



## Examining the Supply Chain:

# Red Alder in Coastal British Columbia



Hardwoods such as alder represent an opportunity to diversify the type of wood products our forests can supply such as these doors at Nita Lake Lodge.

Photo courtesy of Forest, Innovation and Investment

**THE BIAS TOWARD TIMBER-BASED CONIFER** objectives is still firmly engrained in the culture of forestry in BC. This is not surprising considering much of the landscape is dominated by conifers. But hardwoods such as alder represent an opportunity to diversify the type of wood products our forests can supply.

As part of an effort to encourage the utilization of deciduous species, the Future Forest Ecosystems Scientific Council (FFESC) funded the project “Using red alder as an adaptation strategy to reduce environmental, social and economic risks of climate change in coastal BC.” Staff from the Forests and Communities in Transition (FACT) initiative at the University of British Columbia investigated the question “What steps need to be taken to develop an integrated hardwood forest sector on the coast?” with a particular focus on alder.

Based on the interview data collected with hardwood supply chain actors and an examination of the existing literature related to the BC coastal hardwood supply chain, there is potential for alder to play a minor, but significant role to the forest industry. It would be best suited as an integrated part of a larger product basket that also includes maple, birch and cottonwood.

To collect this data, FACT used purposive sampling techniques to conduct semi-structured interviews with alder supply chain actors in coastal BC. A series of issues that pertain to the alder supply chain emerged from these interviews, including these themes:

### Existing Alder Inventories

As alder’s value has increased over the past decade, many stands that were once considered uneconomical units have become favourable for harvesting. The best of these stands have since been harvested and the amount of alder that is available in economical units has decreased.

### Establishment, Harvesting and Transportation of Alder

Whether or not to establish alder stands in favour of other conifer species has increasingly become an issue in recent years. The ecological benefits of red alder are well documented (for example, its resistance to laminated root rot *Phellinus weirii* can help sanitize infected sites) and its ecological attributes can be utilized to meet forest land management objectives. Operationally, there is still a need for information related to establishing stands, including the availability of planting stock from nurseries and the ability to plant alder as a preferred crop species.

With respect to harvesting and transportation, alder also provides some unique challenges compared to its conifer counterparts. Timing is critical. Alder logs should not be left in the cutblock during the summer months as the sap will run and discolor the outside (and most valuable part) of the log. Ideally, logs are cut in the fall or winter and transported for processing (or at minimum put into floating booms) before the summer.

### Primary Breakdown, Secondary Manufacturing and Marketing of Alder

The types of products that can be created from red alder are varied and include furniture, flooring, cabinets, veneer, as well as woodenware and toys. High value products include doors, shutters, mouldings and panel stock. Lower value products include plywood core stock, chips for pulp and paper, firewood, and chips for smoke curing.

Currently, the majority of alder logs from the BC coast are being shipped south into Washington and Oregon for processing into manufactured wood products. That said, a small but significant hardwood processing industry exists on the BC coast. However, many of these businesses have been forced to reduce the size of their operations as a result of the recent global economic downturn.

In many ways, the future of the hardwood supply chain in coastal BC depends on these businesses specialized knowledge pertaining to the acquisition, processing, and delivery of hardwood products to the marketplace. This knowledge will be integral to establishing the correct quantity and quality of alder stands at the landscape level, and timing the harvest of such stands accordingly, thus ensuring producers a stable timber supply. 🌲

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