

It's time we look to our forests

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It's no secret that the timber industry has had its share of struggles during this economic downturn. We've faced historic drops in housing starts and lumber sales and there still remains a huge backlog of unsold homes and underwater mortgages. We're worried about rising fuel costs and an aging workforce. While it's easy to point out the challenges in front of us, we should all be taking a closer look at what's happening around us. It's change and opportunity. And both are happening at an unprecedented pace. There are big changes taking place in our economy and our society setting the stage for new opportunities.

***The Weak Dollar:* Our declining economy and bloated debt has weakened the dollar and made our products more affordable to other nations. Many predict this may be a long term situation which creates an opportunity to develop export markets and products. There's a growing international market for Idaho's high quality wood products and we're finding our place at the table.**

***The "Local" Movement:* American consumer's desire to purchase products that are local with a known provenance is real and it makes sense. We have abundant forests growing in our own back yard. We have laws in place to protect resources and we have certification programs that assure consumers about the origins of a product and how it's made. Buying local products keep jobs in local communities and create taxes for local governments and schools. Just a few years ago talking about the employment impact of a local business created yawns. Today we're all learning the importance of a working "Joe Sixpack".**

***"Green is Good:* The more people think about what "green" really is, the better wood and paper products look. Going "green" means considering the carbon footprint and life cycle analysis of the products we use. That's good for products made from trees, a renewable resource that can be sustainably managed over time. Wood and paper products are also energy and resource efficient, renewable, recyclable and reusable. What's not to love?**

***Environmental Enlightenment:* More and more, environmental groups and the public are learning that a forest products infrastructure is essential to restoring unhealthy national forests. Without the equipment and know how of loggers and the ability to make products and offset costs, forest restoration projects can be a bottomless money pit. Collaborative groups are popping up throughout the west comprised of people that traditionally met in court. They're trying to reach common goals on federal lands and preserve the integrity of the communities they all value.**

***Upsides to a Down Economy:* When belts tighten, Americans are quick to adjust their spending. As a top producer of private label paper products our local paper company had an outstanding year as consumers shifted from name-brand to store-brand tissue and paper products. Their success supported numerous Idaho jobs, local businesses and our tax base.**

Change and opportunity. Resources are a valuable asset and play an important role in creating wealth and stimulating economies. The public is coming around to value working forests and all they contribute to the environment and the economy. If we take the time to look to the forest, we'll see it's poised to explode with change and opportunity. The question is who will look to the forest and what will they see?