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Going to market

Builders hope to find a wider variety of Forest Stewardship Council-certified products as green building grows in demand

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Green building demand has started to bump up the availability of Forest Stewardship Council-certified wood products, but there are still strides to be made in the market.

Forward movement in the green building community as well as rising interest in the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED rating program marks a turning point in the market for FSC-certified wood products, said Terry Campbell, principal at Forest Products Solutions, a Portland consulting firm that connects green building professionals to certified wood products.

The move toward green techniques in residential projects - which use much more wood than commercial or industrial projects - and the under-development LEED for Homes residential rating system is expecting to up demand.

But getting FSC-certified products quickly and easily is still an issue.

Local companies varied in scope - from green-focused Environmental Building Supplies to Northwest leader Parr Lumber and national retailer Home Depot, at its Salem store - carry FSC-certified woods.

But there's still an element of "where am I going to get it from?" Campbell said.

"It's been a bit of a challenge in the past," he said. "The demand is there in anecdotal amounts, but not quite in quantifiable numbers of board feet."

Availability of FSC-certified products isn't the problem, said Terry Tibeau, wood products manager at Environmental Building Supplies. The problem is getting retailers to carry a broader range of materials.

"The bigger pickle for the building community right now is being able to get the material, because no one wants to stock it," he said. "The only reason why I don't carry every single piece of framing lumber is (that) I have to carry inventory, and that's really the balance we're trying to strike."

Having a ready supply of in-stock wood is a focus for the Forest Stewardship Council, said Brandon Smith, interim director of the Cascadia Region Green Building Council.

"The push from FSC has been, 'If we prove there's demand, people will start stocking it,'" he said. "And if they stock it, demand will increase because people will know they can get it easily."

Tibeau said he now has Portland builder clients, such as Green Hammer Construction, who are really providing the drive - and support for - carrying FSC-certified building materials.



Portland-based Collins Products is among the companies that offer Forest Stewardship Council-certified wood. The Company's Lakeview Forest, located in Oregon and California, is on of three certified forests from which the company harvests wood.

"The demand is growing, and it's encouraging," he said. "I think it's starting to come into its own at this point."

The Portland community has the interest in FSC-certified products and the resources needed to find them, said Elaine Aye, a principal at Green Building Services.

Nationwide, 33 percent of LEED-rated projects have achieved the certified wood credit.

But 42 percent of Green Building Services' LEED projects have achieved the certified wood credit, and Aye said she thinks resources have much to do with the higher figure.

"We've got a tremendous amount of support," she said. "And I think the fact that we do, and that we're passionate about it, is why we get a higher percentage."

The design community has a significant role to play in encouraging certified wood use, Aye and Campbell said.

"You make a clear statement when you specify FSC wood," Aye said. "It's not just what goes into the project, it's how the tree was cut and the practice behind it."

Architects also have the opportunity to nudge demand - and to smooth along the process.

To that end, Campbell said, the Forest Stewardship Council has developed a request form at www.findfsc.com that's designed to take the pain out of sourcing. If design professionals know where the materials will come from - and if they specify sources in requests for proposals - they clarify the process considerably, he said.

"The communication starts with the specifications," he said.

If you go out into the building community with a general specification that at least 50 percent of this has to be FSC-certified, that's not very helpful to the process."

Yes, Campbell said, some local suppliers are committed to carrying FSC-certified products.

But convincing the distribution companies - the people who own the railcars and the trucks and the warehouses - that green building is growing, he said, will make a significant difference.

And the buying public has the power, he said, to increase the demand - when demand starts growing, so too will store space for FSC-certified products.

"The game's afoot, so to speak," he said. "We definitely want folks to know that we're only at the very beginning of this - things will get easier as companies and municipalities and builders ask for FSC-certified products."

As the wood product market solidified, the Forest Stewardship Council is turning its attentions to another arena: paper.

Certified paper, in the past, has been more of a niche product, Campbell said.

But much of the new land being certified is paper-focused, and the wider use of paper products makes potential impact great.

"It's certainly important," Campbell said. "As a region, we obviously consume way more paper than we do two-by-fours and plywood."