

LOGGING HEROISM

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Every material thing we use begins with extraction of natural resources and ends with disposal. The only truly renewable and sustainable raw material is wood and that begins with logging.

The extraction, processing, manufacturing, and eventual disposal of raw materials and goods entails a complex web of economic activity and energy consumption. The full “life cycle” of a particular product describes the impacts of that product from its cradle to its grave. The impacts can have various measures, such as energy consumption, carbon balance, or water use.

Wood, by any measure, is the most environmentally-friendly raw material at our disposal. For these reasons, an environmentally-conscious person ought to be favoring wood use over other natural resources, within the sustainability limits of the forests, of course. Loggers are our allies in building a more sustainable society.

Tree harvesting is a noble thing. Thousands of products that we use every day are made from wood or have wood elements in them. This includes the obvious, such as our homes, paper products, and furniture. However, there are also chemicals, pharmaceuticals, clothing fiber, carbon fiber, foods, “plastic” bottles, energy products, and many other things. Organic aspirin comes from willows. Rayon fabric is made largely from wood pulp. Even tall buildings are increasingly being constructed of wood.

Forests grow back after a harvest. Other natural resources such as metal ores, coal, petroleum, and natural gas do not grow back. We can reduce, reuse, and recycle, but only wood is also renewable. The extraction and processing of wood products takes far less energy, carbon, and water than other raw materials.

A managed forest landscape captures solar energy, extracts carbon at no financial cost to us, and produces a wide range of goods and environmental services, including wood, water, and habitat. This can't be said about a soybean field. A managed forest provides more of all these benefits and logging is an integral part of that process. Logging may be the only extractive operation that contributes to environmental health. For example, it's nearly impossible to remove trees damaged by exotic species if loggers are not available.

A forest cannot be managed without adding and subtracting trees. Logging cannot occur without a healthy forest industry. Better forest management happens where the forest product markets are more diverse and robust, as there is greater demand for the range of harvest products. A healthy forest industry not only contributes to the economic health of our communities, it contributes mightily to our environmental health through increased management opportunities. And this all begins with the logging contractor.

The media often boldly report about renewable energy in the form of solar and wind technologies, and even some rather currently obscure ideas. Those are fine. However, the majority of renewable energy is currently produced by woody biomass. We often hear about advances in the production of alternative technologies for electricity generation and sometimes for transportation fuels. Yet, we seldom hear about the largest energy consumption need in the Lake States; that being heating.

Many heating and cooling needs can be readily accommodated using existing advanced wood-based technologies. The fuel source is local. The jobs and economic impacts cannot be outsourced. There's an ample feedstock supply, to a point, easily a million homes. The pricing is likely to be stable. And, it's carbon-smart. And this begins with loggers.

Loggers are typically family-owned businesses, often with over a million dollars on the line. They operate under difficult conditions, physically, regulatory, and economically. And, it's getting harder, not easier. They're a hard-working, versatile bunch that, by and large, are excellent community role models. Few industries are scrutinized as closely as the forest industry. Yet, few industries have as many collateral benefits as logging and the forest industry.

Using wood and paper products are among the more sustainable practices at our disposal. Harvesting trees is a good thing, for many reasons.