

The Forest Products Industry

Wood was the most essential product in early America. It provided fuel, building materials, railroad ties, barrels, tool handles, furniture, mining supports, charcoal and other essentials for living in and developing a young nation. Early industrial uses included:

- ✓ Ship building: Pennsylvania was a primary source of white pine for ship building.
- ✓ Charcoal: Made primarily from oak and chestnut, charcoal fueled the iron furnaces of the 1700's to mid-1800s, taking an acre of wood a day to satisfy even smaller furnaces.
- ✓ Tannin: In the late 1850's tanneries extracted tannin from bark, usually from hemlocks, to make animal hides soft and brown. The rest of the tree was used for lumber and paper.
- ✓ Mining: With the transition to coal as a preferred fuel in the last quarter of the 1800s, the mining industry relied on timbers, props and lagging – consuming 30,000 acres of forest per year.
- ✓ Alcohol and other distillation products: The wood chemical industry derived various industrial compounds from the combustion of wood.

Today, the main sectors of the forest products industry in Pennsylvania are:

- ☞ Primary processors, such as loggers, sawmills, pulp and paper mills
- ☞ Secondary processors, such as furniture, flooring, cabinet and pallet manufacturers, millwork facilities and paper product producers
- ☞ Allied industries such as lumber wholesalers and retailers, equipment suppliers, forestry professionals and associated services

Jobs

There are more than 700 job categories – public and private – in the timber and forest products industry. In Pennsylvania, the industry accounts for 10% of manufacturing jobs – some 98,000 Pennsylvanians employed in 2,600 businesses – as the seventh largest employer.

Efficiency

Some 25 years ago, only about 80% of the harvested tree was utilized. Today, with modern processing and high technology equipment, virtually nothing is wasted. Once wasted, bark now is used for mulch and other products; and sawdust is recycled as a fuel for lumber drying kilns and other industry needs. However, some parts of the tree may be purposely left behind at a logging site to create wildlife habitat and protect young saplings from deer browsing.

Economic Contribution

Today, the industry produces about \$5 billion a year in wood products and harvests 1 billion board feet of timber annually. It is one of the state's largest industries with every dollar in timber sales yielding an estimated \$17 worth of economic growth.

Value-added Processing

Pennsylvania ranks sixth nationally in value-added manufacturing of wood products, which is the processing of the raw lumber into a product of even greater value.