

Lumber

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He said wholesale prices of plywood – 1,000 square feet – have been on a roller coaster in the same span, from \$400 before the pandemic to a high of \$2,100 in the summer of 2021 and now down to \$700.

To the average consumer, that means a 4-by-8 sheet of plywood went from about \$13 to high of about \$48 down to about \$24.

“We’re really quite concerned at \$700 because we’re losing money at that level,” Freres said. “To be 40% higher than your previous all-time high and to lose money is kind of the situation we’re in. It’s just, it’s absolutely mind numbing how we are dealing with the wild swings in the marketplace and dealing with the challenges of finding a work force. I don’t know that it’s ever been so unpleasant, all the various challenges we’ve had the last couple of years.”

Highway’s like 99 and 126 maintain steady streams of log trucks taking scorched logs out of the fire zone. State and county officials and private landowners have felled thousands of dangerous and burnt black trees and are sending as many as they can to the sawmill.

It was rare when burned logs were processed by a mill before the wildfires.

“We have a tremendous amount of black logs coming at us. We’d never run a black log through our mill prior to recently,” said Seneca Sawmill Co. Senior Vice President of Marketing and Communications Casey Roscoe. “Every timberland owner that had salvageable timber wanted to get value from it because they’re up against a timeline.”

But lumber prices have been on the rise, and a number of conditions related to the pandemic are expected to keep lumber – and new homes – expensive.

Marion County community development manager Chris Eppley said Wednesday that 451 homes that were destroyed in Marion and Linn counties have applied for septic permits. That about 75% of those that were destroyed.

“Our building official is aware of a handful of projects that have recently been canceled or delayed by applicants who cite rising lumber prices as the reason for the withdrawal of their building permit applications,” Lane County spokeswoman Devon Ashbridge said.

Lumber markets

The average price of a new single-family home increased by more than \$24,000 between April 2020 and



Freshly cut lumber heads through a sorting station in April at the Eugene sawmill formerly owned by Seneca Sawmill Co. California-based Sierra Pacific Industries bought the Eugene-based Seneca companies and plans “to continue investing in these mills and providing jobs at these mills.” CHRIS PIETSCH/THE REGISTER-GUARD

March, according the National Association of Home Builders. On Thursday, lumber closed at \$1,260 per 1,000 board feet, a record high price and up nearly 280% from the same time last year.

Freres said finding enough workers has been a challenge, especially since the wildfires. There are fewer workers to draw from in logging and manufacturing in wood products in the Santiam Canyon with over 2,800 people displaced.

He said the company that produces wood products like plywood and mass ply paneling has about 410 workers. Previously it would have close to 500.

“Last year, for example, we could only make 55% of the plywood we would normally make and 75% of the veneer products,” Freres said. “And this was in an extraordinarily high market. It was completely labor driven, lack of labor driven.”

“We need 100 people to get back to our normal levels and we are not unique in our industry and the entire manufacturing sector across America.”

Prices are expected to rise further in coming months.

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Sheets of freshly lathed wood is scanned at Freres Engineered Wood in Lyonson June 9. BRIAN HAYES / STATESMAN JOURNAL, BRIAN HAYES

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Permit

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In the petition, they say the facility poses a serious risk to ground and surface waters, endangering fish habitats and the Willamette River basin ecosystem.

The facility is a quarter-mile from the North Santiam River.

“ODA and DEQ cannot ignore this mega-chicken operation’s likely pollution of the North Santiam River, a federally protected waterway,” said Amy van Saun, senior attorney at Center for Food Safety.

The facility’s permit only addresses discharges to groundwater. But opponents say there also is the potential for discharges to surface water.

“This includes aerial deposition of ammonia from chicken barn fans into the river, and runoff of contaminated stormwater,” they wrote in the petition.

The petition also argues that four inches of compacted soil in the barns, required by DEQ, is not enough to protect groundwater. Other states require 12 inches, it says.



Signs opposing a factory chicken farm are posted along a road in Scio on Feb. 16. BRIAN HAYES/SALEM STATESMAN JOURNAL

And the groundwater monitoring required by DEQ is inadequate, it says.

Other petitioners include Willamette Riverkeeper, Friends of Family Farmers, Humane Voters Oregon, Food & Water Watch, Animal Legal Defense Fund and Center for Biological Diversity.

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