

“What’s Going Right”

Written By: Mike Albrecht

This 3-word title could end with a period, an exclamation point, or a question mark. For this article, my intent is to stay with an exclamation point.

I’ll set the stage for the “exclamation point” with a few facts as follows.

Currently, over 56% of America’s 760 million acres of forest is privately held by approximately 10 million family forest owners. The vast majority of these private ownerships are east of the Mississippi. (The majority of these eastern forest landowners are well aware of the many western forestry challenges (debacles) and hope they stay . . . west!)

The western loggers might choose the title to read “What’s Going Right?” with a question mark. Regardless, optimism can be found in the fact that the majority of America’s forests are privately owned and cared for by tree farmers across our country who see wisdom in managing for multiple uses, while profiting from a renewable resource . . . trees. I think if we can all “hang on” for a bit longer, America’s trees, and the loggers who harvest them, will soon be more highly valued.

Here’s why I say that. Wood, in the form of lumber, the renewable resource and product we understand, is steadily becoming the world’s preferred building material. Alex de Rijke, director of the London-based cross laminated timber (CLT) firm, dRMM, put it this way, “Timber is the new concrete. . . . the 17th century was the age of stone, the 18th century was the peak of brick. The 19th century was the age of iron, and the 20th century the century of concrete. The 21st century will be the time for timber.”

Canadian architect Michael Green summarizes it like this: “Climate change and the need for more urban housing collide in a crisis that demands building solutions with low energy and low carbon footprints. As a renewable material grown by the power of the sun, wood offers a new way to think about our future.” The fact that architects and builders are embracing CLT as the preferred building product for the future should be viewed by us loggers as a major “exclamation point” to tag onto “What’s Going Right.”

Here are a few more points to consider. The average person can go about 3 weeks without eating. Thank God that we have the world’s best farmers and ranchers feeding America and so many others. That same average person will expire in about 3 to 5 days without water, and in about 3 minutes without oxygen.

Hydrologists estimate that 60 – 70% of America’s water flows out of our forested watersheds. On average, scientists estimate that one acre of trees can produce enough oxygen for 18 people to continually breathe freely. And who is entrusted

to work in our forests, watersheds, and airsheds that provide us with the very essence of life? The American logger! That trust is the foundation for this title “What’s Going Right!” To maintain that trust, we must continue to train our logging crews that there are two products that demand our full consideration: What we haul out of the forest, and the forest we leave behind.

I’ll end with something else going right, maybe the most hopeful thing of all. John Buckley (representing the environmental community in our region) and I (representing the timber industry) fought through the California timber wars of the 1980’s and 90’s. John and I both had our voices, our pens, and our “people” who engaged in the battles with us.

In California, Y2K ushered in drought, bark beetles, and catastrophic wildfires into our forests. As Sierra Nevada forests were being strangled to death from too many trees, vast swaths began to succumb to disease and burn right before our eyes. Our warring factions had an epiphany: We had better lay down our arms and figure out how this could be turned around before the forests both sides wanted to protect ended up being destroyed.

In 2010, 30 different local and regional groups (including environmental groups, the timber industry (contractors, sawmills, associations), homeowner groups, recreational users, USFS, BLM, PG&E, and others) got together, checked our egos and pride at the door, and began a discussion that continues today. It centered on two key points:

1. We wanted to protect our forests for multiple uses.
2. Protection would require removal of excess trees and vegetation that fuel massive wildfires as well as the markets essential to process those materials.

We got off to a slow start. It took four meetings to name the group. At one point I suggested “Collaboration Results in Analysis Paralysis.” The group did not like the acronym “CRAP.” We eventually settled on Yosemite Stanislaus Solutions, and “YSS” was born.

In 2013, what we all feared the most happened: the Rim Fire. The Rim Fire burned 247,000 acres, 80,000 acres of it in Yosemite National Park. It threatened San Francisco’s water and power supply, which resulted in national attention. After the smoke settled, YSS went to work promoting over 300 million board feet of timber salvage, thousands of tons of biomass removal that was converted to electrical power, and tens of thousands of acres of reforestation.

None of this has gone perfectly, but our collaborative’s results stand in stark contrast to the millions of acres of forest carnage that lie fallow across the state of California and serve as a testimony to mankind’s unwillingness to compromise. Because of the efforts of the YSS collaborative, over \$100 million has been sent to the Stanislaus National Forest in the past two years to facilitate over 200,000 acres of landscape level projects.

A recap of “What’s Going Right”...

1. The majority of America’s forests remain privately stewarded by folks who value “multiple use” forest management.
2. Loggers are entrusted by the American public to work in forests that provide the very essence of life: our water and air.
3. The 21st century is ushering in an enthusiastic “yes” to using wood as the primary building material for our future homes and cities.
4. “Working together” is slowly but surely replacing the “Timber War” approach to implementing forest management solutions.

Right now, “What’s Going Right” can end with an exclamation point. With the American Loggers Council’s work at the national level, and your work in your community, we can keep the question mark out of the title.

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