

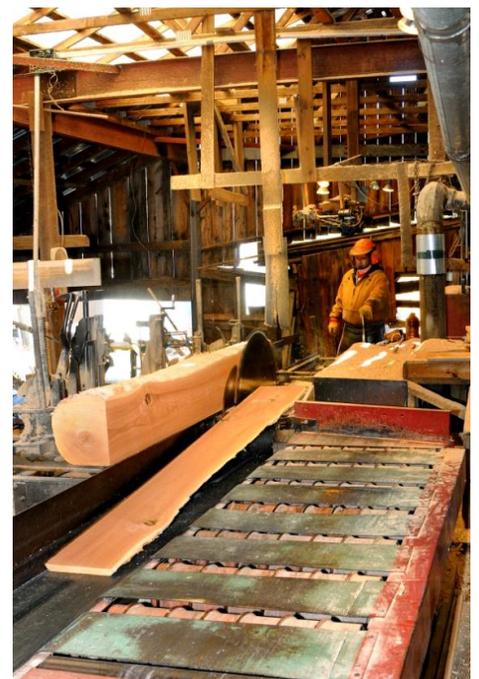
Building Local

It was early, even for the birds, when photographer Bill Byrne and I arrived at Jim Conkey's sawmill in New Salem, Massachusetts. C & M Rough Cut is nestled in the woods just a stone's throw from the banks of the Quabbin Reservoir. This small-scale sawmill has stood in the same location for more than 30 years processing local forest products. We huddled around the woodstove in Jim's rustic cabin of an office following a story about wood, wildlife, and community.

We were there to watch the mill make lumber for the new Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife headquarters in Westborough. The building includes a geothermal heating and cooling system and solar photovoltaics, but just as noteworthy is its connection to the forest and to local forest products manufacturers. Some prominent interior building components came from wood harvested as part of MassWildlife's efforts to restore wildlife habitat for native species.

Black cherry handrails were milled from trees harvested during a shrubland restoration project at the DFW's Stafford Hill Wildlife Management Area in Cheshire. The reclamation of these abandoned agricultural fields supports declining species such as the eastern towhee, chestnut-sided warbler, and American woodcock.

Flooring in the building's library came from northern red oaks harvested as part of a habitat management project at DFW's Phillipston Wildlife Management Area. Approximately 40 acres of young forest habitat was created on this abandoned agricultural land. The goal was to promote regeneration of mast producing trees like red and white oak, and native shrubs, especially blueberry, that will benefit many wildlife species.



Black cherry and northern red oak trees were harvested from Stafford Hill and Phillipston WMAs and milled local Massachusetts sawmills



In addition to creating valuable wildlife habitat, these projects also produced sustainably harvested wood and supported local businesses. TR Land Works, from Hartford, Connecticut, completed the work at Stafford Hill, while Sawyer's Trucking and Logging, out of Hubbardston, Massachusetts, conducted the timber harvest at Phillipston. These projects generated firewood, sawlogs, and low-quality softwood chips. The firewood was sold to local residents for winter heating; the chipwood was used by Pinetree Power in Westminister, Massachusetts to generate electricity; and sawlogs were trucked to mills in New Hampshire, Maine, or Canada.

Most lumber that originates in Massachusetts is trucked out of state to be processed and sold because the state economy does not generate enough support for sawmill operations in the Commonwealth. The environmental and economic consequences of this situation result in an increased carbon footprint for each piece of lumber used in the Commonwealth and a significant loss of wood processing jobs as they increasingly move out of state. While Massachusetts has excelled at reviving the local food market we are failing to support our local forest products market in a state that is 60 percent forested.



Wood products harvested during habitat management projects were used in the interior of the DFW field headquarters building.

The cherry and oak logs in this story are a happy exception to the trend; our logs were processed entirely at Massachusetts mills. After the rough sawing at C&M Rough Cut, the boards were trucked to Lashway Lumber in Williamsburg to dry in state-of-the-art vacuum kilns. Lashway Lumber is one of the few remaining family-owned (four generations) sawmills in the state. After kiln drying, the

red oak was moved to the Ponders Hollow mill in Westfield for tongue-and-groove processing as floorboards.

The new building was completed in 2014 and during the December building dedication, the handrails and flooring were lauded as a testament to how responsible stewardship of our forest lands can support local jobs and local wildlife. That's a hopeful message, but the story doesn't end there. To ensure that sustainably harvested local forest products remain available in years to come, we all need to support a local market that demonstrates responsible stewardship of our forest lands, supports local jobs for our neighbors, and reduces the carbon footprint of the very materials that sustain the structure of our lives.

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