

Right-Sizing the Future Forest Industry

BY RUSS VAAGEN

It's time to build a right-sized industry that adds value to the by-products of forest restoration. We need to discover what kinds of materials and how much will be generated over time with a new forest restoration program on federal, state, and other forestlands. We need to take this data and align it with existing and new mill infrastructure. These mills are the physical and financial tools needed to manage our forests. Many mills already exist, but more will be needed.

Much of this can be done by removing some of the self-imposed Forest Service policy constraints. My desire is to see the private sector, collaborative groups, and the Forest Service come together to build upon our successes. We need to make projects scalable and adapt them to each unique landscape. As we do this, we will be building a sustainable supply for the infrastructure of the future. State, tribal, and private forests will also benefit.

What does this future infrastructure look like? Mills will need to focus on efficiently using small- and medium-



sized logs, which will be the most abundant core supply. Many of the companies successfully engaging in collaboration and Forest Service contracts have already invested in necessary technologies for the future. The mills that are in place need to be provided with enough supply to invest and expand. Stability and quality of log supply will provide the confidence to invest in areas currently devoid of milling infrastructure. This is the only way to finance wide-scale forest restoration. This work should more than pay for itself and current focus needs to be directed to areas that generate the most retained receipts.

The importance of mass timber

Mass timber is a very important development for all forests and related industries. It occurs to me that not everyone in the forest industry understands the benefits that mass timber presents. The most obvious is the amount of wood used per square foot of structure. We have the opportunity to go from studs at every 16" in walls and joists in the floor to solid wood, three to five layers thick. Think about how much wood that is. This will provide more consistent markets and value over time that should increase and stabilize the market for logs and lumber.

If we see product adoption like what

has been witnessed in Europe and other parts of the world, this could have a dramatic effect on lumber consumption as a whole. If we start to see wood being used in buildings from 7 to 18 stories in place of steel and concrete structures, the effect could be profound. In October of 2018, new preliminary additions to the International Building Codes were approved for buildings up to 18 stories. Once this becomes permanent and more widely accepted, this will drive a serious expansion for the use of wood.

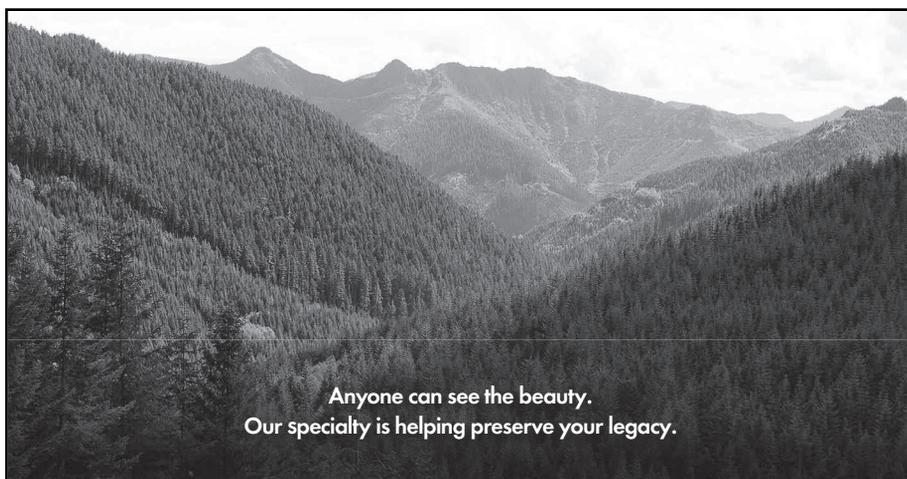
Forest Service and collaboration

The Forest Service has also taken notice of mass timber and sees this as an opportunity to restore more acres. If the Forest Service can put together a new program that allows them to execute on larger contracts over a longer duration, investors may look to put money into facilities in places like north central Washington, southern Idaho, eastern Oregon, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, California, Nevada, and even Alaska.

In my experience, the collaborative groups are eager and ready to go further and faster than the Forest Service. The reasons for this include: not enough budget, not enough staff, waiting to hear back from the regional office, and leadership changes. How many of these could be solved or improved with policy changes? Policy is part of it, but attitude is another.

We need to inspire confidence in people to make decisions to try new things. Collaborative groups have done much of this heavy lifting. We have seen solutions develop that are creating real log volume to mills. Now we need the Forest Service, at the highest levels, to help these collaboratives do more. The volunteer groups have been providing an incredible service to our public lands. It's time for the Forest Service to recognize the value of collaboration by putting money, resources, and projects to support it.

If we can combine the efforts of collaboratives with new changes to policy, we might have a fighting chance to save our forests from wildfires, insects,



Anyone can see the beauty.
Our specialty is helping preserve your legacy.

Land Management | Real Estate Services | Wildlife Management
Recreational Leases | Technical and Data Services
Chehalis 360.740.3757 • Kirkland 425.820.3420

WE'RE IN THIS **TOGETHER**
americanforestmanagement.com



AMERICAN FOREST
MANAGEMENT

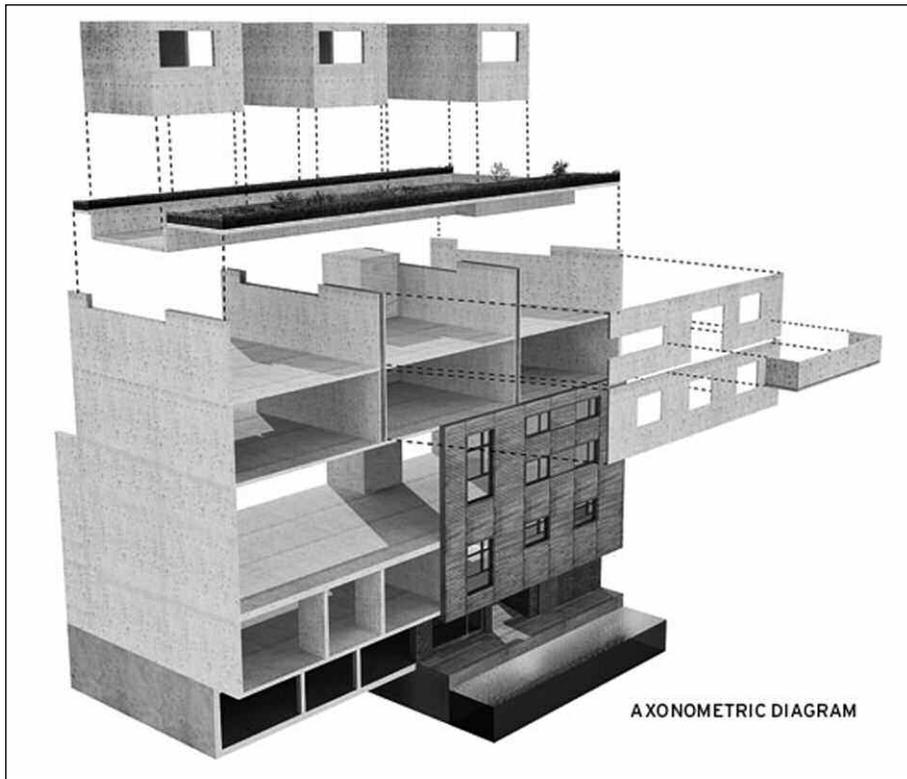


IMAGE COURTESY OF WAUGHTHISTLETON ARCHITECTS, LONDON, ENGLAND

This is a diagram of an apartment building in London. It shows how the massive elements of wood are used to construct the building.

and disease. The Forest Service is starting to realize this. Forest Service Chief Vicki Christiansen needs to continue to apply pressure and focus on changes to make the agency better and more confident. Doing this immediately will show Congress what changes need to be made to effectively restore our forests.

Environmental support

Environmental groups love the idea of CLT transforming the urban density from primarily steel and concrete to the natural elements of wood. Many environmental groups in the Northwest have been very proactive in the development of the mass timber market. Forterra, a Seattle-based environmental organization, has held several conferences on the subject. They have been working to bring leaders together to figure out how products like CLT benefit the environment and the community. Forterra isn't the exception. The Washington Environmental Council held the first ever "Carbon Friendly Forestry Conference" last year. I was asked to speak and I'm glad I did. The questions asked were good ones and I think participants walked away from that event believing that forestry and

the products that go into mass timber products are better than they thought. There is tremendous support for collaboratively based forest restoration projects on our federal lands.

Added value

Mass timber allows forest products to add more value to the forest than ever before. This means that areas that used to have mills may again build a sawmill industry with newer technology that is aligned with the needs of the forest. This will add value to the government lands, but it will also allow

the private landowners the opportunity to manage their forests as well. This added value in the form of mass timber production will add jobs in small communities, bringing high-paying professional jobs. Positions in engineering, architecture, electrical programming, production management, sales, and many others will infuse communities with the type of people that are assets to our communities.

Opportunity for forests

Forest collaboration along with the development of mass timber represents the biggest opportunity we've seen in a long, long time. We think this could make managing forests socially acceptable once again, showing our careers for what they are: valuable, honorable work to make our world a better place. It's been that way for a long time, but the story has been told in a way that did not accurately depict the benefits we provide as forest professionals. With the various types of people that are inspired by mass timber, this may be the opportunity we need to stand up, dust ourselves off, and be proud of the eco-friendly work that we do. ♦

Russ Vaagen is the founder and CEO of Vaagen Timbers in Colville, Wash. He also serves as the president of the Board of the Northeast Washington Forest Coalition and is the founder of www.theforestblog.com. He can be followed on LinkedIn, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter as Russ Vaagen. He can be contacted at 509-684-3678 or rvaagen@vaagentimbers.com.



WFCI

Washington Forestry Consultants, Inc.

Forestry and Vegetation Management Specialists

- Forest Management Plans
- Timber Inventory and Appraisals
- Timber Sale Layout, Permitting and Administration
- Feasibility Studies on New Land Purchases
- Forest Land Management
- Growth and Yield Analysis
- GPS Mapping
- Vegetation Management

Galen M. Wright, ACF, SAF, Certified Forester No. 44 and Board Certified Master Arborist No. PN-0129BU

1.800.276.1723

www.waforestry.com • galenwfciaol.com • Olympia, WA

Serving Clients across the U.S. and Canada since 1991