

AN INDUSTRY AND ENVIRONMENT IN DECLINE

The Oregon timber industry has been in decline since the 1980s. Market factors, concerns over habitat destruction and increased automation of timber falling and milling have taken significant chunks out of the timber economy.

Data compiled by Josh Lehner at the Oregon Office of Economic Analysis show a steady decline in wood industry jobs from between 60,000 and 90,000 in 1950-1980 to below 45,000 since 2000. While timber jobs have declined by about half since their peak in the 1950s, Oregon's population has more than doubled.

Today about 75 percent of the timber harvest in Oregon comes from corporate timber companies, according to information from the Oregon Forest Resources Institute, an industry sponsored group. Industrial timberland accounts for about 6 million acres in Oregon, about 20 percent of the state's overall forestland.

Milled logs have been cut and processed, adding value to them. Depending on market dynamics, as many as one in five logs exported from Oregon is unmilled, which reduces the value added to Oregon timber in favor of market efficiencies and reduces the lumber availability for local mills.

The timber industry embraces a plantation model based on clearcutting and replanting, predominantly with the economically valuable and fast-growing Douglas fir. This model is practically mandated by the Oregon Forest Practices Act (OFPA), which requires replanting of harvested areas and suppression of competition in replanted stands.

The plantation requirement leads to one of the most controversial practices of modern forestry — aerial pesticide spraying. A rash of complaints over health impacts and concerns over water contamination from pesticide drift has generated campaigns to ban the practice. In Lincoln County a ballot initiative to ban aerial spraying of pesticides narrowly won earlier this year. Advocates are eyeing more local and perhaps statewide bans in the future.



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