

Board of Forestry
Professional Foresters Examining Committee (PFEC)
California Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan item 1.16
Lumber Grader Training and Certification White Paper

June 2021

In May of this year, the Executive Officer of the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection requested the Professional Foresters Examining Committee (PFEC) to review and make recommendations to the Board regarding item 1.16 of the California Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan developed by the Forest Management Task Force (FMTF). Please see Item 1.16 below.

INCREASE ASSISTANCE TO SMALL PRIVATE LANDOWNERS Significantly increasing the pace and scale of forest management across the state can only be achieved through significant contributions from small private landowners. Family-owned forest lands make up about 20 percent of California’s forests, approximately 7 million acres. Nearly 90 percent of this acreage is comprised of parcels that are 50 acres or less in size. Almost 60 percent of the state’s 200,000 non-industrial private forest landowners (NIPFs) are 65 years and older, and only nine percent derive income from their forest land. The state offers various assistance programs to NIPFs, including the California Forest Improvement Program (CFIP), Forest Stewardship Program, and Wildfire Resilience Program. However, limited state funding generates competition among small landowners, and the lack of a common framework or shared goals poses further challenges to expanding forest management across private lands. Accordingly, CAL FIRE is partnering with the USFS, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the American Forest Foundation, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), and UC Cooperative Extension (UCCE) to create a comprehensive program to assist small landowners with forest assessments, thinning, prescribed fire and rapid recovery after wildfires.

1.16 Expand Lumber Certifiers: Expand Lumber Certifiers: BOF will assist in establishing additional small-scale forest product infrastructure, such as portable sawmills, and will explore the potential for Registered Professional Foresters to become third-party certified as Lumber Graders.

This white paper is intended to provide the Board with possible variables and solutions discussed by the PFEC to address this item.

LUMBER GRADING

The May PFEC meeting included outside participants representing the California Forestry Association (CFA), California Licensed Forester Association (CLFA), and invited panelist Lon Sibert, who owns a lumber grading and assessment firm called Renewable Resource Associates, Inc. out of Atlanta, Georgia. Lon discussed the organizational structure and industry standards for certified lumber grading.

The American Lumber Standards Committee Incorporated (ALSC) is a non-profit organization comprised of manufacturers, distributors, user and consumers of lumber that serve on a standing committee for the American Softwood Lumber Standard (Voluntary Product Standard 20) and administers an accreditation program for the grade marking of lumber produced under the American Lumber Standard System (ALS). The ALS system provides the basis for the acceptance of lumber and design values for lumber by the building codes throughout the United States ¹.

Lumber grading bureaus in the West consist of the Western Wood Products Association (WWPA), the Pacific Lumber Inspection Bureau (PLIB) and the Redwood Inspection Service (RIS) and provide training to prospective lumber graders for certification. Training is comprehensive and detailed, requiring a minimum amount of lineal feet of lumber grading under the supervision of a certified lumber grading supervisor. A PowerPoint presentation depicting criteria for lumber grading and assessment can be found at the Board website in the Binder Materials for the July Board meeting. Lumber grading certification is not a one or two-day training but requires two to six months of grading experience under a certified lumber grader.

When an organization becomes an accredited member of the ALSC, they are required to follow the grading guidelines for the ALSC which in turn requires mandatory auditing of grading performance. Lumber stamps are issued to these organizations and are typically “linked” to the location of the grading site, whether it be a mill or lumber yard. The image below depicts the information on the lumber grading stamp for the WWPA:



Western Wood Products Association (WWPA)
1500 SW First Avenue, Suite 870
Portland, OR 97201-5815

503.224.3930
fax: 503.224.3934
e-mail: info@wwpa.org

1. WWPA is a rules writing agency.
2. Approval of rules they publish and as an inspection agency including mill service under:
 - a. WWPA rules
 - b. WCLIB rules
 - c. NLGA rules
 - d. RIS rules
 - e. NGR and Scaffold Plank portions of the SPIB rules
 - f. Section 6.2-Eastern White Pine Common Board Grades of the NelMA rules
3. Approved to supervise glued and machine graded lumber.
4. Approved to provide heat treatment audit services under all rules.

As stated previously, these stamps most commonly are tied to a location where the lumber is graded. Occasionally, these stamps are used for “transit” grading outside of the normal stamp and grading location for a fee. For example, the WWPA will supply a transit grading session and stamp for a \$900 per day fee for WWPA members or \$1,000 per day for non-members. In addition, the transit grader’s costs for travel and lodging expenses must be covered by the party requesting the service. Transit grading sessions are available where allowed under the ALSC and are increasing in demand with the recent spike in lumber values. The WWPA has three transit graders in all of California and the PLIB has eight in the western region. Phone interviews of western grading bureau representatives made apparent the importance of having a specific location for the issuance of their stamp and that current availability

¹ David E. Kretschmann, President, www.ALSC.org, general info, May 24, 2021

for transit grading often results in three to four months delay in getting to a property to conduct grading.

Costs associated with transit grading are not limited to the expense of the grader, but also with the work involved to achieve grading. Grading of lumber requires that the lumber be inspected on both wide faces and both edges. This requires someone to help the lumber grader turn and sort the boards as they are graded, and to trim pieces of lumber, if necessary, to achieve the desired grade.

Important points to consider include:

- a. If the lumber would be sold and installed as a “seasoned” or “dry” product (i.e. with a maximum moisture content of 19% at time of grading), the lumber owner would have to invest the time and effort to either “air-dry” the lumber or have it “kiln-dried”, prior to grading.
- b. If the lumber would be sold and installed as a “non-seasoned” product (known as green lumber), it would be in the lumber owner’s best interest to have the boards graded soon after milling to reduce repeated handling of the lumber and to minimize exposure to climate and biological elements that can deteriorate and reduce the lumber grade and value over time.

The following is a list of recommendations and considerations from our discussion at the May 2021 PFEC meeting.

PFEC List of Recommendations/Considerations

The following list is not ranked in any order of priority.

- 1) The Board should consider that any prospective training for lumber grading should not be limited to RPFs. Owners of small portable sawmills, utilities personnel, LTOs and Fire Safe Councils could all benefit from lumber grading training. The question is what will be the demand for such services?
- 2) The Board should also evaluate the potential for violations of the Forest Practice Act and Rules. Small scale timber operations without the required timber harvest permit that produce lumber for sale, barter, or exchange pose a potential problem. The Board may need to determine the amount of lumber that can be generated for “personal use”. This could also create a CAL FIRE tracking problem and an RPF licensing issue if an RPF conducting grading is involved with an unpermitted timber harvest project.
- 3) The Board should consider allowing commercial harvests on CFIP projects where small portable sawmills are employed. Project revenue generated from the sale of lumber products could be reinvested back into the CFIP Fund to help support the fund which in turn, supports California small private forest landowners.
- 4) Training for lumber grading is a process requiring experience and oversight. If the various groups of professionals and organizations listed above (item 1) could coordinate regionally, then a lumber grading service could potentially provide the necessary oversight for lumber grading

training to provide for certification under the grading service's grade stamp. A state sponsored one-year pilot program could help to identify the demand, required coordination and subsequent viability of any proposed state supported lumber grader training program to achieve the objectives of the California Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan's recommendations under Item 1.16.