

Utah Forest News

Utah Forest Landowner
Education Program Newsletter



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Portable Sawmills Offer Opportunities for Forest Entrepreneurs

Forest landowners are surely aware that what grows up (seedlings and saplings) must eventually come down, whether by cutting or natural means. In these tough economic times, you might wonder how best to profit from all those downed trees, especially if they occur in large numbers, say from beetle kill. One alternative to selling them to salvage loggers is to buy a portable sawmill and mill the logs yourself (see also *UFN* Spring 2007). The advantages of owning your own mill are numerous, and the income-generating possibilities are limited only by your creativity.



Brett Lottman of Wood-Mizer demonstrates the LT40 sawmill on a spruce log in Panguitch, Utah.

This April, Wood-Mizer, a portable sawmill manufacturer, sponsored an informational seminar in Panguitch, Utah. Jim Evans, a longtime timber operator and Wood-Mizer representative from Sheridan, California, demonstrated the use of two models of Wood-Mizer sawmills and outlined some of the many ways people can earn a living from them. Although he was there specifically to market the Wood-Mizer brand, much of the wisdom he passed along could apply equally well to other mills.

So, how *can* you make money with your own sawmill? One way is to custom saw other people's timber, but it's also helpful to specialize—one of Jim's specialties

is exotics. In this case *exotic* doesn't refer to rare African rainforest trees; it's the name applied to any wood with unusual characteristics such as marks, worm holes, streaks, or stains. If this wood is marketed with a name such as "rustic," it can magically increase in value. In a similar vein, Jim reported that when he changed the label "eucalyptus" on some of his logs that weren't selling to "Australian oak," they sold within

a week. Another way Jim makes money is with long timbers, since it's possible to get an increase in the price

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per board foot on any log over 24 feet long. He also buys culls from various sources and finds that he can still get a lot of good wood from them and increase his profits. In his words, "God don't make no junk. Just put it through the mill and somebody will buy it."

Additional niche markets are suggested in the Wood-Mizer literature, along with examples of the products in demand in these markets:

- Farmers: fence posts, barn siding
- Cabinetmakers: frame stock, countertops
- Craft market: picture frames, crotch cuts, burls
- Log home builders: logs for walls and beams, wood shingles
- Specialty users: gunstock blanks, violin parts, golf club heads, truck bed decks
- Home improvements: hardwood flooring, railings
- Furniture makers: lumber for chairs, desks, tables
- Trim or finish carpenters: casing, baseboard
- Woodworkers: high-quality lumber for special projects

There are various ways to charge for your services, each with its pros and cons. The most stable and secure way is by the hour, but if mill or blade problems occur on the job, customers may feel they didn't get a fair deal. Rates vary a lot by location, but Wood-Mizer's literature says the range is usually between \$30 and \$75/hour (Jim Evans charges \$85/hour), perhaps with an extra set-up fee added on. The most common method is to charge by the board foot, since it puts all the productivity risk on the

sawyer. Many factors can affect production levels, such as the size and cleanliness of the logs, the species of tree, and the dimension of lumber requested by the customer. Once again, total daily returns vary greatly, but generally range from \$200 to \$800 per day according to Wood-Mizer, assuming a volume of 1000 to 3000 board feet. Another method of charging is on

a share basis, where the sawyer accepts a percentage of the finished lumber from the owner of the logs. This can potentially result in higher profits than charging either by the hour or by the board foot, depending on the species. Finally, it's also possible to charge by the job, but this method is generally safest with smaller jobs that have fewer variables.



Laurel Anderton tries out the Wood-Mizer LT15 as Jim Evans looks on.

One way to market the advantages of your sawmill to "green" customers is to emphasize the eco-friendly aspects of thin-kerf sawing. The kerf is the slit made by the saw blade, and with traditional circular mills, it ranges between 1/4" and 3/8". With Wood-Mizer and other portable band sawmills, the kerf is 1/16". That may not sound like much of a difference, but thin-kerf bandsaw blades generate up to 60% less sawdust than traditional blades, and require less power and fuel to operate, thereby contributing fewer emissions to the atmosphere and reducing operating costs. These blades also cost less and are easier to use and maintain. More lumber can be produced from the same number of logs using thin-kerf blades as opposed to traditional blades, thus generating higher profits. Another use of thin-kerf sawing is the recovery of valuable old timbers. The

reclaimed wood market has a lot of potential because large, old timbers can be given new life by being run through a mill to take off the outer layer. This is likely to appeal to those who would rather recycle and reuse than cut new trees.

For those who would rather not fall their own trees or who aren't equipped to do so, there are many sources for logs to cut. One of the best is your local landfill, where the wood may be free and where valuable logs can sometimes end up when people aren't aware of their value. Jim Evans says it's possible to make a living solely on sawing wood from landfills, even in areas without a lot of trees. He has mills operating and doing well on wood from the landfill in Las Vegas, Nevada. Other sources for logs are local loggers (especially those involved with salvaging beetle-killed trees), tree services, new developments where trees are being removed, state and federal agencies, and demolition or reclamation projects. Depending on your location, urban timbers are also routinely available and can be quite valuable.

Even if sawing wood is only a sideline, it might be enough to make a difference when other income sources run dry. Whether you decide on a new mill from Wood-Mizer (ranging in price from around



Steve Walker uses his Norwood sawmill to cut a round section of trunk for a hobbyist.

\$3000 to over \$40,000), or buy a used mill from craigslist.com, your investment is likely to yield a good return. For more information on Wood-Mizer mills, go to www.woodmizer.com. Other good sources for general information that include links to other sawmill manufacturers are http://forestry.about.com/od/portamills/tp/top_saw_mills.htm and www.sawmill-exchange.com.

by Laurel Anderton

Update on Carbon Market for Landowners

Further investigation into the forestry carbon market (see "Voluntary Carbon Market Available to Utah Landowners" in *UFN* Winter 2010) has yielded the following important information. As the *UFN* article mentioned, the only way a landowner can participate in the Chicago Climate Exchange (CCX), or any other carbon exchange, is through an aggregator, a company that pools carbon credits from numerous sources and sells them over the exchange. Natalie Conlin, Area Forester with the Utah Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands, says she recently spoke with an aggregator, Forecon, who told her that the carbon market is currently in a major slump, and that CCX and carbon credits are not a viable opportunity for private forest landowners right now (see <http://www.foreconinc.com/services/CarbonSequestration.asp>). For instance, in June 2008, carbon credits to forest landowners were worth \$7/ton on the CCX. Now they are paying only 10¢/ton, but landowners need at least \$3/ton to make a profit. In fact, Forecon believes that the CCX does not hold much future promise for forest landowners. However, the good news is that they are currently involved with a couple of promising new carbon credit exchange programs for forest landowners (Voluntary Carbon Standard and California Climate Action Registry) that should start up within the next year.

Utah Forest Practices Act Now Includes Penalty for Failure to Notify

The Utah Forest Practices Act (FPA) was amended by the Utah Legislature with Senate Bill 149 this year to make it a class B misdemeanor for an operator (logger) to fail to notify the Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands of intent to conduct forest practices. The bill was sponsored by Senator David Hinkins. The original Utah FPA was signed into law on May 1, 2001, by Governor Leavitt.

In addition to requiring operators to notify the Division, the bill also calls for them to register with the Division prior to starting a harvest. The amended act allows the Division to take action in court to stop an operator from continuing the harvest of commercial tree species until they comply with the act. It also states that the operator shall pay all reasonable attorney fees and court costs incurred by the Division related to this matter.

The amendment also directs the Division to make rules to govern the application, approval, implementation, and monitoring of a Forest Stewardship Plan. Forest practices, according to the act, include harvesting commercial trees, site preparation for regeneration, reforestation, and the management of logging slash. The bill defines commercial species with a list that includes all of our pines, spruces, and firs, as well as quakies, junipers, pinyons, and Gambel oak.

Activities exempted by the amended act are: (1) harvesting trees for noncommercial personal use by private landowners on their own land, (2) harvesting



A rubber-tired grapple skidder skids a turn of logs to the landing at a timber harvest in central Utah.

areas less than five acres in size, (3) clearing land for defensible space and hazardous fuel reduction in the wildland urban interface or near homes and structures, and (4) harvesting Christmas trees.

In discussion with Division employees about the act, it was apparent that their intent is to use the misdemeanor penalty built into this amendment only as a last resort. They would rather just see operators get registered and notify them of their intent to conduct forest practices on private land in Utah.

by Darren McAvoy

Green Belt Amended to Allow for Waiver

“The Farmland Assessment Act” is the official title of the law that creates what is commonly known as Green Belt tax status, which allows agricultural producers to have their property assessed on an agricultural basis as opposed to a full market value assessment. The act was amended by the Utah legislature this year to allow the tax commission or counties to grant waivers to landowners who already have Green Belt status and need to remove their livestock for a period of time in order to grow young trees or complete other range improvement activities as outlined in their forest stewardship plan. The bill was sponsored by Senator David Hinkins.



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Landowner Assistance Available for EQIP Program

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is a voluntary conservation program administered by the National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Its goals are to provide technical and financial assistance in implementing conservation practices to people who are engaged in livestock or agricultural production or who own non-industrial private forestland. EQIP assistance is available for planning and designing conservation measures to conserve water and improve water quality, reduce soil erosion, improve grazing lands, enhance riparian areas, improve air quality, and address wildlife issues. Forest landowners may be eligible for assistance with tree planting and pre-commercial thinning and may also receive payments for forest stewardship plans and management practices. In order to apply for benefits, Utah forest landowners must work through their Forestry, Fire and State Lands (FFSL) Area Forester and NRCS District Conservationist. Contact information for these individuals is provided here, and is also listed at http://extension.usu.edu/forestry/Landowner/GetStarted_Assistance.htm and http://extension.usu.edu/forestry/Landowner/District_Conservationists.html.

Utah FFSL Foresters:

Bear River Area

Counties served: Box Elder, Cache, Rich, Weber
Morgan Mendenhall
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1780 N Research Parkway, Ste 104
North Logan, UT 84341-1940

Central Area

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Richfield, UT 84701

Northeastern Area

Counties served: Daggett, Duchesne, Summit, Uintah, Wasatch
PJ Abraham
435-657-9409
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Vernal, UT 84078

Southeastern Area

Counties served: Carbon, Emery, Grand, San Juan
Natalie Conlin
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natalieconlin@utah.gov
1165 S Highway 191, Ste 6
Moab, UT 84532

Southwestern Area

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Wasatch Front Area

Counties served: Davis, Morgan, Salt Lake, Tooele, Utah
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Darren McAvoy Receives Stewardship Award

The editor of this newsletter, USU Extension Associate Darren McAvoy, was presented with the 2009 Forest Stewardship Achievement award by State Forester Dick Buehler at



the Utah Association of Conservation Districts convention held in St. George in late 2009. Darren was chosen for the award by the Forest Stewardship Coordinating Committee for his commitment to land stewardship.

For many years now Darren has diligently produced the *Utah Forest News (UFN)* newsletter, which is distributed quarterly to more than 2,000 landowners, agency professionals, and others interested in Utah forests. UFN keeps landowners and professionals up-to-date on forestry issues in Utah. The *UFN* also handles the occasional controversial issue carefully and sensitively to promote understanding to a wide audience. Several times it has won awards as one of the best extension forestry newsletters in

the country. Darren also recently released a video titled “Considering a Timber Harvest on Your Family Forest” that promotes the idea that timber harvesting and active forest management are good things if planned and carried out thoughtfully. For all he does for promoting good forestry in Utah, Darren is truly deserving of this award.

*by Mike Kuhns, Extension Forestry Specialist.
Article adapted from a Utah DNR news release.*



Webcast Archive Available

On April 13, the Interior West Forest Inventory and Analysis program of the U.S. Forest Service held their 2010 User Group meeting online, in cooperation with Utah State University Forestry Extension. To access the recording of this webcast, go to <http://extension.usu.edu/forestry/Presentations/FIAUsers.html>.

For more information regarding any of the information presented in this newsletter, please call Darren McAvoy at Utah State University, 435-797-0560, write to him at 5230 Old Main Hill, Logan, UT 84322-5230, or email darren.mcavoy@usu.edu.

The Utah State University Forestry Extension Web site, found at <http://extension.usu.edu/forestry>, is an excellent source of technical forestry information for woodland owners. Check the “What’s New” section periodically for new postings.

State of Utah Division of Forestry, Fire and 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 contributions or comments to the return address above or call 435-797-0560, or email darren.mcavoy@usu.edu.



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COMING EVENTS

Intermountain Society of American Foresters. Stewardship of the Henry Mountains Site Visit; McMillan Spring Stewardship Project; August 27-28, 2010 (tentative), Hanksville, UT and McMillan Spring. Visit www.usu.edu/saf/meetings.html for more information.

Ninth Annual Timber Harvest Tour. September 9, 2010, near Heber City, UT (location tentative).

Restoring the West Conference. October 26 -27, 2010, Logan, UT. Visit www.restoringthewest.org, or go to extension.usu.edu/forestry/subscribe.html to get on our email notification list.



PJ Abraham, Area Forester with the Utah Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands, teaches tree identification to high school students at the Utah Envirothon this April.