

Nebraska's Wood Products Tradition: Understanding Available Skills and Resources

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The purpose of this research is to better understand the available timber and woodworking resources that can be found in Nebraska. The availability of a particular species for harvesting, its woodworking characteristics and the availability of the tools or skilled professionals necessary to create a final product should all be considered to achieve this understanding.

In order to gain more qualitative information on the subject, this study goes into specific precedents of applications of timber grown, harvested and/or processed in Nebraska. To give a more general understanding of what types of timber are available and what their applications may be, there is also information included stating the physical properties of the wood species most commonly found in Nebraska, as well as common uses for each of these wood species. In this way the scale of understanding starts with general wood species' uses, narrows to the wood products industry of Nebraska, and finally looks at individual processes.

Because a very small percentage of Nebraska's land mass is forested, there is limited qualitative documentation about the outcome or potential outcome of Nebraska's forest industry beyond harvesting statistics. Several

of the examples found in this research show a fully sustainable cycle from live tree to processor to final product which does not rely on resources outside of the state.

A map is included in this study to illustrate the distribution of wood processors and forests throughout Nebraska. Although no overarching patterns have been found in regard to the type of wood products that are being manufactured here, the processes of these manufacturers, or the path from the live tree to the final product, what can be found is a cross section of wood crafting throughout Nebraska. Secondary processors include pallet manufacturers and wooden sole shoe manufacturers, while primary processors prepare timber for uses such as custom furniture or log cabins.

This research begins to prove that although Nebraska has one of the smallest timber industries in the United States, it is capable of being efficient and self-sustaining. The small scale of the industry means that many of the wood products processed here are of a custom nature. For some specialty processors each piece of lumber is considered for its individual characteristics before being crafted into a final product.

The next phase of this research would include a more in-depth study of the processes of one or more local wood processors. This information would illustrate the highly personal and specific nature of Nebraska's traditions in woodworking. Many of these processes, skills, tools and in some cases lumber, have been passed down through generations of craftsmen, making quantitative information about each processor insufficient to tell their story.

NEBRASKA'S WOOD PRODUCTS TRADITION : UNDERSTANDING AVAILABLE SKILLS AND RESOURCES

THE FIVE SPECIES WITH THE HIGHEST NET VOLUME OF LIVE TREES IN NEBRASKA, AND THEIR RESPECTIVE CHARACTERISTICS AND COMMON USES:



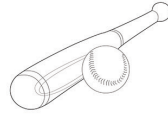
EASTERN RED CEDAR

Because of its excellent resistance to decay and insect attack, Eastern Red Cedar is often used in outdoor applications such as fence posts and outdoor furniture.



PONDEROSA PINE

Ponderosa Pine has a straight, uniform grain, seasons well, and has high dimensional stability making it ideal for close-fitting joints. Ponderosa pine is often used in light framing, interior trim and cabinetry.



GREEN ASH

Green ash has low resistance to decay and is susceptible to insect attack. It works well with hand and machine tools and turns and finishes well. It is often used for baseball bats and other turned objects.



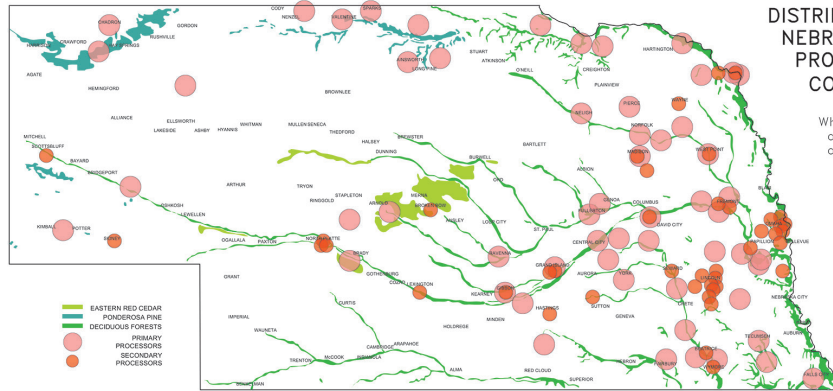
BUR OAK

Bur oak has a very high resistance to decay, is easy to glue and finishes very well. It is often used for cabinetry, boatbuilding and barrels.



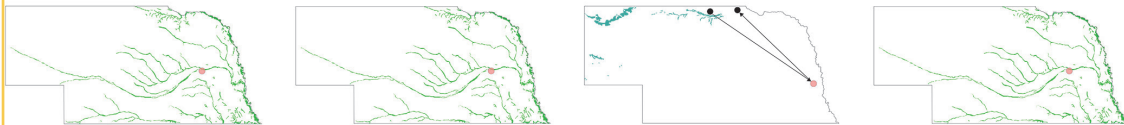
COTTONWOOD

Cottonwood is not resistant to decay and is susceptible to insect attack. It works well with hand and machine tools but has poor nail-holding capability. It is often used for boxes, pallets and other utility purposes.



DISTRIBUTION OF NEBRASKA'S WOOD PRODUCTS INDUSTRY COMPONENTS:

While primary processors are found primarily adjacent to forested areas, secondary processors are concentrated in or near areas of denser population.



PRIMARY
Reece Wooden Sole Shoe Co.,
Columbus, NE

SECONDARY
Reece Wooden Sole Shoe Co.,
Columbus, NE

PRIMARY
Oxbows Furniture,
Bellwood, NE

SECONDARY
Oxbows Furniture,
Bellwood, NE

PRIMARY
Nebraska Timber Inc.,
Omaha, NE

SECONDARY
Cabin owner, Marvin Liewer,
Bufte, NE

PRIMARY
Barcel Mill & Lumber Co.,
Bellwood, NE

SECONDARY
Barcel Mill & Lumber Co.,
Bellwood, NE



REECE WOODEN SOLE SHOES

From 1885 to 2002 Reece Wooden Sole Shoes hand crafted orthopedic and industrial shoes from cottonwood and elm that were distributed throughout the United States, Canada and Europe.



EASTERN RED CEDAR DINING TABLE, OXBOWS FURNITURE

This dining table is one example of the custom wood work done by Aaron Rerucha of Oxbows Furniture. He works out of his grandfather's wood shop building cabinetry and furniture. He collects individual pieces of lumber from local forests and neighbors.



"A NEBRASKA LOG CABIN," MARVIN LIEWER

Marvin Liewer built his own log cabin home using traditional Northwest Nebraska pioneer cabin techniques. He used Ponderosa Pine logs from the Pine Ridge area of western Nebraska.



PALLETS, BARCEL MILL & LUMBER CO.

This family owned cottonwood sawmill produces pallets, veneer, lumber and landscape mulches from logs harvested within 65 miles.