

Utah Forest News

Utah Forest Landowner
Education Program Newsletter



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Utah Forest Products Closes Escalante Mill

The Utah Forest Products sawmill in Escalante stopped production on Monday, February 4, due to economic and supply factors, and it looks as if it may be shut down permanently. Although mill manager Steven Steed and his family have weathered tremendous ups and downs in the wood products industry in southern Utah since his ancestors moved there in 1832, this crunch may be too much. To survive these hard times the mill needs either a supply of wood, which has been increasingly difficult for the national forests to ensure, or new investment partners to help make it through to a better day.

This was one of the largest sawmills in Utah, the other

being Carbon County Lumber in Wellington (formerly Cascade Mountain Resources). This comes only months after the closure of the Stoltze aspen mill in Sigurd and the Timber Products mill in La Sal. There continue to be about a dozen smaller family owned operations around the state, but many of them also fear the possibility of impending closure.

The Utah Forest Products mill shut-down comes in spite of innovative practices employed by Steed, such as constantly altering the product mix to meet market demand and supply availability, and adding high-tech laser measuring devices to the saw rig. More recently the mill

has responded to the regional need to remove small diameter trees reflected in the National Fire Plan by working with the nonprofit Escalante Group to acquire a semi-portable sawmill that was originally designed to complement the mill in Escalante. The MicroMill is designed to go into the woods to efficiently handle log diameters from 3" to 12", thereby reducing overall transportation costs. As a continuing demonstration of



Steven Steed in the mill yard this fall.

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Landowner Profile: Rex Ahlstrom

When Cedar City native Rex Ahlstrom first purchased his five acres of mountain land near Duck Creek in 1981 he had no intention of logging it; he purchased the property as a weekend getaway, and soon built a cabin several hundred feet in from the road. Over the past 20 years he says that he spent as much time on the property as his work schedule would allow. As a heating and electrical contractor in Cedar City for 35 years, he has had plenty of time to witness the changes in the forest as he drove the 45 minutes back and forth to the property over the years.

One of those changes is that the forest around his cabin site has closed in some, and he was losing some of the sunlight and more open feeling the property once had. Ahlstrom has become increasingly concerned about the massive spruce beetle infestation engulfing forest land just east of his property including portions of the Dixie National Forest, Brian Head and Cedar Breaks National Monument, and how that outbreak might affect his own property.

Ahlstrom was also concerned about wind and wildfire threats to his cabin; he believes “It is important to manage the property; trying to save every tree is not good for the land.” His first effort at forest management started about five years ago, but never really took seed. He contracted with a consulting forester who marked the trees to be removed, but at that time was unable to find an interested and qualified logger to do the job.

Finding good loggers to work on smaller pieces of property such as this has always been difficult because for every



“It is important to manage the property; trying to save every tree is not good for the land.” Rex Ahlstrom

logging job there are fixed costs involved in setting-up the timber sale, such as transporting the logging equipment to the site, locating and scratching out the landings, skid trails, and haul roads, etc. If there are only five acres to log from that landing, as opposed to 40 acres or more that can be served from a single landing on a larger piece of property, it is not hard to see the financial disincentive most loggers face when considering a smaller parcel.

With no loggers interested in doing the job, Ahlstrom was forced to put the project on the back burner until last year when, by coincidence, he met a logging contractor named Merrill Burrows who was working on a neighbor’s property. After looking at the land with Burrows they worked out an arrangement that was advantageous to both of them.

Ahlstrom’s interest was improving the health and beauty of the property, while Burrows interest was in using the logs in his own sawmill, so they traded products for services. This arrangement is less common than a negotiated price between landowners and loggers, where either the logger takes the logs and pays the landowner a set price for them, or the landowner keeps the logs (or sells them independent of the logger) and pays the logger for his/her service. Their flexibility, however, was the key to getting the job done and makes the point that in some cases with smaller acreage jobs, less traditional approaches may work best.

Ahlstrom, continued

Although the basis of this agreement is quite simple, it by no means lessened the need for a solid timber harvesting contract between the landowner and the logger.

Ahlstrom said that “35 years as a heating and air conditioning contractor has given me a true appreciation for the importance of having a good contract” with anyone working on your property. “If anything”, he points out, “a smaller acreage like this increases the need for a solid contract, as there are many hazards for the logger to deal with in a small area.” Just the act of falling timber becomes substantially more hazardous when done around cabins, power lines, vehicles, and curious neighbors.

Assistance with setting up the contract is one of the things that Ahlstrom valued most in his relationship with his local forester, Clint Reese. Reese is the local Area Forester with the Division of Forestry, Fire & State Lands. Ahlstrom realized that folks like Reese were available to him as a landowner and figured: “why not take advantage of that assistance.” Ahlstrom already had a forest management plan in place as Reese, along with the Division’s Stewardship Coordinator Ron Gropp, had previously prepared a plan for Duck Creek Village.



A few of the larger ponderosa pines left after logging.

Reese and a coworker also marked the trees to be removed; another very important step in the process. Their marking strived to preserve a diversity of tree

species, ages, and sizes, by removing some of the less desirable trees. Species like ponderosa pine were generally favored for their large size and beauty, longevity, and their relative resistance to insects, diseases, fire, and wind. Although these trees offered more value at the mill than some of the other trees that were removed, they offered much greater value to the landowner by remaining, as revenue production was not the primary goal of the timber sale. By removing some of the smaller trees around a larger ponderosa pine, natural systems are mimicked. A forest is left that has larger, older trees, much the same as would happen with the frequent low intensity fires that occurred in this area prior to settlement.

Most important was Ahlstrom’s satisfaction with the way the job was turning out. He had more sunlight and air movement through the stand, and could finally see more than a few feet from the cabin, which is something that he slowly lost over the years since purchasing the property. As Reese and Burrows worked together to preserve some of the better trees on the property, Ahlstrom also has something quite beautiful to look at.

Utah Has Its Share of the Big Trees

Although Utah is among the driest states in the nation, it is home to six National Champion Big Trees. Since 1940, American Forests has been keeping The National Register of Big Trees. It all got started when forester Joseph Stearns issued his rallying cry: "Let every tree lover, every forester, and every lumberman rally...to fight for the preservation of our biggest tree specimens."

Utah holds the national champion blue spruce, which grows on the Duchesne Ranger District of the Ashley National Forest and stands 127 feet tall. Our national champion Rocky Mountain white fir grows south of Salem, in Loafer Canyon, and is 94 feet tall. Utah also holds the record for the largest Rocky Mountain juniper, known as the Jardine Juniper on the Logan Ranger District of the Cache National Forest. The Jardine Juniper is one of only four of today's national champions that have

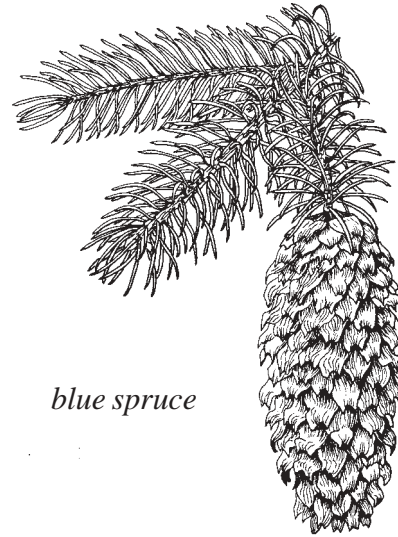
remained on the list consistently since 1940.

Our national champion limber pine is near Pittsburg Lake on

the Uintah National Forest. Utah is also home to a national champion cliffrose and alderleaf cercocarpus.

Considering tree growing conditions, it may be no surprise that California and Washington hold the records for the biggest and the tallest species in the country. It is somewhat surprising though, that Florida holds the most national champions, with California and Texas coming in second and third. There are more than 826 eligible

species in the country, and 93 of them do not have champions, including the Greene mountain-ash, which is native to cool, moist canyon sites in Utah.



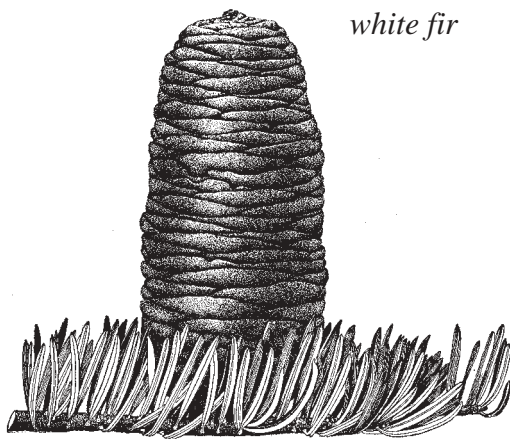
blue spruce

Anyone with a pair of hiking boots and a tape measure can submit big tree contenders, and his/her name will be listed alongside the champion in the national Register of

Big Trees. To nominate a tree for either the state or national list, measure and record the height to the nearest foot, the circumference (not diameter) of the trunk at breast height (4.5 feet above the ground), and the average crown spread (by measuring the greatest width of the crown straight through the trunk of the tree, and then the narrowest, and dividing the total by two). Each foot in height receives one point, every inch in trunk circumference receives one point, and the average crown spread receives a quarter of a point for every foot.

For more information on the National or the Utah Register of Big Trees, contact Tony Dietz, at the Division of Forestry, Fire & State Lands by telephone at 801-538-5505, or by email: nrslf.tdietz@state.ut.us.

Sources: American Forest's web site www.americanforests.org or by telephone at 202-955-4500. Tony Dietz, Urban Forestry Coordinator, Utah Division of Forestry, Fire & State Lands.



white fir

The 1902 Wasatch Survey: Diary of A. F. Potter

The Utah Forest News occasionally features excerpts from the diary of Albert F. Potter, from the USU Special Collections and Archives. In 1902, Potter conducted the Wasatch Survey, where he crisscrossed the Wasatch Mountains and the Colorado Plateau by horseback for 5 months. His assignment as Chief Grazing Officer was to document forest and range conditions and attitudes of inhabitants on formation of the national forests. This historical perspective is useful in understanding how today's management activities may affect tomorrow's forests.

July 3, 1902
Went with Mr. Smart for a trip up Spring Creek (Logan area) and across the mountain. Passed a small sawmill at the mouth of the canyon before entering the mountain. Entering the canyon, found same contains a dense growth of brush, the trail cut-out being barely wide enough to permit a person passing with a saddle horse. It was raining and the wet brush just about wet me through. On the sides of the mountain the growth is about the same as in Dry Canyon. Scrub cedar on the south slope of the lower part and spruce (what we now call Douglas-fir was commonly referred

to as Douglas-spruce in 1902) on the north slope. Much cutting of timber has been done and no large trees remain.

Went up the canyon about two miles, dense brush all the way. As the rain had then turned into a snowstorm we concluded it was folly to try to go over the mountain today and turned back arriving at Logan at noon.



A Douglas-fir forest on the north slope of Providence Canyon (Potter's presumed location) today, regrown since 1902.

During the afternoon met a number of citizens who are favoring the establishing of the reserve. Said they wanted stock excluded from it so as to prevent them fouling the water; they think the health of the town is endangered by stock dying near the stream and by the pollution of the water by the manure and the urine. Denudation of the slope by timber cutting diminishing the

water supply does not seem to alarm them. All evils being charged to stock. There are many people, however, who honestly wish to preserve the forest and favorable water conditions.



Stewardship Blocks: Innovative Tool Brings Fire Plan Benefits into Communities

The National Fire Plan and the 2001 Interior Appropriation Bill that funded it are laced with references to the idea that communities, and the forest workers who live there, should benefit from hazardous fuel reduction activities. Across the country, Forest Service district rangers are struggling to figure out how to provide “close collaboration between citizens and government” and to “give local workers preference.” The Camino Real District of the Carson National Forest in New Mexico created an innovative tool called “stewardship blocks” that brings fire plan benefits into communities while accomplishing fuel reduction objectives.



Results of a stewardship block thinning.

The district’s first experiment with stewardship blocks was on a site called La Cruz Ecosystem Improvement Project in a 200-acre area of ponderosa pine forest north of Truchas, NM. Residents of this rural community, like many others in the West, depend on wood from the national forest to heat their homes. District Forester Henry Lopez came up with the idea of stewardship blocks as a way to implement a fuel reduction prescription by giving local woodcutters a block of forest to harvest firewood.

Stewardship blocks work as follows: woodcutters leave the trees the district has marked and remove firewood-sized logs with a fuel wood permit costing \$25 for 5 cords and \$5 for each additional cord. The woodcutters sign a written agreement with the Forest Service to cut in their assigned block. Signing the agreement, and not a precommercial thinning contract, is appealing to many local workers who are not interested in forming a business or taking on a large-scale project. These agreements differ from fuel wood permits that give access to a communal firewood harvest

area because the written agreement requires that the work be performed on a certain plot of land to specific standards.

Stewardship blocks range from one to four acres, depending on the workers’ experience and ability, and are labeled with the workers’ names. The woodcutters begin thinning at one edge of their block and move towards the other side, a policy that insures against the selective removal of larger trees in the block and allows the Forest Service to monitor the quality of the thinning as it progresses.

The woodcutters are accountable to the community and have an incentive to do good work. If they don’t, the district will not assign them additional blocks in the future and they will lose their easy access to a concentrated supply of firewood. Lopez says that most cutters take pride in their plots – some are even pruning the leave trees (the ones remaining) for kicks.

The Forest Service is pleased with the project because it has accomplished a high-quality fuel reduction project with the help of the local community. The woodcutters are pleased because the stewardship blocks support their subsistence needs for wood products.

Excerpted from The Fire Chronicle: Stories of the National Fire Plan, by Martha Schumann, Research Associate, The Forest Trust, and Tori Derr, Coordinator, Southwest Community Forestry Research Center

Utah Forest Products, Cont.

their tenacity in the forest products industry in southern Utah, Steed indicated that his family has a plan to move forward with the MicroMill independent of the larger mill. (Look for more on the MicroMill in future editions of the Utah Forest News.)



Raw logs and drying boards at the Utah Forest Products mill this fall.

The loss of the mill not only represents a blow to the economy of Escalante, but also a loss to southern Utah's private forest landowners. Forest stewardship can be greatly augmented through the revenue produced from timber harvesting; it is much easier to afford taxes, road maintenance costs, and even take on projects such as wildlife habitat improvement when management efforts produce a positive cash flow. The lack of sawmills in the area leads to prohibitive log-hauling costs and becomes a disincentive for practicing forest management. For a family trying to pay a big tax bill on a property for instance, this depressed timber market can also lead to a greater incentive to high-grade a stand, or take the best and leave the rest, which leads to long-term decline in forest health and productivity.

Classified

Do you have forest resources you want to sell? Are there specific timber resources you want to buy? Do you offer services useful to forest landowners? This is the place to advertise your needs! Advertisement is free. If you would like to place an ad, call Darren McAvoy at 435-797-0560 or e-mail darrenm@cnr.usu.edu.

- **Utah Forest Products, Inc.** is looking for saw logs and offering competitive bids on standing timber. All species considered. Complete management proposals offered using best management practices. Contact John Schmidt, Forester, at 435-865-9438 or at our mill in Escalante, 435-826-4521. Please keep Utah forests working for Utah!

(Editor's note: The inclusion of this ad stands as continued demonstration of Steven Steed's optimism, see page one for details)

- **CRZ, Inc. Forest Engineering Consulting**
Former logging and road construction company owner with 10 years of highlead, multi-span skyline and ground-based logging experience. I have 6 years of forestry consulting experience providing timber sale and road construction layout and design, timber sale negotiation and administration, fire risk reduction and CAD mapping. Contact Cary Zielinsky at 801-737-4721, fax 801-737-4378, e-mail mail189898@pop.net, or write to 3967 N 1050 West, Pleasant View, UT 84414

This classified section is a service for forest landowners. Listing of these services, companies, and individuals in no way implies endorsement by USU Extension. We suggest that you use the same precautions you would use in the purchase or sale of any goods and services, including asking for and checking references and using a written agreement to clarify the obligations and responsibilities involved in a sale or service contract.

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For More Information:

Regarding any of the information presented in this newsletter, please call Darren McAvoy at Utah State University, 435-797-0560, write him at 5215 Old Main Hill, Logan, UT 84322-5215, or email darrenm@cnr.usu.edu.

State of Utah Division of Forestry, Fire & State Lands (DFF&SL) service foresters for your area can be contacted by calling 801-538-5555.

Ideas and written contributions to this newsletter are encouraged. Send your comments to the return address above or call 435-797-0560, or email darrenm@cnr.usu.edu.

COMING EVENTS:

❑ A FireWise workshop is scheduled for April 29- May 1, 2002, at Snowbird Mountain Resort. FireWise workshops have been held around the country for the past few years in an effort to promote community and homeowner understanding of wildfire protection measures. For more information contact Larry Laforte at 435-586-4408 or email at nrslf.lleforte@state.ut.us.

❑ SmallWood 2002; Community & Economic Development Opportunities in Small Tree Utilization, April 11-13, Albuquerque, New Mexico, for more information call the Forest Products Society at 608-231-1361; www.forestprod.org.