

WSFPI: three long-term options are being considered

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Most recently, D.R. Johnson, citing poor market conditions, shut down its Wallowa mill indefinitely and four others on a temporary basis.

Small mills like WSFPI that produce dimension lumber are having an especially hard time against large, highly automated, and super-efficient rivals. To take an example, with the most up-to-date technology mills can run up to 20 small-diameter logs per minute. WSFPI's 20-year old small-log saw averages about four to five logs per minute.

Some of the larger mills produce as much lumber in a month as WSFPI cuts in a year.

The mill's performance has lagged to such an extent that only in the very strongest markets has it been profitable. As log diameters decline—a recent trend projected to continue—it becomes even more important to handle small logs both rapidly and efficiently.

Efforts to improve performance

Mill chief executive officer Mark Jackson and the mill staff have been aggressively pursuing operational improvements and new market opportunities, as well as development of a strategic plan. Jackson has engaged



Dave McMechan/Spilyay

Merlin Tom, production floor lead person, and Rafael Caldera, swingshift lead millwright, are among the WSFPI workers.

operational and engineering specialists to help assess the mill and learn what, if anything, can be done to operate profitably now and in the future.

The operational work has led to improved financial performance, even amid the prevailing sour market conditions. The three summer months of June, July, and August yielded an aggregate profit to the mill.

Jackson credits the people working at the mill for their efforts to make positive changes.

"I'm extremely proud of our employees," Jackson said. "They've worked very hard to

change the way we do business. It hasn't been easy but they've handled it well and been successful. That applies throughout our work force, from the loggers through shipping."

In addition, as part of a larger economic development package sponsored by Tribal Council, a team of regional industry experts was formed in May to help develop and recommend a long-term strategy for WSFPI.

Led by Tom Tomjack, chairman of the Board of North Pacific, this committee is looking at industry trends, including housing forecasts, on- and off-

reservation wood supply, and technological advances.

Three options are being considered:

1) cease manufacturing operations and transformation of the enterprise into an industrial supplier of logs to off-reservation mills;

2) continue with the current mill and improve performance through finding operational efficiencies, niche marketing opportunities, and making small capital investments to the facility;

3) invest approximately \$15 million into a new small log line that can efficiently run 12-20 logs per minute, significantly reducing manufacturing costs.

Each option would have different repercussions on employment levels as well as tribal revenues. Currently WSFPI employs 118 people, of whom 86 are tribal members or supporting tribal members.

Tomjack says that the strategy team is sensitive to the tribe's need to retain jobs, and that employment concerns will play an important role in the team's recommendations, which should be complete by early November.

Impact of Biomass

A further area of inquiry for the Secretary-Treasurer in looking at the mill has to do with the Biomass Project. "Tribal Council wants to understand the interrelationships between the mill and biomass before making any decisions about the mill itself," said Calica.

"With the Tribe thinking

about committing major resources and effort to the future of biomass," Calica said, "it is important to know how a decision in one area will affect other projects. The Council has asked me to help them find that out."

Calica has begun assembling data and will work with the mill, board, and strategy team to report his findings and recommendations to the Tribal Council no later than October 16.

Festival of Nations Salmon Run at Cascade Locks

The Festival of Nations Salmon Run is set for Saturday, Sept. 29 at the Marine Park at Cascade Locks.

The 10-K run begins at 8 a.m. The 1-mile run/walk starts at 8:30 a.m.

Registration forms are available at the Kah-Nee-Ta Expansion Office; the Warm Springs Recreation Department; and the Lorang Art Gallery at Cascade Locks. On-site registration begins



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at 7 a.m.

For information call 553-4883; or 553-3243.

Schools: suspensions are down

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In addition to the strong lines of communication between teachers and families, Smith said, "I know, on our part, we are always looking for ways to improve our home-school connections in order to better meet the needs of our kids."

At the middle school

According to the data, Jefferson County Middle School saw the number of

suspensions drop drastically from 338 in 2001-02 to 58 students in the 2006-07 year.

"To go from 338 to 58 in six years is really outstanding," said Josh Adams, who works as a principal at Metolius Elementary.

The past few years have also demonstrated very strong dips in the number of absences, Adams said.

"It just means more kids are staying in school," he said.

Student grade point averages

began to increase during the 1997-98 scholastic year and have been increasing ever since. "In 30 years that's the highest its been, and that's really exciting," Adams said.

The upward trend is exactly what school officials need to see continue, Adams said—and it's something he credits a lot to parents and community as well.

"It's something that a lot of people deserve a pat on the back for," he said.

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