

Timberrr! - Our Natural Resources: Softwoods, Hardheads

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"If Up With Trees is so worried about trees, how come they make their signs out of wood?"

That's a pretty cute line. You hear it quite often from people you run into around town. You might even see it in "Call the Editor." It's a clever bon mot that never fails to identify the person who delivers it as one who possesses the sharpest and hippest of wits.

The question, of course, refers to the civic group Up With Trees, whose volunteer members in the past 17 years have acquired, planted and helped maintain hundreds of trees at 90 locations in Tulsa, most of them along expressway rights-of-way. Many of the planting areas are identified with rustic-looking wooden signs.

So why does Up With Trees erect signs made of cut-down trees?

While this is a rhetorical question (the thing that makes it so cleverly humorous is that there presumably is no answer) it is interesting enough to deserve an answer. So here goes:

- First, based on its actions to date, Up With Trees is a civic group, not a religious cult. It recognizes the benefits of urban trees, it does not worship or idolize them or set them up as icons. The organization does not oppose the use of trees for beneficial purposes, such as the manufacture of lumber.

- Second, it saves money. The signs are made from treated southern yellow pine 2x10s, 2x12s and 4x4s donated by Mill Creek Lumber Co. They are handcrafted by members of the Green Country Woodworking Club, who donate their time and labor.

- Third, members of the group, according to Sid Patterson, one of the founders, believe the wooden signs are more pleasing to the eye and fit better in the natural planting sites than the alternative, painted metal signs.

- Fourth, and most important, a well-known public relations slogan said it all: Trees are America's renewable natural resource.

A typical Up With Trees sign contains about 58 board feet of lumber. You'll recall from wood shop class that a board foot is a foot wide, a foot long and an inch thick. How long does it take for mother nature to replace 58 board feet of lumber? We attempted to make some calculations based on information dug up for us by Dr. Steve Anderson, state extension forester and forestry professor at Oklahoma State University. The figures are based on U.S. Forest surveys.

Oklahoma grows about 196 million cubic feet of timber each year. One cubic foot of timber produces about 5.5 board

feet of sawed lumber. That means Oklahoma grows enough commercially harvestable trees each year to produce about 1,076,350,000 (that's more than 1 billion) board feet of lumber.

Now this begins to boggle the circuitry of our little calculator, but the way we figure, in one second - one tick of the clock - Oklahoma grows enough timber to make more than 600,000

Up With Trees signs. It takes a fraction of a nanosecond to replace the timber sacrificed to an Up With Trees sign.

And the timber grown here is just a drop in the bucket compared to what is grown nationwide.

While Oklahoma's timber industry is not among the nation's leaders, it is still important to the state. The forest products industry ranks 10th in Oklahoma in terms of employment and dollars. Timber's estimated 1992 contribution to the Oklahoma economy was \$80.7 million for softwoods and \$36.2 million for hardwoods. Christmas trees are a \$424,000-a-year business in Oklahoma.

The state produces 204.2 million board feet of softwood saw timber (timber sawed into boards) and 81.5 million board feet of hardwood saw timber. It produces 57.1 million board feet in posts and poles, 4.2 million board feet in miscellaneous timber products, 173,614 cords of firewood and 143,711 cords of pulpwood.

Is this production sustainable? Yes. In recent years net timber growth in Oklahoma forests exceeds removals by a healthy margin.

When someone uses a 2x10 or 4x4 to build an Up With Trees sign, frame a house or build a backyard deck, he or she is using a renewable resource and contributing to the economy. At every step of the process of turning trees into lumber - from planting seedlings in clear-cut forests, to cutting, hauling and sawing the timber, to transporting the lumber, to selling it at the lumber yard - value is added.

So why make signs, or anything else, out of wood?

Like the guy says about the popular tortilla chip: Use all you want; they'll make more.

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