



Missouri Forest Products

While I was growing up my father made a living in southern Missouri in the forest products industry. I later spent about eighteen years following in his footsteps logging in Shannon County. We harvested timber from mostly private land timber sales and sold logs to local sawmills. These small sawmills processed logs into forest products that many of us rely on every day. Most of the products produced from these mills were railroad ties, pallet lumber, blocking, flooring lumber, staves, and grade/furniture lumber. I also spent some time hauling cordwood to the local charcoal plant where charcoal was made for backyard barbecues.

A Missouri Department of Economic Development report stated that Missouri is one of the leading producers of wooden pallets, charcoal and walnut products. The forest products industry is economically important to the state. Below I will spend some time talking about some of the wood products produced in Missouri.

Each year railroad ties are purchased from sawmills to make new railroad lines and to replace worn out ties in existing lines. According to Jim Gauntt, executive director of the Railway Tie Association, 20 million crossties were purchased in the US by railroads in 2006. I estimate that these 20 million crossties would have about 800 million board feet of lumber in them. Most crossties are made out of hardwood logs that are sound without rot.

A pallet is a structure used for stacking and moving objects with a forklift; most pallets are made of wood. It would be hard to find a company today that does not use pallets. Imagine today's warehouses and shipping operations if products were still manually loaded one box at a time. Today, there are about 450 million new pallets produced in North America each year. About 1.9 billion are in use at any given time (Pallets 101: John W. Clarke, Grate Pallet, Inc.). Most of Missouri's low value lumber is used to make some of these pallets. One thing that I have learned throughout the years is that when pallet producers are not selling pallets, the national economy is starting to experience a slow down.

Hardwood flooring and furniture is made from lumber produced in Missouri. Most houses have hardwood floors made from clear pieces of lumber. Fine furniture and kitchen cabinets usually will be made out of the best cuttings of hardwood lumber. Some of the cheaper pieces of furniture will be made out of particle or pressed board with a thin slice of hardwood veneer glued onto the board.

Barrels made from wood are a product made in Missouri. These barrels are used to store/age wine and bourbon and are shipped all over the world. The staves used to make these barrels come from white oak trees. My grandfather used to cut down these trees and manually split the staves from the stem and load them by hand onto a truck. At the stave mill the staves were cut into small boards and were placed together to make a wooden barrel. One of the largest barrel factories in the world is located in Lebanon, MO.

The largest U.S. producer of charcoal is located in Belle, MO, with several more companies scattered throughout the Ozarks. Lump charcoal and charcoal briquettes are the two forms of charcoal used for barbecues. Charcoal is made from slow burning wood under low oxygen. According to the Barbeque Industry Association, in 1997 eighty four percent of all families owned barbeque grills and 884 thousand tons of charcoal were used in these grills.

There are many other traditional forest products produced in Missouri besides the ones I have talked about above. Some of the other wood products produced in Missouri is blocking (wood used to set products on), handles for tools, wooden fence posts, utility poles, wood pellets, and log house logs to mention a few.

The economic impact from the forest products industry is huge to Missouri. The total (including indirect and induced) economic impact of Forest Product Industries in Missouri is over \$4.32 billion, constituting about 2% of Missouri's Gross State Product (Department of Economic Development report). The DED report also suggests that there are 67,741 forest products jobs paying \$2.8 billion in salaries in Missouri. As you have read above, the forest products industry is economically important to Missouri.

I have spent time talking about the traditional forest products produced in Missouri. There are many other forest products that our forests in Missouri produce. I can not miss the opportunity to remind everyone that our forests provide the following: clean air, clean water, sequesters carbon, wildlife habitat, botanicals and medicinals, wood floral, and forest recreational opportunities. It is a renewable resource that if managed properly can provide environmental, economical, and social benefits to all Missourians.

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