, it will just go through the audit process, and won't immediately seek final certification.

"Here we are providing advice to other countries and not even doing it on our own land," said Sally Collins, associate chief of the Forest Service, from Washington, D.C. "It made us think we ought to at least test this, because it's becoming an international language and we ought to be able to show we manage our forests sustainably."

The sustainability standards address issues such as making sure new trees are growing to replace those that are cut, controlling erosion and protecting fish and wildlife habitat and clean water. The Forest Stewardship Council standards go further to assure protection of social issues, such as sacred tribal sites; and economic considerations, such as maintaining longterm jobs, in addition to the environment.

The Collins Companies (no relation to Sally Collins), the first timber company in North America to win FSC certification, greened up its act to gain a marketing advantage, and hopes bringing in a third party to validate the national forests will break the gridlock that has crippled timber production from federal lands and allowed wildfires on national forests to damage private timber.

"I'm a fourth generation lumberman," said Wade Mosby, senior vice president of the Collins Companies, which has headquarters in Portland. "What my dad and grandfather did is not accepted practice today. There is a balance. That pendulum needs to swing back. It needs to be done in a sustainable way, not a political manner. Let the professionals decide. That's what this does."

Environmental groups are wary, wondering whether standards for industrial forests can be translated to public lands where fish and wildlife habitat, clean water and recreation are

supposed to get equal treatment, and whether this is laying the groundwork to toss out the environmental laws that have given them so many court victories.

"We are very skeptical this is going to be an adequate replacement," said Mike Anderson, an analyst for The Wilderness Society. "Lots of people have said the Forest Service needs to rebuild trust with the public. That's certainly true. But you know, I just don't know whether certification has really improved public acceptance of private land logging practices."

Robert Hrubes, senior vice president of Scientific Certification Systems, in Emeryville, Calif., will visit the Fremont National Forest in November with a team that will start looking at the Lakeview Cooperative Sustained Yield Unit, nearly 500,000 acres devoted to producing timber for local mills. They will look at paperwork, forest plans, and the forest itself to see if it is sustainable environmentally, socially and economically.

"Tens of millions of acres of state forest lands around the country have already undergone the process," he said. "If it makes sense for a state department of natural resources to engage in certification, I don't see why it wouldn't make sense for managers of federal lands."

Back in the late 1980s, when national forests were producing 12 billion board feet a year - a quarter of national lumber consumption - the Lakeview area had five mills working off the unit, which was turning out about 150 million board feet a year.

Collins' Fremont Mill is the only one left, working mostly off timber grown on Collins' own lands. Mosby said they have only been able to buy 5 million board feet a year off the unit in recent years, and much of that was killed by fire or insects, making it less valuable. He figures it could sustainably produce as much as 80 million board feet, 20 million board feet more than the Fremont Mill now uses. The audit will see if he is right.

Mosby said Collins got into certification after seeing a Danish lumber retailer shut down by protests over clearcutting tropical hardwood forests, and enjoyed a market advantage in the early going. That has mostly evaporated as the industry has followed suit, most of them with the less stringent SFI standard. But it is likely to become more of a factor as sustainability building standards - already common in commercial construction - are adopted in residential construction.

"It's just like organic food," said Mosby. "There is a certain segment that will pay extra to put organic or stuff with no pesticides in their body."

Catherine Mater is a forest engineering consultant in Corvallis and a senior fellow with the Pinchot Institute, which advises the Forest Service on forest management issues. She has been pressing the Forest Service to consider certification since 1997, when state forestry departments began adopting it. She has seen certification defuse confrontations on state lands, and hopes to see that happen on the national forests.

"It has fundamentally changed the fabric of the industry," said Mater. "It did so without the force of legislation or regulation behind it. It was a market-driven approach, a voluntary approach."