



NEBRASKA'S URBAN WOOD INDUSTRY

Lumber stacked at Cutting Edge Mill in Elkhorn, NE

Urban wood is salvaged from tree removal operations typically due to tree mortality, disease, land development, storm damage or other causes. Urban wood utilization promotes the highest and best value use of locally available, wood resources while providing opportunities for economic development.

BACKGROUND

Trees removed from communities due to insects and disease, storm damage or other circumstances are often viewed as waste. The value of this wood resource is often overlooked. However if all trees removed from communities nationwide were processed and sold, the U.S. would produce nearly 4 billion board feet of urban lumber, develop local economies and provide a sustainable and renewable resource to beautify homes, businesses and public facilities. While it is unlikely that all trees removed from cities and communities can be put to use, utilizing just a fraction of the urban wood resource could have major social, economic and ecological benefits.



Ash wood table produced by Cornhusker State Industries from ash trees removed in Lincoln.



Lumber from trees removed in Lincoln, NE being delivered to Lincoln Public Schools for use in their woodshop classes.

URBAN WOOD CHARACTERISTICS

Urban wood is often noted for its interesting character. Because trees in communities are subject to different conditions, they will often exhibit unique grain patterns, knots or branching patterns that create beautiful lumber.

Emerald ash borer (EAB) does not affect the structural integrity of the lumber produced from ash trees removed due to the infestation. EAB kills trees by boring into the outer layers of the tree, the xylem and phloem, and interrupting the flow of nutrients and water, leaving the inner wood intact.



Did you know? Prior to 1945, Nebraska was known as the “Tree Planters State,” rather than the “Cornhusker State.”



Urban wood use reduces wood disposal costs, improves air quality, decreases greenhouse gas emissions and support a local economy.

NEBRASKA'S URBAN WOOD RESOURCE

Nebraska has no shortage of urban wood. Statewide, communities are home to approximately 1 million ash trees. Over the next several years, we can expect 80% of ash trees in infested communities to die. This is a staggering number that does not even account for the thousands of trees removed from our communities for any number of other reasons.

Nebraska is also known for its severe weather. Between tornadoes, thunderstorms, ice storms and strong winds, many trees must be pruned or removed to maintain public safety. Furthermore, the harsh conditions of many urban environments (think pollution, concrete, building disruptions, etc.) result in shorter life expectancies for urban trees that lead to their removal.

NEBRASKA'S URBAN WOOD PRODUCTS

Currently, a handful of businesses utilize wood removed from our communities, with the majority located in the eastern portion of the state. The products produced from urban wood varies greatly. Below are a few examples of Nebraska-made urban wood products:

- Mulch
- Firewood
- Green lumber
- Kiln-dried lumber
- Fine art wood working and wood turning
- Finished furniture
- Household products
- Animal bedding



Unique ash wood table created by Ray Mark Inc, of Stromsburg, NE



Ash logs waiting to be milled into lumber at Big Red Sawmill in Palmyra, NE

CONSIDERATIONS

Currently, ash wood is being regulated for movement within the state and between states. When transporting ash wood, it is important to understand the rules and regulations of the state and federal quarantines to minimize the spread of EAB. Permits and certificates are available through the Nebraska Department of Agriculture to assist wood products businesses operate with as little disruption as possible.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH

Other states have implemented urban wood networks that connect producers to end-users. These programs have been successful in raising awareness of the importance of using locally available resources as well as creating an urban wood brand that is sought after by consumers. The Urban Wood Network is a national organization working to help states join the urban wood movement.