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NORTHWEST LOGGERS CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FROM THE GROUND UP

BY MAYA MUIR

In northern Idaho, Andy Joliff and Hari Heath formed the Small Loggers Council to fight against the hegemony big companies hold over timber sales in the state. In southwestern Washington, Tim Schmitz established Skamokawa Creek Enterprises to help small landowners manage their timber sustainably. Joliff, Heath, and Schmitz are exploring solutions to the problems faced by small operators in the timber industry in the Northwest (and elsewhere across the country). They were recently recognized for their work and named Founders of the New Northwest by Sustainable Northwest, a Portland-based non-profit organization.

In 1991, Joliff and Heath, representing another 80 or so small "gyppo" loggers, complained to the state of Idaho about a provision in the state constitution mandating that state-owned forests be managed to provide revenue for local school districts. The Small Loggers Council maintained that the provision was violated by the standard practice of putting up large sales for bidding—sales so large they always went to big timber companies. The Council also generated considerable local media attention by pointing out how much usable timber was routinely burned after companies logged—timber that small operators could use to make a living.

The Council's campaign was successful, and a salvage logging program was instituted. As Joliff describes the situation:

"Now we find the trees want, then we ask for them, and the Forest Service forester comes up to assess it. As long as only one party is interested, there's no bidding. Bidding keeps us from working, because the projects end up being too big. Plus it takes too long; the product isn't worth much by the time you've been through all the steps. We put a limit on the size of the sale: 100,000 board feet or \$10,000. People can make a living then.



We keep to dead, dying, and fire-burned trees, and we remove them in as environmentally-sound manner as possible."

Money Joliff and others make also stays in the region. Idaho's Secretary of State told Joliff that for every \$1,000 small loggers now bring into their community of St. Marie's, an estimated \$5,000 to \$7,000 is created.

Tim Schmitz of Skamokawa Creek also works in an area where little timber is available for small operators. He began building his business cutting timber for small private landowners, while stressing the need to maintain the ecological integrity of the forest. He practiced selective cutting and extracted logs using a ground yarding machine to minimize

impacts on the land. Soon, Schmitz was trying to engage his landowners in long-term sustainable forest management by offering to write management plans.

Southwestern Washington has been heavily cut, and alder has become one of the most prevalent species. Removal of alder with herbicides is standard practice by large timber companies. "But alder is nature's healer," Schmitz says. "It fixes nitrogen, restoring fertility to the soil. And, by growing so fast, its roots hold the soil in place, preventing erosion." Schmitz emphasized thinning in his forest management strategy and developed alternative uses for the wood in order to make it economically viable to realize his ecological ideals.

"One of our primary goals is to develop harvesting and processing methods that enable small, community-based wood products companies to flourish in the region," says Schmitz.

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NORTHWEST LOGGERS CREATE OPPORTUNITIES CONTINUED FROM THE COVER

Schmitz invested in a mill and built a kiln drying facility using waste heat from a neighboring glassblower's studio.

Then, around 1990, demand for alder skyrocketed. "It became fashionable," Schmitz explains. "Customers finally wanted something other than oak. It found its niche, and log prices rose by up to 100 percent." With alder becoming harder to find, Schmitz had to change his plans. He also found that few of the landowners he worked with were willing to make a commitment to long-term sustainable management.

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Schmitz considered third party certification as a strategy and rejected it. "Each of my landowners would need to pay a \$2,500 fee, and it's just not worth it to them," he says. "We hear that the market will pay a premium for certified wood, but if that doesn't trickle down to the guys in the woods, especially the landowner, there's no incentive. And right now, it isn't reaching them."

Although he is not certified, Schmitz has been able to market some lumber as sustainably harvested. Ecotrust, a Portland-based sustainable development organization that he collaborated with in the past, has vouched for him, which has made it possible. The volume Schmitz markets that way, however, remains small.

Now, Schmitz's major focus is the design and manufacture of furniture. This new strategy will reduce the volume of wood he needs, but give him a higher-value end product. "I have a background in skilled carpentry," says Schmitz, "so it's a natural for me."

Along with Skamokawa Creek Enterprises and the Small Loggers Council, the 41 Founders of the New Northwest include innovative businesses, farmers, and ranchers and sustainable economic development and forest management efforts that build a healthy economy while restoring or preserving a healthy environment.

Sustainable Northwest will be putting out a compendium of all the Founders of the New Northwest shortly. For a copy of the compendium or more information, contact Sustainable Northwest, at 1200 Northwest Front Ave, Suite 280, Portland OR 97209.

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MAKING SOMETHING OUT OF NOTHING: THE ACTIVE MATERIALS EXCHANGE

The 1997 Surplus & Scrap Wood Products Exchange Directory is designed to assist New England wood products companies in developing trade and markets for wood by-products. Available in print and on the internet, the directory identifies sources of by-products and lists companies looking to purchase surplus and scrap wood. The directory is a resource for wood-related businesses interested in conserving resources and reducing waste while augmenting wood utilization and increasing profit. Plans are underway to expand the on-line directory from 50 businesses to 4,000 primary and secondary manufacturers in 30 states. Ultimately, companies will be able to edit and update their listings on-line, search the database by wood species or region, and print out reports.

The Directory is published by Vermont-based GeoSoft in cooperation with the Good Wood Alliance and the Vermont Manufacturing Extension Center. Funding for the project has been provided from the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation and the USDA Forest Service. The internet version of the directory is accessible at <http://www.gtcl.com/scrapwood/index.html>. For more information, contact Lincoln Alden at 802-765-4673 or lincoln.a.alden@valley.net, or Lew McCreery at the USDA Forest Service, 304-285-1538.