MARKETING DOUGLAS-FIR IN THE INLAND NORTHWEST

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INTRODUCTION

Inland Douglas-fir is in demand both in the domestic and international markets. Douglas-fir's wood properties and variety of products contribute to a wide range of values. Douglas-fir grows in a very large geographic area which contributes to the varied tree form and quality of the logs. The tree characteristics in Douglas-fir that are of marketing importance are sweep and crook, knot size and location, and taper. These characteristics will determine what products the log can produce.

DOUGLAS-FIR CHARACTERISTICS

On the more moist sites, Douglas-fir grows a straight bole with few knots and very little taper. On the drier canyon sites, Douglas-fir tends to have much more taper often with hook or pistol butts and sweep if the tree has grown as a codominant or intermediate in the stand. Trees grown in the open tend to hold their branches longer which produces larger knots that are closer together. On windy sites, Douglas-fir shows signs of ring shake that often runs up through the lower half of the stem. These stem characteristics determine the quality and types of lumber products that can be produced. Each manufacturing facility, depending on it's equipment and technology, utilizes a specific log differently. Some milling operations slice or peel veneer sheets, while others cut high grade boards, specialty products, or dimension lumber.

PROCESSING DOUGLAS-FIR

Douglas-fir in the Inland Northwest is sawed primarily for the dimension market. Specialty markets use Douglas-fir for mining timbers, railroad ties, and plywood peelers. In those areas where Douglas fir has good form, small knots and close ring count, the international market is very competitive, often times purchasing logs at prices that exceed what domestic processors can mill and sell in their respective markets.

The domestic market includes a wide range of milling processors. The size and quality of the log determines which products can be manufactured. Each sawmill operation identifies the best size log and grades that can be run most efficiently through the milling operation. In domestic operations the correct log size matched to the mills efficiency to process the log is of primary importance if production schedules are to be met.

The international market prefers the straight longer length logs that can be handled easily in loading and shipping. The larger logs are generally the highest value as long as the log has good form and is bucked to the proper lengths. In selling logs on the international market, appearance is very important. The logs prepared for shipping need to be even and bundled by grade and sort.

MARKETING DOUGLAS-FIR

Marketing logs requires a knowledge of the purchasers interested and the quality of the particular timber for sale. In marketing Douglas-fir, all potential buyers must be notified in ample time to evaluate their needs, have reasonable access to the timber, and have the flexibility to purchase the size, length, or grade of log they can utilize most efficiently. Once the timber is sold, log quality now becomes an important factor in the operation. Bucking for grade, size and length will determine how much revenue can be generated. The ability to merchandize a specific log enables the seller to maximize the net dollars for the segment. The ideal situation is to maximize the net dollar return on each segment and produce the highest dollar amounts for the whole stem. Several computer programs are available for maximizing revenues through proper bucking practices. Bucking logs for maximum log scale is another practice that may provide increased revenues by increasing the net log scale, but caution needs to be taken in this area since small increases can be obtained through better bucking for scale as compared to dollar increases that may be available for a specific log quality. More often the higher price will offset the increases in log scale. In the Inland Northwest the Scribner Decimal C log scale is used. This scale utilizes a maximum scaling cylinder of 20 feet. The scale used by most purchasers west of the Cascade Range and for international logs is the West side long log Scribner Decimal C, which scales the tree as one segment up to 40 feet in length. The East and West side scaling end diameters are rounded off differently and the difference between these methods is approximately 20%, with the East side showing the higher volume.

SUMMARY

In summary, Douglas-fir is a highly desirable species providing products in many different markets. Douglas-fir's primary use is dimension lumber and due to it's high degree of serviceability, Douglas-fir may become a more important species where increased strength is required. The high demand for Douglas-fir by both the domestic and international markets combined with it's use for construction and finish products will keep Dougals-fir a very valuable species.

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Published in proceedings of "Interior Douglas-Fir: The Species and Its Management" held February 27 – March 1, 1990 in Spokane, WA, USA.
Compiled and edited by D.M. Baumgartner and J.E. Lotan, Washington State University Extension, Pullman, WA.
(Bulletin Office, WSU, PO Box 645912, Pullman, WA 99164-5912.) MISC0230. 301 pp.