

Pioneering Projects: Sitka High School Industrial Arts Program

Local Red Alder Bedside Tables

This fall 2012 project, funded by the National Forest Foundation and Sitka Conservation Society, is one piece of a broader effort to explore and demonstrate the performance of Tongass young growth in a variety of interior and exterior applications. For the project, Sitka High School industrial arts instructor and lifelong woodworker, Randy Hughey, compared local red alder to imported poplar as a material for both teaching in school, and woodworking in general.

The red alder was harvested and milled in the Sitka Ranger District by Todd Miller of TM Construction, who

wanted to test the quality and marketability of potential red alder products. One class used red alder to make nine bedside tables, while two other classes made twenty-three tables using imported poplar.

Toward the end of the semester, Mr. Hughey observed that, "Red alder is a beautiful wood, in my opinion superior to poplar, but we wasted a lot cutting out loose knots and warped portions. If one were going to use

local alder as a cabinetmaking wood, it would have to be either by significantly selecting out

the knots to achieve a clear grade, or by marketing it as a rustic sort of product." His final conclusion was that although red alder is a beautiful wood, it is too costly at this early stage of local production for SHS class projects.

From a business perspective, Miller and his team gained experience milling and drying a wood that is fast-

growing and abundant, but not commonly used in Southeast Alaska. Slow drying is key, he found, along with having a variety of uses in mind for the harvested tree, which often yields about 15-30% wood suitable for milling. Flooring is one of the most physically suitable and economic applications for red alder, because it does not require specific lengths and can accommodate the removal of imperfections.



+SPECS

Project Date: fall 2012

Species: red alder from False Island

Age: 20-30 years, 10-15" DBH

Cost: \$1.90/board foot (planed, kiln-dried), compared to \$1.75 for imported poplar

Observations:

- Color is rosy pink to light brown, with occasional dark streaks
- Occasional spalting is unique
- Clear sections could be considered superior in look to poplar
- Fairly soft, with frequent knots that often have to be removed
- Requires slow drying to minimize warping, cupping, and splitting
- Can be a great material for flooring, cabinetry, and finish-work, but requires more handling than conventional imported lumber and is a bit more costly



Next Up - Spring 2013

Young Growth Spruce Bike Shelter

In spring 2013, students will use young growth Sitka spruce harvested on Prince of Wales Island (POW) to construct a three-sided bike shelter for the Sitka Sound Science Center. The spruce has been milled into studs, rafters, beams, roof decking, and wall sheathing by Mel Cooke of Last Chance Enterprises. Because young growth lumber is still a lesser-known product, Mel enjoyed the opportunity to gain experience working with the wood, which he says is beautiful and easily processed. Old growth red- and yellow cedar, also from POW, will be used for the floor, siding, and shingles.

Ultimately, the bike shelter will offer students a chance to become familiar with using local woods, and provide the community with a practical demonstration of dimensional lumber made from Tongass young growth spruce. Mr. Hughey and his students will share their observations and lessons learned at an open house celebration when the shelter is complete. This project is funded by the National Forest Foundation, the Sitka Conservation Society, The Nature Conservancy, and the Sitka Sound Science Center.



For more information about these and other local wood projects, contact the Sitka Conservation Society at (907) 747-7509 or info@sitkawild.org, and stay tuned for the January 2013 publication of the "Guide to Tongass Young Growth."