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Sunrise at Bear Creek photo by Merle Kirkley

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A New Year At Bear Creek Lumber

Bear Creek Lumber enters its 27th year with great optimism. A steady crew, more customers than ever, and a strong inventory are all signs that point to an excellent year to come.

Looking at the lumberyard from this vantage point, what do we expect to see in building trends? Hardwood flooring continues to grow in popularity, replacing wall-to-wall carpeting in many upscale homes. Better finishes, and the aesthetics of natural wood are making wood flooring a must-have in for many new home buyers.

Interior wood panelings are also becoming more popular, although many people have reported they are increasingly difficult to find. Bear creek will continue to stock a full range of these products, and can also custom mill them if you are trying to match a pattern (minimum order 300 BF).

Timbers and beams are being used more all the time in exterior applications, such as pergolas and other detached outdoor pavillions. Bear Creek has a strong supply of both Western Red cedar and Douglas fir. Recycled Redwood is also still available.

We are anticipating the arrival of our Alder Creek mill recycled timbers. Its been a two year process , but these Douglas fir timbers should be available later this winter. Meanwhile we still have a supply of other reclaimed timbers in stock, with sizes up to 25 inch x 25 inch.

Yellow cedar continues to be a large part of the inventory here, in both clear and knotty grades. We are also stocking more Port Orford cedar than ever before. Look for inventory specials on all grades!

Jessica Blethen rejoins the staff this winter as two of our office folk take maternity leave this spring. Jessica has recently graduated from the University of Idaho with a major in business. We are pleased to have yet another local student return to the company after completing their college education.

Project Highlight :

Western Red Cedar Timbers and Beams

Don Smith purchased Bear Creek Lumber #2 Structural and better timbers and beams for his pergola project in Connecticut. He sent this picture and email.



Joe: I finally finished up the patio/pergola project this weekend. Thought I'd send along a couple of shots so you can see how your WRC beams got used. I've still got some odds 'n ends to do to finish things off, but it's done for the most part.

Thanks again -Don Smith
Tolland CT

New Focus In Forest Management

Billions of board feet of dead and dying timber stand where the Biscuit fire blazed across southwest Oregon last summer. If the past is prologue, nearly all of this public timber will be left to rot in the midst of tangled fields of brush and hardwood trees.

There is a better way, as Oregon State University forestry professors point out in a significant new report on the Biscuit fire. But it requires decisive leadership in the Forest Service and Congress, “quick action, public trust and the courage to challenge environmentalists who insist on ‘natural recovery’ of burned lands”.

Yes, all that is unlikely, given the paralysis on public forests. But the OSU report is a powerful argument for using part of the Biscuit lands to demonstrate that prompt salvage and reforestation, as private timberland owners have discovered, is the surest and quickest way to restore old growth conifer forests.

In effect, the OSU professors are suggesting that the FS split the Biscuit fire, salvaging in non-wilderness areas and using the large burned areas in the Kalmiopsis Wilderness Area as an experimental control. This is a ‘once in generation opportunity,’ they said, to show the tradeoffs of letting nature take its course, versus salvage and reforestation.

Salvage would help the land and the people of southwest Oregon. At least two billion board feet of fire-killed trees, and 500 million board feet of insect-weekend trees lie within two miles of existing roads, and outside protected wilderness and wild scenic areas. The report said the salvageable timber is worth at least \$100 million.

Maybe it’s no longer fashionable to show concern for timber-dependent communities, but the Biscuit salvage would provide a sorely needed boost to the Southern Oregon economy. It would be a lifeline to the few remaining sawmills that have survived the near-total shutdown of public-lands logging in Oregon.

But there is no more time to waste. The value of the timber has eroded by tens of millions of dollars in the year since the fire. The burned trees will lose most of their value in the next two or three years. Meanwhile, the Forest Service is only now unrolling its red tape and preparing to release a draft environmental impact statement proposing to log 117 million board feet of dead trees on 5,500 acres. Given the likely appeals and delays, at best the first salvage sales on the Biscuit will begin next summer.

That is too little, too late. It is repeating the mistakes that are clearly evident in the side-by-side comparison of public and private lands burned in the 1990’s. On public lands, where nature has taken its course, brush and undesirable hardwoods overwhelm conifers. On the neighboring private lands scorched in the same fires, conifer forest are rapidly returning when the land is quickly salvaged, replanted, and given a boost by herbicides that reduce brush.

The Biscuit fire was a historic blaze, the largest single fire in modern Oregon history. Now it offers a historic opportunity to demonstrate how burned-over public forest can best be salvaged and restored.

Reforestation Efforts Signal Good News For Future

Hillside that was planted 65 years ago gives wood for a new generation - with very different logging methods

In 1938 Howard Hughes flew around the world in three days, 19 hours and 17 minutes; Bing Crosby crooned You must have been a beautiful baby; and Hitchcock’s ‘The Lady Vanishes’ played at cinemas. It was also the year in which a hill on the north side of the Great Central Lake near Prot Alberni, B.C., was reforested.

The hillside is a historic one for Weyerhaeuser. The land was first logged in 1928, by Bloedel, Stewart and Welch (later to become MacMillan Bloedel, later to become Weyerhaeuser.) The company replanted parts of it a decade later as its first plantation, and this spring harvested some of the free-growing forest nice again.

In fact, the 32-hectare site provided enough regenerated Douglas fir to fill about 436 logging trucks. Bill Beese, a forest ecologist with Nanaimo Timberlands services, says that in 1938 there were no roads into the area. The area was logged with a large timber A-frame on a wooden float that used cables to drag the timber directly into the lake.

In the 65 years that it took the trees to regrow, technology and practices have radically changed. In 1938, for instance, the area was clear-cut and burned. In those days, there was little thought given to the visual effect or the biological diversity of the area.

Bill says that bare-root Douglas fir seedlings were grown in a field and then planted. Today, container grown seedlings are raised in sophisticated nursery houses.

“Then, we planted only Douglas fir,” Bill says. “Today we plant six major species on the B.C. coast, and a dozen minor species, using eight million trees annually.” He adds that variable retention, an environmentally sustainable harvesting approach, is one of the most significant changes for the company.

“The key difference is that we always leave some part of the original stand behind for the long term and it’s modeled after natural disturbances,” says Bill.

For example, a windstorm, or fire, or insect, or diseases leave some trees behind, so if a fire comes through it jumps around and doesn’t necessarily end up with all the trees on the ground.” Woodpeckers, bats and other forest creatures depend on older trees for their habitat, Bill adds. “There is a whole variety of species out there on the landscape that are helping by leaving some trees behind when you log,” he says.

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New In 2004

After many years in our location, Bear Creek Lumber has elected to go to all ‘will-call/ delivery only’ sales at its main plant. We have served local and regional customers for 27 years with walk-in sales. Insurance concerns have forced a change.

With the safety of our customers in mind, we realized the lumber company has simply grown too big for retail type sales. Customers of all order sizes are still encouraged to buy, and even come in to the yard, but orders must be placed for later pick-up or delivery. The salesman and/or delivery agent will contact the customer when the order is complete. We believe this will speed all order processing and make the yard safer for both employees, drivers and clients.



Industry News

Builder confidence in the market for new single-family homes dipped slightly in November after reaching its highest point in nearly four years during October, the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) reported today. NAHB's Housing Market Index (HMI), a monthly gauge of builder sentiment, showed a three-point decline to 69 this month.

"After the really solid sales activity of this summer and early fall, builders remain in very good spirits heading toward the holidays," said NAHB President Kent Conine, a home and apartment builder from Dallas. "However, we're seeing some slowdown in visitors to model homes. That's a typical observation builders are making."

"All the fundamentals remain in place for a healthy housing market -- including mortgage rates in the 6 percent range, reviving consumer confidence and impressive house-price performance," said NAHB Chief Economist David Seiders. "However, many of the fence-sitters went ahead and made their moves when rates were so good in October, so a moderate decline in the HMI is to be expected at this point."



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Politics and Housing: New Worries

Two out of three Americans are concerned about the cost of housing in their communities and 67 percent would be more likely to vote for a candidate who works to make housing more affordable.

Those are the results of the National Housing Opportunity Pulse, a survey released last month at the National Summit on Housing Opportunities convened by the National Association of Realtors (NAR) in Washington, D.C.

"Our survey found that people worry about affordable housing just as much as they worry about affordable health insurance, and only slightly less than jobs and unemployment," NAR president Cathy Whatley said.

These findings reaffirm what Realtors have known all along. Armed with these findings, our summit partners concluded that it's time to put affordable housing on the public agenda."

The survey found that 71 percent would like to see government place a higher priority on making housing more affordable for renters and homeowners alike. Local state and federal governments received a grade of "C" from their constituents for their work on affordable housing.

By a wide margin, Americans support the construction of more affordable housing, both rental and ownership, in their communities if the housing fits in with the area. Sixty-two percent of Americans are concerned about the impact the rising cost of housing has on teachers, firefighters, police and others on whom communities depend, and 81 percent support the construction of affordable homes for these public employees.

Most Americans - 51 percent - also worry that their children, and grandchildren will not be able to afford to live close to them and 56 percent feel that the cost of a home is getting so unaffordable that it is hurting their local economy.

The National Housing Opportunity Pulse survey of 1,000 urban and suburban residents in the top 25 media markets was conducted by Public Opinion Strategies Aug. 13-17.



Why Has Hardwood Become So Hip?

Some attribute its popularity to the age-old adage: What once was old is new again. Others note the ever expanding variation of hardwood species in today's market, from exotic Brazilian cherry to bamboo.

Hardwood is easy to maintain, doesn't trap dust or allergens and gives a home a rich finished look. The average hardwood floor uses 2.25 inch wide oak boards, at a starting cost of about \$9 a square foot for materials, labor and installation.

Those with more unique tastes may choose American maple or cherry, or imported species such as mahogany or cyprus. Bamboo is also becoming popular, in part because its quick rate of growth makes it a renewable resource.

Other popular exotic woods include Brazilian cherry, a salmon-red wood with dark streaks. Called jatoba, it is available through Bear Creek Lumber. Reclaimed wood is popular in flooring today but carries a higher pricetag. Often pulled from old factories, barns, or from the bottom of streams used years ago to transport logs, reclaimed wood can run up to \$25 a square foot.

What species of wood isn't the only choice to make --buyers also need to decide on finished or unfinished wood. Pre-finished floors already are sanded, stained and varnished, which means they can be installed in a day with minimal mess and no waiting for the finish to dry.

Despite the price tags of such stylish species, hardwood, in all its forms, earns high consumer confidence. Last month, the National Wood Flooring Association polled 1,000 non-wood and wood floor owners. Among them, 39 percent said hardwood is the easiest material to clean, 57 percent said it is the most beautiful and 81 percent said that it increases the value of their home.