

ENVIRONMENTAL WISDOM: BUY CALIFORNIA GROWN

By Donn Zea

National Forest Products week (October 17-23, 2004) provides a reminder of how significantly our only renewable resource, trees, touch our lives, from weekend getaways into the forest to the roofs over our heads and the newspapers we read.

Californians use 15 percent of the nation's wood products, which range from two-by-fours to nail polish – more than any other state in the nation. We consume enough wood to build 600,000 standard-sized houses every year.

Yet despite the fact that we have more than 38 million forested acres, naturally rich soil, and ideal tree-growing climate, we provide only a quarter of that wood from our own plentiful forests.

There is no doubt that California-grown wood products come from the most protected forests in the world. Our forestry practices meet the highest environmental standards for soil, air, and water quality as well as fish and wildlife protection.

There is also no doubt that our forests have more wood available to harvest. A 2003 report by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF) found that private timberlands are growing over 50 percent more volume than is being harvested. Also, public forestlands have tree densities up to ten times their natural norm.

But in California, harvest levels are down dramatically. Our forests are getting denser, more susceptible to disease, insect infestation and catastrophic wildfire, and we sit idly by, watching, imposing more and more harvesting restrictions, and turning to other states, other nations for our wood.

Why?

We face a dilemma. The very regulations meant to protect our forests are having unintended consequences. The cost of complying with regulatory processes now threatens forestry businesses, and the forests themselves.

In a 2003 study conducted by Cal Poly State University, San Luis Obispo, professors concluded “the ever-increasing cost to forest landowners for complying with regulations could drive some to utilize their lands for other purposes than the growing and harvesting of timber.”

CDF, too, notes that the “industry faces shrinking profit margins and increasing land prices, which spurs significant conversions especially near metropolitan areas.”

And still, catastrophic wildfire continues to threaten our public forestlands. California has millions of acres at significant risk of devastating wildfire because harvesting restrictions

prevent the removal of excess fuel and effective forest restoration, even though CDF states that “threats of fire, pests, diseases, water pollutants and invasive species can be addressed through appropriate management”.

Dr. Patrick Moore, co-founder of Greenpeace, got it right when he noted: “We have been led to believe that when we use wood we are causing a bit of the forest to be lost. This is not the case. When we buy wood we send a signal into the marketplace to plant more trees, and produce more wood.”

For Californians who care about the environment, the responsible signal to send is one that encourages sustainable forests and wood that is harvested in environmentally friendly ways – wood that is California-grown.

You may have seen and heard the television and radio commercials promoting California grown products and our state’s rich agricultural sector. California’s forestry industry is a proud participant in the California Grown campaign, which promotes the most environmentally friendly agriculture products in the world. It advances sound harvesting practices and helps keep jobs in state.

If we truly want our forests to endure, two things must happen: a) we need to stop regulating our forestry business to the point that it can’t survive; and b) California consumers must make the conscious decision to buy California-grown wood products.

According to a study conducted by Dennis H. Tootelian, Ph.D., professor of marketing at California State University, Sacramento, if Californians were to increase their purchases of all California-grown products by just 10 percent annually – which equates to about \$1.63 per week for the average Californian – it would result in 5,565 new jobs and nearly \$1.38 billion in additional spending.

Protecting the environment and keeping forests healthy doesn’t have to drive California foresters to sell out. We can be the most environmentally responsible and competitive at the same time. But this will take unprecedented public cooperation.

So when you shop, choose California Grown. It helps our state’s economy and environment at the same time.

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Donn Zea is president of the California Forest Products Commission (www.calforests.org) and chairman of the California Grown Marketing Agreement.