Montana Forest Products Marketing News

MSU Extension Forestry

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Fuels for Schools Update

Fuels for Schools is a federally funded program whose mission is to promote the use of woody biomass. That mission is carried out, in part, by providing public entities with grant funds to assist in the upfront investment associated with a wood-fired boiler—a cost that can range from $250,000 to over $1 million, but which pays off over time in the form of reduced energy costs. In Montana the program is administered by the Montana DNRC, the US Forest Service, and the Bitterroot RC&D.

So far Montana has received the lion's share of the program funding. Schools at Darby, Victor, Phillipsburg, and Thompson Falls have operational biomass boilers. Schools at Troy, Kalispell, Townsend, and the University of Montana—Dillon have projects underway. Finally, the Central Montana Medical Center in Lewistown has been funded to receive a boiler but work has yet to start.

When all of the projects just mentioned are operational, they will consume a total of about 10,000 tons of biomass annually. For comparison, the state's largest woody biomass consumer, Smurfit-Stone Container Corporation, uses 350,000 to 400,000 tons annually.

Earlier in 2005, $1.5 million in federal funds had been appropriated to continue the Montana Fuels for Schools grant program. However, that appropriation has been frozen because of federal budget concerns. A federal decision on releasing those funds is expected soon.

Montana Communities & Wildfire Conference

After the 2000 fire season, the President requested the development of a national strategy for preventing the loss of life, natural resources, private property, and livelihoods in the wildland urban interface. The response was the National Fire Plan.

In Montana, the plan included an assessment of Communities at Risk — cities and towns in close proximity to forested lands. From that assessment, actions were taken to improve fire response, reduce hazardous fuels, and encourage *firewise* development in the wildland urban interface.

Now, 5 years later, the program's accomplishments will be assessed and plans will be made for the future. The forum for those activities is the Montana Communities and Wildfire Conference, which will be held in Helena on February 27th through March 1st.

The specific issues that will be addressed at the conference include: biomass utilization, forest health, the economic health of our forest dependent communities, and reducing the risk of uncharacteristic wildfires. Invited participants include scientists, firefighters, homeowners, realtors, planners, volunteers, foresters, developers, politicians, conservation organizations, and other community leaders. The conference will also include a trade show featuring wildland fire related products and services.

In This Issue:

Rocky Mountain Log Homes 2

Luck E G 3

Educational Calendar 4

Check it Out:

MT: Judge Requires Timber Sale Bond

MT: Death of a Sawmill

WI: Aldo Leopold Foundation Logging Trees Planted by Aldo Leopold Himself

OR: 'Community Forest' may be State's First

Rocky Mountain Log Homes: Hi-Tech Roundwood Manufacturing

When Rocky Mountain Log Homes (RMLH) of Hamilton, Montana was founded in 1974, skilled manual labor was an important part of transforming logs into homes. However, as the company grew, owners Jim Schueler and Mark Moreland, decided that switching to more automated production systems would be a key long-term strategy for the company.

Rocky's road to technological enlightenment started when they transitioned from using chainsaws and hand tools for peeling and shaping logs, to using a spindle lathe capable of handling logs up to 28 inches in diameter and 30 feet long. The lathe, which could process about 600 linear feet of logs per day, was used to make each log a uniform diameter along its length.

However, because the lathe was relatively slow, it was replaced a few years ago with a log rounding machine. Unlike the lathe, which passes a cutter head along the spinning log, the log rounding machine moves the log through spinning knives. The machine produces logs to a target diameter anywhere between 7 and 14 inches and can produce about 5,000 linear feet per day.

Another advance was the addition of an optical scanner. It creates a computerized image of each log, by passing a curtain of light over it. Computers then use that image to calculate the optimal use of that log based on its size and shape relative to the size and shape of logs needed to fill current orders.

Rocky fully embraced computerized technology about a year ago when they purchased a K2 Hundegarrd cutting machine. Since the K2 went into operation, Rocky's designers use computers to design a home to customer specifications. From that design, a computer software program creates a list of the required building components.

A package of Rocky Mountain Log Home logs ready for shipment to a customer's building site. Rocky uses computer aided design paired with computer numerically controlled cutting machines to precisely mill the multiple angles and shapes necessary to join log pieces for use in a structure.

That list is then sent electronically to the manufacturing plant, where the log rounding machine operators use the information to produce logs of the appropriate diameter and length. Next, the operators of the K2 machine and its multiple cutting heads are charged with the exacting job of cutting the mortise and tenon joints and the multiple angles required to join pieces of roundwood together and ultimately form a structure.

Over the last few years Rocky has successfully incorporated technology into their production process. However, during that same time sourcing raw material has become a big challenge. In fact, because of what Pat Connell, Rocky's VP of resource operations, calls "ecology wars", Rocky sources nearly all of its raw material (standing dead timber) from British Columbia—thereby necessitating a round trip that consumes 600 gallons of fuel. According to Connell, "less than 5% of the huge 2000 Bitterroot Burn has been salvaged, and a litany of litigation aimed at thwarting forest salvage efforts have totally collapsed any level of certainty for annually sustainable harvest volumes from the National Forests in Montana."

As a result, Connell spends a lot of time bouncing between Montana and British Columbia. True to Rocky's love of technology though, his pickup truck is equipped with a cell phone, laptop, shovel, pulaski, bucket, and chainsaw!

Luck-EG: Producing Roundwood Forest Products in Libby Montana

In late 2002, Stimson Lumber Company, a Portland Oregon based firm, announced that it was closing its plywood manufacturing plant in Libby, Montana, a town of about 2,500. It was a business decision that left 300 people—whose combined annual payroll was $15 million–without jobs.

Since then the city and region have been busy rebuilding the local economy. That effort was given a jump start when Stimson donated the plywood plant's land and buildings to the Lincoln County Port Authority—a quasi-government entity with the authority to own and manage property. The mission of the Port Authority is to develop new businesses on the site, which is now called the Kootenai Business Park.

Today the park is home to a handful of diverse businesses, which contribute 110 jobs to the local economy. Luck-EG, a post and pole plant that currently employs 5 people, is one of those businesses. This past May, Steve Garyalde, Luck-EG's owner, decided to move his business to Libby from Blanchard, Idaho where it had been operating since 1976.

Garyalde says the move was based on two factors— 1) logs were getting hard to find in Idaho and 2) Paul Rumelhart and the staff at the Kootenai River Development Corporation (KRDC) offered their assistance in establishing Luck-EG in Libby.

For example, KRDC helped Garyalde negotiate with the Port Authority to set aside 10 acres and build a structure to house Luck-EG's pole peeling equipment. Luck-EG now leases the building and land from Kootenai Business Park. In addition, KRDC assisted Garyealde in writing a business plan–a document that enabled him to qualify for several hundred thousand dollars in business loans. Finally, KRDC connected Garyalde with Rich Lane, a consulting forester who has helped Luck-EG purchase over 200 truckloads of raw material.

Luck-EG currently uses a Morbark PS8 post peeler to transform lodgepole pine "whips" into posts and poles. He produces a variety of lengths and diameters per his customer's specifications. The PS8 allows him to produce as many as 1,400 pieces a day, but later this spring he plans to add a Morbark PSP model, which would roughly double his production.

He also has machines, which cut tenons on the ends of the posts and mortises in the sides. According to Garyalde, those features add considerable value to his product.

Garyalde sells his products in truckload quantities to customers throughout the Northwestern United States. He says that he has relationships with some customers going back over 20 years.

Biomass energy is a new market that Garyalde is eyeing. He is hoping that a wood-fired boiler will be installed in the Libby area so that he can sell shavings from his post peeler.

Garyalde is optimistic about the future of his business–he has a good customer base, continued support from KRDC, and–if he can find enough raw material–plans to upgrade to a PSP Morbark Peeler, which would roughly double his production and require as many as 20 new employees. Garyalde can be reached at 406-291-1540.

Luck EG's crew at work peeling posts. Luck EG is a post and pole manufacturing operation based in the Kootenai Business Park in Libby, Montana on the site of what was once the Stimson Lumber Company's plywood mill.

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION

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Montana State University Extension Forestry is a branch of the MSU Extension Service and is housed cooperatively with College of Forestry and Conservation at the University of Montana in Missoula, Montana.

The mission of Extension Forestry is to provide education and outreach to non-industrial private forest landowners, forestry industry, and other forestry-related organizations in Montana.

Extension Forestry carries out its mission by providing its stakeholders with educational workshops, publications, news-releases, brochures, and videos. Common topics include forest stewardship planning, forest insect and disease, windbreaks/living snow fences, alternative forest management practices, wildfire hazard reduction, forest products marketing, and tree pruning & care.

We're on the Web:

http://www.forestry.umt.edu/hosting/forestproducts/index.htm

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If so, send them to Roy Anderson, newsletter editor

Forestry Educational Calendar

Family Foresters Workshop
January 20, 2006
Spokane, WA
click here for info and registration

Montana Communities and Wildfire Conference
2/27/06 thru 3/1/06
Helena, MT
click here for info and registration

Field Data in Forestry
January 19-20, 2006
Albany, OR
click here for info and registration

SAF Leadership Conference
January 27-28, 2006
Lubrecht Forest - Greenough, MT

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