

# C I N T R A F O R

Working Paper 14

[Back to Publications List](#)

## The Role of Northwest Hardwoods in International Trade

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### Summary

Although comprising a small fraction of the forest resource in the Pacific Northwest (PNS), the region's hardwoods are becoming an increasingly important sector in terms of both domestic and overseas markets. This has occurred despite a generally negative attitude among foresters and the general public. This attitude has been fostered by a variety of factors. Perhaps foremost is the common situation in which lands logged of coniferous stands are invaded by light-seeded, pioneering, fast growing hardwoods, especially red alder. Because this invasion prevents natural restocking of conifers and frequently overwhelmed planted conifer seedlings, hardwoods became viewed as pests. Prior to the 1960's and 70's, vast areas of former conifer lands became covered by vigorous stands of hardwoods. Since that time, foresters have invested substantially in hardwood control programs. Young hardwoods were sprayed or manually removed during early thinnings to prevent competition with planted conifers. Older hardwood stands were converted to conifers by logging off the hardwoods, salvaging better material for lumber or chips, and replanting with conifers. These activities, combined with various statement in corporate and public agency reports of what was being done to eliminate the hardwood problem and get lands back into productive conifers, conveyed an impression to the public that hardwoods were worthless weeds. Furthermore, early use of red alder in hidden parts of furniture and as an inexpensive substitute that was often stained to imitate other woods reinforced its reputation as a lesser species. Unfortunately, these attitudes have persisted while alder has gained acclaim in both national and international markets for furniture lumber and for pulp chips. It is widely regarded for its many good properties and, in furniture, for its versatility to be used naturally or to imitate many other species. Interest has also grown in several other Northwest hardwood species. Indeed, during the recession of the early 1980's, a Weyerhaeuser executive state "In the 1980's, we suddenly found that our most consistently profitable lumber operations in the (Northwest) region were two small alder mills, which were developing customer ties in the Japanese and California furniture industries." (Bingham,1986).

Although many are becoming aware of the increased value of the PNW hardwoods, there is little current information on the present size and scope of industries using the resource, developments in markets and the resource base and issues or problems that are confronting this industry.

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[Back to Publications List](#)