

Sustaining the North products

The Great Lakes Forest Alliance looks at how this industry can evolve to not only grow, but also stay alive



Kim Kaiser

In June, The Great Lakes Forest Alliance hosted a conference in Madison, Wis., to help answer some of the questions currently pressuring

the forest products industry. With a focus on sustainability, the conference sought to answer whether we are currently faced with a crisis or a unique opportunity.

The three-day conference kicked off with a presentation by keynote speaker Patrick Moore, cofounder of Greenpeace International and chairman of Greenspirit Strategies Ltd. Moore's message was clear: Trees are the answer.

Moore's presentation acted as a pep rally, stirring emotions and getting the attendees pumped up for the next two days of in-depth discussion about the state of our forests and the forest products industry.

"Sustainability isn't hopeless; that's just a myth," Moore said. "Changes through practices and technologies can help sustainability."

As an example, Moore cited two examples of change. First, he pointed to turning off a light when you leave the room. This is a change in behavior. Second, you can switch your light bulbs from incandescent bulbs to compact fluorescent bulbs — a change in technology. The two changes together make a big difference, he said.

This same practice can be applied to sustaining our forests and the ecosystems that thrive in them.

"Wood is the most renewable resource; yet environmental movement policy is to cut fewer trees, to use less wood," Moore said. "That's an anti-environmental policy."

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American forest industry

Moore also touched on forest certification and the debate over whether having only one certification system is good or bad. In his opinion, a monopoly of certification systems is a bad thing. "Monopolies are bad, both politically and every other way," he said.

“Growing more trees and using more wood is the answer, but we’re up against a movement that religiously believes, with no scientific evidence, against the use of trees and is against nuclear energy.”

— Patrick Moore, GreenSpirit

Moore also said there is a bias against wood in the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED program. "All this certification — where is the certification for steel and concrete? It's completely ironic. Everyone should be on the same field," he said.

"Growing more trees and using more wood is the answer, but we're up against a movement that religiously believes, with no scientific evidence, against the use of trees and is against nuclear energy," Moore claimed.

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A changing business

On day two of the conference, Larry Selzer's, The Conservation Fund, presentation, "The Challenge to turn problems into opportunities," focused on finding new ways for the forest industry to do business and on the problem of how much land has changed hands in recent years.

Since 1996, 35 million acres of forest land have changed hands, he said. A big part of the problem is that parcel size is diminishing.

"Wall Street calls it progress, but it makes it harder to man-

“Ultimately, wood is the way to go. Ultimately it's the most sustainable building product we have.”

— Sara Hines, presidential management fellowship program

age and decreases the quality [of the forest]," Selzer said.

National policy and economic incentive does not favor sustainability, Selzer said, and that needs to shift. Among the things needed to be done are new planning and conservation tools, increased funding and insurance that the next generation

will be prepared to inherit and manage the forest land.

"Without careful planning, growth will hurt forest management and the industry. New development is good for the wood products industry, but not for forests," Selzer said.

Selzer pointed to the Green Infrastructure (www.greeninfrastructure.net), which looks at conservation and development together. The organization assesses which land is the best to conserve and the best land to accommodate development.

"We must work together as a nation to ensure the forest opportunities we have are there for the next generation," Selzer said.

Peter Ince of the U.S. Forest Service Forest Products Laboratory discussed North American and global forest product market trends.

Peter Ince's presentation focused on trends in the North American and global forest products market. In the lumber and wood panel sector of the market, the down housing market is having a strong impact, he said.

"The correction to the housing market is going to be significant," he said. "Softwood lumber prices are down 44 percent; they've been crushed by the decline in the housing construction."

Log prices are also down, somewhere between 15 and 20 percent. OSB is down 56 percent, due to a combination of excess mill capacity and the housing bust, Ince explained.

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growth is predicted to be exponential, Rick Merdan, Newpage Corp., said in his presentation, "The Market for Chain of Custody Products: A Fad or the Future."

Consumer penetration can already be seen. For example, Toys R Us has introduced FSC-certified wood toys and Walmart sells FSC-certified patio furniture.

Other presentations during the second day of the conference centered around the need for sustaining and managing our forests properly for the next five generations, finding additional revenue options, such as selling carbon credits as Peter Conor, president of W.D. Flooring, suggested, and the ways landowners are changing in demographic.

"Look for solutions; don't complain about the problems," said Kevin Korpi of the Michigan Forest Products Council.

Building green

"Ultimately, wood is the way to go. Ultimately it's the most sustainable building product we have," said Sara Hines, a fellow of the Presidential Management Fellowship Program.

Jiixin Chen of the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources talked about how sustainably managed forests can help with the climate change problem. Reducing our use of fossil fuels is not practical in the near future, he said.

Instead, we should increase forest and wood product carbon stocks, he said. This can be done through reducing deforestation; enhancing sequestration rate in existing and new forests; providing wood fuel as a substitute for fossil fuel; and providing wood products in lieu of more CO₂ intensive materials.

Jim Bowyer of Dovetail Partners Inc. discussed the green building movement and various certification systems. Although it seems like a new trend, Bowyer said the green building idea really came out of the oil shocks of the 1970s.

He predicted that by 2010 more than half the members of the National Association of Home Builders will be incorporating green building practices.

Currently, there are 47 green building programs in the United States, many of which are offshoots of LEED, Bowyer said.

According to Bowyer, the key to getting green building to the forefront is bringing life cycle assessment into the programs. Life cycle assessment examines all measurable factors including raw material inputs, products and byproducts, emissions, effluents and wastes, Bowyer explained.

Life cycle inventory can include

all stages of production, use and disposal, including: extraction, transportation, primary processing, conversion to semifinished products, incorporated into finished products, maintenance and disposal/reuse. Understanding what goes into life cycle assessment and being able to discuss it with customers will be important for salespeople, he said.

"When life cycle assessment is brought into green building programs, wood

use will skyrocket. Wood outshines everything else when you do a life cycle assessment. Green building is a clear opportunity for the forest products industry. There's a disconnect between getting the most LEED points possible and building green."

As Patrick Moore noted the very first day of the conference, wood is the answer.

"It's not a wild idea; it's a good idea," Bowyer said. **W&**

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