

Build Local

ALLIANCE

What do you get if you mix forest owners, lumberyards, home builders, architects, and contractors into a “local-only” supply chain? In Portland, Oregon, it’s called the **Build Local Alliance**.

Most organizations are born out of people’s drive to creatively solve problems—and the Portland Build Local Alliance (BLA) is no exception. The people were local wood growers and local wood users—and their problems were twofold. First, a handful of local wood users were determined to use local, responsibly grown wood, but they were having problems finding and getting it. At the same time, forest owners believed that their forests were growing locally responsible wood, but had problems connecting with like-minded wood users. In 2005, Peter Hayes, representing the growers, and Stephen Aiguier, representing the wood users, teamed up in the hope of creating a single solution to their two problems—and the BLA was born.

Recognizing the success of the Farmer-Chef Connection in solving a parallel pair of problems, Hayes and Aiguier asked each other “why not adapt the idea and apply it to wood?” (The Farmer-Chef Connection—www.farmerchefconnection.org—strives to link people or companies who are looking to source food or drink locally, or buyers who want to purchase directly from the sources.) From the first exploratory meeting in late 2005 until today, BLA’s membership and energy have grown steadily. Today, 150 individuals and groups count themselves as members and

include foresters, sawmillers, woodworkers, architects, builders, distributors, and nonprofit organizations. In six years, the young organization has gone from a simple idea into a successful reality. Guided by an experienced, committed board and supported by a diverse, creative, and resourceful membership, the BLA is on track as an encouraging example of people coming together to solidly connect wood users to their local forests.



More than Wood

Peter Hayes, a cofounder of BLA, recognizes that a local supply chain is more than just converting trees into products. Hayes says, “It’s important to recognize that markets shape lands and communities—and consumers shape markets. Consequently, our markets need to be aligned with our values.”

Hayes also notes that small groups of people can change the status quo. He says, “It’s sad that many small landowners feel powerless. These folks often have an affinity for forests and forest-

dependent communities, but they don’t know what to do or how to demonstrate their values in a meaningful way. Thankfully, the BLA is proving that the little guy is not powerless.”

The BLA has also demonstrated that local processors—sawmillers and others—can adapt their product lines and make valuable close-to-home products sourced from local, responsibly managed forests for local consumption. This not only can improve a firm’s economic viability but results in local dollars staying in the local area and ultimately benefiting local communities and forests.

FSC

Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)-certified forests play an important role in BLA. FSC certification provides users of the wood (architects, builders, homeowners, etc.) certain assurances regarding land management practices associated with the harvested wood. However, according to Peter Hayes, many landowners are exceeding FSC standards with some choosing not to go through the process of certification. In these cases he says, “The market is demanding local and sometimes this is more powerful than organic—or any type of certification system.”

Green Building

Green building projects are one specific outcome of the BLA. Annual awards are given to firms, individuals, and organizations committed to advancing the use of locally- and responsibly-sourced forest products in building projects. Named the Build Local Challenge, criteria for the award include:

- Use of local wood and other resources (thriving local forests and economies)
- Use of responsibly sourced wood (advancing forest stewardship)



Urban Timber Works (a part of Green Hammer Construction) salvaged on-site walnut logs and milled them into countertop materials used in the Granger house.

- Partnerships along the value chain (advancing value throughout the system)
- Creative expression and innovation
- Replicability (enabling others to follow your lead)

Recent Build Local Challenge winners include The Joinery, a fine furniture manufacturer in Portland, for their use of FSC-certified lumber products and a nontoxic, biodegradable wood finish; ZGF Architects for designing a downtown Portland high-rise incorporating an array of local and reclaimed wood products throughout the building; Cook With What You Have cooking school, for a kitchen remodel that used local FSC wood products, including locally built cabinets; the Granger Home, a sin-



One goal of the Build Local Alliance is to promote the use of responsibly sourced wood from local vendors. FSC-certified lumber, urban trees, and salvaged wood from barrel staves were used to make the kitchen cabinets and countertops in this photo (courtesy of Bob and Julie Granger, Portland, Oregon).

gle-family home built with FSC and local/salvaged wood products; and Full Circle Construction, a carpentry business that used 100% salvaged and reclaimed materials for a backyard chicken coop.

The BLA sponsored a tour and workshop in October 2010 to explore the many dimensions of urban aspects of building with local woods. One stop on the tour was the home of Bob and Julie Granger in northeast Portland, built on a vacant lot. The Granger home is not only energy efficient, but it used framing lumber milled from city trees, native maple for flooring, local Douglas fir for trim and two on-site (front yard) walnut trees for kitchen counters (as the trees needed to be removed during construction), and kitchen cabinets produced by using wood from old barrel staves. Just like many people who take an interest in where their food comes from, some consumers like the Grangers take satisfaction in knowing the origin of the wood products that surround them every day. Bob Granger says, “It’s difficult for most people to find the information and sources for local materials. The BLA and their contacts made it simpler for us to track down what we needed.”

Stephen Aiguier, president of Green Hammer, a Portland-based designer and builder, agrees wholeheartedly with Bob Granger’s view of the difficulty in connecting the pieces when it comes to green building. Aiguier says, “One of the biggest benefits of BLA is that members can make connections with like-minded people. Connecting people—from landowners to home builders to consumers—is a major success of BLA.”

Another way to think about the role of BLA is one of collaboration. Aiguier notes that small businesses like Green Hammer need to find their niche in the marketplace. BLA meetings and related networking opportunities enable peers to analyze how their business fits in

SUSTAINABLE NORTHWEST WOOD

As a wholesale yard, Sustainable Northwest Wood (SNW) connects local mills to green building markets, serving both regional producers and conscientious consumers. The mission of SNW is to make buying local and sustainable the wisest and easiest option, thus placing home-grown business in the heart of the green building movement.

All products from SNW are from the Pacific Northwest and grown on forests managed either to the standards of the Forest Stewardship Council or as part of a stewardship program restoring native ecosystems. SNW aims to promote purchasing from local businesses, thus supporting the communities needed to lead the conservation economy of the future. For more information: www.sustainablenorthwest.org.

the supply chain, plan joint marketing programs, and explore future opportunities. Aiguier says, “The BLA is a powerful resource center that operates in real time. By working together, we can learn from, and inspire, one another. The Granger house is a case in point.”

Aiguier also argues that BLA provides momentum to a host of related green building efforts, including the Sustainable Northwest Wood distribution center (see sidebar).

Bottom Line

The BLA has advanced land conservation in Oregon by encouraging direct cooperation between local conservation-minded forest growers and the consumers who buy their products. The success of the BLA hinges on the ability to connect all players in the supply chain, including sawmill operators and related lumber manufacturers, some of which dry and finish lumber and make end-products for consumers. The growth of small, diverse lumber markets creates opportunities

GREEN SCENE

FROM FIREWOOD TO LUMBER



Peter Hayes of Hyla Woods tells a story that sums up what the BLA is trying to do—connect responsibly-sourced forest products from nearby forests with local projects.

“A few years ago we harvested some large oak logs—3 feet in diameter—from our forest. At the time, the only viable local market was firewood. But the logs seemed too good to waste on firewood. The market, however, was essentially pushing us to simplification—and the simple product was firewood. I started digging around into alternative markets and learned that there were markets for quality oak lumber. Long story short, by milling, drying, and selling the wood, we discovered that our oak could be as valuable economically as it is ecologically. I learned from that experience that I can either sell logs for firewood at 20 cents per board foot or sell finished lumber at six dollars per board foot to a local consumer. This is part of what the Build Local Alliance is trying to do—develop a vibrant local economy based on wood products from nearby sustainably-managed forests.”

for growing locally-diverse, viable forests. This creates a win-win situation for forests, landowners, small mill operators, and everyone else in the wood supply chain. ■

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