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Another spin on CLT.....



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Cross-laminated timber as forest-management strategy

By TJ Martinell

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The role of cross-laminated timber (CLT) in improving forest health was discussed by U.S. Forest Service (USFS) Chief Vicki Christiansen at the 2018 Pacific NorthWest Economic Region Summit in Spokane on July 24.



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The state legislature earlier this year called on the Washington State Building Code Council (WSBCC) to adopt rules for cross-laminated timber (CLT) use when building residential and commercial buildings. The move represents ongoing efforts to bring CLT into mainstream use for residential and commercial construction, which would create commercial value for the small-diameter trees that are contributing to poor forestland health in Washington state.

For state and federal officials, as well as private stakeholders, that change could hasten restoration work by making tree thinning a profitable endeavor rather than a costly project requiring government funding.

The potential CLT offer was articulated by U.S. Forest Service (USFS) Chief Vicki Christiansen at the [2018 Pacific NorthWest Economic Region Summit](#) in Spokane on July 24.

“We can use new opportunities for forest product delivery to help us to improve forest conditions, while also creating jobs and sustaining rural communities. We can implement these new practices by working together and being a good neighbor.”

Forest Service Region 6 covers Washington and Oregon and includes 28 percent of all forestland across Washington. In recent years the federal agency has struggled to conduct forest health work due to “fire borrowing” in which those portions of its budget are used to pay for the high cost of firefighting. During last year’s wildfire season USFS spent \$2 billion on wildfire fighting, more than half its budget. There were 50 large fires on USFS land and over 411,000 acres burned, costing the agency \$130 million. Over 90 percent of those fires were human-caused.

In April, federal legislation sought to end the practice of fire-borrowing by allocating additional long-term funding to USFS to the tune of \$2 billion starting in 2020.

A [2014 analysis](#) by the Nature Conservancy and USFS concluded that half a million acres of forestland managed by the federal agency in Eastern Washington were in need of thinning and prescribed burns.

Along with the new funding, Christiansen said that they can also “align our best practice policies and guidance with the changing markets that are certainly emerging in the Pacific Northwest.”

CLT is the result of gluing several layers of lumber to form a single wood panel, making it feasible to use small-diameter trees for commercial purposes that otherwise would be removed as part of pre-commercial



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thinning projects. Its value was recognized by the state Department of Natural Resources in its [20-year forest health plan](#) as a way to minimize project costs.

A CLT pilot program managed by the state Department of Enterprise Services last year built 20 classrooms in five school districts using CLT.

Also speaking at the July 24 summit was Katterra Co-founder Fritz Wolff.

While Wolff touted the ways CLT can help reduce housing construction costs, Christiansen said “the raw materials for mass timber can come from small diameter trees that we must remove to improve forest conditions. So, I see no downside here, because wood is a green building material far better for the environment.”

She added, “It’s a thriving mass timber market that can help us reduce hazardous fuels, protect homes and keep communities safe from the risk of fire, while also boosting rural jobs and economies. The outcome is communities that are safer, greener and more prosperous.”

Last year, USFS treated 555,592 acres of forestland in Washington and Oregon to either restore or enhance their health. That work also includes 723 miles of stream habit restored or enhanced, and five watersheds moved to an improved condition.

“Many landscapes and watersheds are in need of treatment,” Christiansen said. “So to build our capacity, to improve forest conditions, we are reforming our processes across the board.”

She added that along with CLT, “improving forest conditions takes active management, using every tool we have, whether it’s grazing, timber sales, mechanical fuel treatments or the use of fire. Often our treatments call for a combination of one or more of these tools, but we need to do more work. And we are making opportunities to get more work done.”



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