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GREEN BUILDING: Smart wood choices benefit builders, local environment

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Our forests are disappearing at an alarming rate. Poor planning has left us with eroding soil, endangered habitat and declining wood resources. An acre of forest is cut every second worldwide. Ten percent of the world's tree species is in danger of extinction.

Some things are being done to repair the damage. Chances are you have purchased lumber with an FSC sticker on it. FSC stands for Forestry Stewardship Council. This is a certification of lumber that assures the buyer the lumber has come from a well-managed forest, workers have been paid a fair wage and minimal waste was involved in the milling process. The rating is widely regarded as the most vigorous rating system anywhere.

To facilitate access to FSC suppliers, the Rain Forest Alliance has compiled the Smart Guide, a listing of certified suppliers with contact and product information (www.rainforest-alliance.org/greenbuilding).

As a builder, I must occasionally cut trees to build a house. If the tree is at least 10 inches in diameter, it is useful to have the tree milled, dried and made into trim, flooring or lumber for cabinetry. The new homeowner is thrilled to know the tree was not simply thrown away, but made into something useful.

We have made flooring out of red oak, vanities and railings from walnut, trim and tabletops from poplar, and cherry into cabinets. Planning ahead makes the process easier. It is best to air dry lumber three months before kiln drying. Air drying can take up to one year, depending on the species of lumber.

In the Asheville area, we are lucky to have sawmills, milling companies, portable sawmills, wood kilns and the Mountain Forest Stewardship Co-op. The co-op was started by family landowners, loggers, forestry professionals, environmentalists and others who believe the best opportunity we have for conserving our forest, saving our wildlife and reviving our rural economy is a sustainable forest-based economy.

According to Alex Perry, the group's director, the co-op has three primary goals: to make low-impact logging economically feasible for loggers, landowners and foresters; to provide more accessible services for landowners in Western North Carolina; and to provide local sustainable wood products and transform the local wood products market into one that restores forests and economies, rather than degrades them.

There are many things a builder can do to conserve resources:

- Use locally harvested wood.
- Use recycled lumber and products when possible.
- Have brush chipped into landscaping mulch.
- Use engineered lumber when possible.

- Use the smallest size lumber required to do the structural work.
- Consult an arborist about the health of a tree.
- Reduce the amount of lumber in a house by using advanced framing techniques.
- For every tree that must be cut, plant another tree to replace it.
- Clear trees and shrubs in winter to avoid disruption of migratory bird nesting.

For more information about sustainable wood harvesting, go to www.fsc.org or www.southern-sustainableforests.org/.

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