

A MILL WORKER’S PERSPECTIVE

In the 1920 and 30's in Oregon, timber was king. A man could set up a mill, log the trees within range of a team of horses, and move the mill to a new stand when those trees ran out.

As recently as the 1980s, logging and milling were still important parts of the economies of nearly every part of Oregon, from big cities to remote mountain hamlets. But as logging diminished, so did the industrys economic significance. In 1980 there were 405 lumber mills in Oregon. In 1990, the number of mills dropped to 313; by 2000 it was down to 175 mills. The trend for closing mills has not stopped. In 2010 there were 106 mills, and in 2012 it was down to 104.

Lawsuits in the 1990s forced the Forest Service to cut logging by 90 percent in the Northwest to save species such as the northern spotted owl and salmon from extinction. Logging jobs in Oregon dropped from 11,000 in 1990 to about 5,000 in 2013. Mill jobs went from 46,000 to 20,000.

The life of a typical lumber mill worker can be quite physical. The individuals should be able to stand or their feet for eight hours a day and be able to do a variety of work such as sorting timber, loading/unloading wood, operating saws, all in a fast paced production setting. The work can also be hazardous as it is not uncommon to see scars on the hands of people in the mills, or some even lose fingers and limbs.

Pay scales for mill workers are relatively low. Nationally, the pay ranges from $8.70 to $13.11 an hour in 2013. In Oregon, the pay scale is approximately $10.00 to $11.00 an hour, and a worker might earn $17,000 to $19,000 a year. A high school education is preferred, but mills will take the right people who fit the culture of the trade.

Logs are still coming off the forest, but they are fewer and smaller not enough to sustain places like Rough & Ready in Southern Oregon, that recently closed their mill. Owners of the few surviving mills have been forced to purchase private timberland to supplement the declining supply of national forests, and to invest millions to computerize and improve efficiency.

**Official Ballot**

I identify most strongly with the following perspective. Mark only one choice and vote only once (this isn’t Chicago, after all). Give it to your group facilitator.

A. Friends and Lovers of Old Growth.

B. County Budget perspective.

C. Northern Spotted Owl perspective.

D. Millworker Perspective.

**Questions**

**(From a Mill Worker’s Perspective)**

I hear all of the logging/harvesting jobs are going to Canada, China and Russia. Why can’t we continue to do this work in America?

Why are we sending all of our mill finishing work overseas to Japan? Why can’t we do the mill work here?

Why isn’t the federal government giving us a subsidy so that we can modernize our mills to become more modern and efficient? We will use selective harvesting with helicopters, but it is very expensive . The automobile industry and farmers get subsidies.

Don’t the environmentalists know that clear cutting helps to prevent forest fires, prevents diseases like the gypsy moth, and the resulting new growth from replanting creates a beneficial environment for many species of animal (such as deer)?

Aren’t the environmentalists aware that even if the loggers clear cut here and there, they immediately replant?

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