



(Sample feature story using National Forest Products Week as news hook -- for use in local and regional press)

#### FOREST PRODUCTS IN DEMAND - NATION'S OLDEST INDUSTRY SEES NEW GROWTH

It is early autumn in the year 2010. In a large clearing in a heavily wooded area, the sleek transport cars of an ultraspeed hovercraft lift logs into the hold, while uniformed technicians consult small, hand-held computers.

Logs? Won't they become obsolete by the year 2010? Not if the projections of the nation's wood products industry come to pass. The makers of wood and paper products, and the timberland owners who grow their raw material, are celebrating National Forest Products Week October 19 - 23. And the future they see for the country's oldest manufacturing industry is pretty bright, thanks to the world's continued demand for a range of forest products and the renewability of the nation's half billion acres of commercial-grade forest land.

Over the next few decades, say the experts, we'll see not only new uses for wood products but refinements in existing ones. Improvements already underway in adhesives and wood joining techniques, together with wood's strength and flexibility, promise to make wood products even less expensive and more easily used as a basic building material.

The resilience of wood products is best illustrated by the dramatic new uses that paper has found in the computer age -- in photocopying, and in data and word processing. These applications confounded observers who not long ago predicted that computers would revolutionize telecommunications and usher in the "paperless society". No more checkbooks and office paper, they said, not with electric impulses carrying and storing information.

What really happened was very different, says Dr. Thomas Hansbrough, Dean of the Forestry School at Louisiana State University. "The microchip, which revolutionized communications, has actually increased paper usage," he said. Computers churn out an estimated 350 billion pages of paper each year. As any office worker can tell you, for every use of paper the computer erased, it created two new uses.

The paper industry has prepared itself for this increased demand by dramatically by becoming more efficient users of the nation's forests. For instance, 30 percent of all wood that's cut in this country is converted into pulp by the paper industry. Of this percentage the industry derives wastewood that adds yet another ten percent of useful fiber.

Wood a renewable resource, and it is one of the most maleable and diverse materials known. Forest scientists, silviculturists and technologists believe it will be possible to increase wood's strength and applications through chemical modifications of its molecular structure. By combining lignin and cellulose found in wood cells, researchers think that new silvi-chemical compounds, or polymers, can be constructed in the laboratories that will be superior to those derived from petrochemical and other non-renewable substances.

Demand for forest products has been booming of late. As the population of advanced industrial societies grow, so too does the demand for lumber, panel, paper and paper packaging. Citizens of developed countries like ours are the biggest per capita users of forest products. Small wonder that the U.S. Forest Service predicts we may not have enough wood growing in our forests to meet the anticipated demand.

Foreign demand for wood and paper products is also growing, particularly in Pacific Rim countries where a shortage of timberlands and manufacturing plants will result in increased forest products imports. Developing countries will also need more wood and paper to match their rising living standards and literacy rates. "In 50 years, the population of India will exceed that of China," notes Dr. Carl Stoltenberg, Dean of Forestry at Oregon State University. "If we don't grow the wood, who will?", he asks.

Probably no one. As the nation's forestry experts point out, U.S. forest lands are the most productive and fastest growing among the world's industrialized countries. More than any other factor, this raw material advantage gives U.S. producers a leg up in the global marketplace for forest products.

True, the Soviet Union boasts the world's largest forested area, but it is a northern, slow-growing forest with limited commercial potential. The Scandinavians have very productive forests, but they are relatively small and nearing the peak of their productive capacity. Some South American countries have extremely fast-growing forests, but with the exception of Brazil and Chile they lack the industrial means to convert their timber into useful products.

Industry officials say the key to capturing the potential of these promising markets is improved forest management and maintaining levels of capital investment that are needed to maintain the industry's competitive ability. With that caveat, the future of forest products looks as bright today as it did 200 years ago.