

## BURNS FORESTRY NEWSLETTER

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### COVID - 19 AND THE TIMBER MARKET

The covid-19 pandemic closed many offices, businesses and schools, resulting in a decrease in demand for communication paper. This came on top of a long-term decline in the use of graphic and office papers. Sanitary papers and fluff pulp markets, however, have done well.

Prior to March, the housing market was strong. New residential housing construction has dropped since then along with a decline in demand for solid wood products. Housing in the U.S. is severely underbuilt. It is old and in need of repair. Housing, however, is tied to employment, which has been severely impacted by the pandemic. Some homeowners have begun remodeling projects during this lockdown period, but many contractors have delayed or cancelled large remodeling projects. However, since most single-family homes are built in the South, the Southern market may fare better than other regions.

Since wholesale lumber prices bottomed out in April, they have risen 50% to \$523 per thousand board feet. The reason for the rise is that a lot of families, homebound with the virus pandemic, are turning to home remodeling projects. This has created a demand for decking, fencing, and treated lumber. Lumber companies are having to adjust to the 'over-the-shoulder' trade by providing shorter-length lumber—eight and ten-footers. The do-it-yourself sector has created a surge in Google searches for “How to Build a Shed”, etc. Home improvement loans are also up.

### TEXAS FOREST ECONOMIC REPORT

According to Texas A&M Service’s 2019 Texas Economic Report, the forest sector had a total economic impact of \$36.7 billion in industry output. This includes direct, indirect, and induced impacts. Every dollar generated also contributed an additional 94 cents to the rest of the state’s economy.

The forest sector also supported more than 168,190 jobs and every job resulted in another 1.49 jobs in the state. In addition, the forests provide almost \$93 billion annually in ecosystem services. These services include regulating the climate, purifying drinking water, filtering air pollutants, providing wildlife habitat, and creating recreation opportunities.

### BUILDING WITH WOOD

Engineered wood can have the same lifespan as other materials used in conventional building. In addition, it is fire resistant and light. Its lighter weight is a plus for earthquake prone areas, and it can be dismantled and reused down the road. According to an article in Arch Daily, the use of wood in commercial and industrial buildings is on the rise. It lists seven benefits of using timber in commercial and industrial design:

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### 1. Cost-effectiveness

Mid-rise buildings in the U.S. cost an average of 23% more to build out of concrete than wood framing and steel-framed buildings are 41% more expensive than wood. In 2017, the average price for steel mid-rise buildings was \$208.40/square foot, \$156.50/square foot for concrete, and \$119.70/square foot for wood.

### 2. Versatility and adaptability

These buildings need to be flexible as tenants' needs change over time, and wood meets these challenges.

### 3. Ease of use

Building off site with wood prefabrication and then assembling on-site makes structural wood buildings relatively fast to construct and advantageous for tight urban job sites where finding space for concrete delivering and mixing or steel fabrication can be challenging.

### 4. Sustainability

Wood is a renewable building material that has fewer environmental impacts.

### 5. Aesthetics and biophilic benefits

Wood has a natural beauty and warmth that is appealing to people. Exposed wood trusses or heavy timber columns are especially pleasing in design.

### 6. Choice and customization

Wood construction can include a multitude of choices: dimension lumber framing, mass timber, cross-laminated timber, nail-lamination timber, and glue-laminated timber.

### 7. Durability

Properly maintained, wood can last hundreds of years, and heavy timber can resist fire by developing an outer layer of char while remaining structurally stable.

## THE INTERNATIONAL TIMBER MARKET

The spruce bark beetle infestation along with drought and windstorms in Europe has resulted in a surplus of salvage material that needs to be utilized quickly. This condition is driving down log costs in Central Europe and causing timber owners to seek additional log markets. Softwood lumber exports out of this region will likely increase, especially exports to China.

U.S. exports to China have been declining for some time as a result of the trade dispute. The Chinese government's 25 percent tariff on southern yellow pine has stopped the previous growing export market. There is a high inventory of logs in

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the U.S. from the shutdown and slower China trade. Logs from the U.S. South travel in backhaul containers that may not be available.

Pellets are critical to Europe where they are used to generate electricity. This market should do OK since it is not subject to trade disputes and there are dedicated pellet shipping facilities.

## PURPLE MARTINS

According to a recent article in the Wildlife Professional (Vol. 14 No. 1), many aerial insectivore (insect eating birds) populations are declining. These birds are noted for their unpredictable flight, chirps, buzzes, and large nest colonies. Purple Martins belong to this classification of birds, and the eastern subspecies (*Progne subis subis*) that has a range east of the Rocky Mountains is among those experiencing a long-term population decline.

Purple Martins once nested in tree cavities, between boulders, and in other natural spots, but they now primarily nest in multi-compartmented birdhouses and gourd clusters. Native Americans provided hollow gourds for the bird, and humans have been providing birdhouses for most of them since 1900. These special birdhouses kept out house sparrows (*Passer domesticus*) which arrived in the U.S. in 1815 and European starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*) which appeared in 1890. Both of these birds usurp purple martin cavities, lowering their productivity. While the purple martin is quite dependent on humans to be productive, fewer people are providing housing for them. Several organizations are encouraging the public, especially young people, to establish and manage a martin colony at their homes.

## PRESCRIBED FIRE AND COVID - 19 BLOG

NC State University has published a new blog post that addresses making prescribed fire decisions in the Covid-19 era. The post can be found at – <https://research.cnr.ncsu.edu/blogs/southeast-fireupdate/2020/04/08/prescribed-fire-smoke-public-health-and-covid-19/>

## CONTINUING FORESTRY EDUCATION

The Society of American Foresters (SAF) online learning system (ForestEd.org) had a successful first year in 2019. It offers continuing forest education credits (CFE's) for certified foresters, but is open to anyone, regardless of SAF membership.

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