

# Support your local forests

Root Cause to connect sustainable forestry to local builders

□ BY LANG HORNTHAL □  
In April 2016, the U.S. Green Building Council announced the Alternative Compliance Path (ACP), a pilot program designed to advance environmentally responsible forest management practices while promoting the use of responsible wood sourcing. ACP seeks to expand the range of responsible forest products for LEED credits by recognizing Forest Stewardship Certification (FSC), Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI), American Tree Farm Systems, and other programs endorsed by the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification. The intent of the program is to promote wise forest management and minimize the illegal procurement of wood. It will also benefit local forest products.

Asheville residents are well known for buying local and supporting local farmers' markets and local businesses through the Go Local program. Buying local often means keeping up to three times more money in the local economy. It lends greater support to our community and civic needs. Buying local forest products offers the same opportunity, but it is unique in that it also supports the use of a raw material also found in our backyard.

Our region is known as the "Birthplace of Modern Forestry," where wise forest management was proven to increase the health of a forest while improving the quality of the trees being grown. There is also a history of abusing our forests, but the beauty seen in our surrounding forests is a reminder that our forests are resilient and renewable. Today, clear cutting and illegal harvests have taken a backseat to invasive species and climate change as the biggest threats to our forests. Regardless of the threat, the need for sustainable forestry remains.

Sustainable forestry means different things to different people. To some, it is more conservation-oriented where a forest's health is for the benefit of the ecosystem services they provide: clean air and water, biodiversity, and wildlife habitat, just to name just a few. To others, sustainable forestry is the management of forests for increased yield and healthy trees, which can be cut for the creation of jobs and supply of shelter, food and warmth. As a student obtaining a Masters of Science in Sustainability Studies program at Lenoir-Rhyne University, I embrace a definition of sustainability that encompasses an environmental, economic and social measure as our forests continue to support the needs of the current generation, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.

The complexity of forest ecosystems is incredible and how forests are best utilized will always mean different things to different people. Solitude, recreation, and livelihood are just a few, but all acknowledge that



the importance of forests cut across all sectors of society. But, in the end, with the exception of our phenomenal public forests, trees are private commodities that give benefits which are shared with the greater public. The clean air we breathe, water we drink, and viewsheds we enjoy are the direct result of private landowners, many of whom have management plans that benefit their forests health. Without conscientious landowners, Western North Carolina would not likely be the draw that it is today.

So, how can we support those landowners and their forests that support our region? One way is by acknowledging the efforts made by landowners to certify their forests. Forest certification is a mechanism for gauging the quality of forest management against a set of standards that are meant to account for many aspects including growth, harvesting and ecological impacts associated with harvesting. Certification not only improves the value of the trees grown, but also signals the level of commitment that the landowner is giving to their forest's management. These

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benefits come with an added layer of management, requiring third-party certifiers to inspect and verify the management efforts. But, access to certified wood markets and healthier forests make it worthwhile.

Another way to support your local forests is to buy local wood. Not all landowners are in a position to certify their forests, but when local wood markets are vibrant, demand will set fair pricing that adequately values local wood and encourages those owners to maintain their forests, rather than converting them to other uses. It also means that more wood stays in our region, creating a smaller carbon footprint, and increasing jobs for loggers, sawmills, wood processors, and end-users. Once again, more money stays in our region under this scenario. This exponentially supports our communities, particularly the more rural counties with a his-

tory of relying on forests for survival. We will also begin to see many wood products return to our region after losing market share due to a global marketplace and the most recent economic downturn. While the economy has returned, resulting in a regrowth in the building industry, the competition from outside goods remains. Often, these goods are competitively priced and produced on a scale in which smaller mills cannot compete. But, like all markets, there is more to something than just the lowest price. Like knowing where your wood came from and who cut the tree and turned it into a product with a story behind it and a quality that could be relied upon. By using local materials, you are contributing to an economy that breeds accountability and transparency by creating relationships that go beyond a Google search and an email.

While building has returned, the market is still competitive, requiring builders and their clients to carefully consider all aspects of construction while staying on budget. To truly utilize more local forest products requires a trustworthy network of suppliers that can deliver what they promise at a price that was promised. Developing this network will require a consistent supply and demand, but, like the chicken or the egg, which comes first? While the chicken versus the egg answer has eluded me, I believe a solution to our local wood products market is within reach.

Root Cause, with the help of the WNCGBC, is reestablishing the network of quality wood products that can be used by the building industry. To accomplish this, we will identify those products that are sorely needed and cannot be sourced locally. Root Cause is dedicated to helping facilitate the creation of those products and supporting local mills and processors in a manner that will allow them to offer desired products, ultimately becoming certified (if desired). These efforts will require listening to the needs of builders and forest product industry alike, with the end goal of sustainably satisfying those needs and those of our forests.

To learn more about Root Cause and to find more information on local forest products, visit [www.root-causewnc.org](http://www.root-causewnc.org).

Lang Hornthal is the owner of Appalachian Designs and executive director of Root Cause, an advocacy group for the wise management of our local forests. He is also a student at Lenoir-Rhyne University in Asheville where he is completing his Masters of Science in Sustainability Studies.

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