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State Invites Input to Local Use Lumber Program

(Juneau, AK) – The Alaska Division of Forestry and Fire Protection is developing a new program to increase the use of Alaskan wood by allowing local sawmill operators to self-certify their lumber. Local Use Lumber is a concept that promotes locally produced dimensional lumber to be used in some residential construction, usually single and double family houses.

“We want to see more Alaskan homes built with quality Alaskan lumber,” **said Governor Mike Dunleavy.** “Because Alaska sawmill operators often do not have the financial resources to pay for lumber grading, most of the wood used for construction in Alaska is imported from the Lower 48 or Canada. The Local Use Lumber program will increase the use of Alaskan lumber in Alaskan markets, create family wage jobs, and contribute to self-sufficient and thriving economies in rural parts of the state.”

Current residential building codes such as the 2018 International Residential Code requires that lumber be graded into quality categories by one of the six associations that publish grading rules for softwood dimensional lumber, to ensure that dimensional lumber can withstand the stresses of loadbearing parts of a structure. To meet current building codes, Alaska imports about \$20 million annually in wood products from Canada, much of that in dimensional lumber.

The financial and social cost of sourcing outside lumber has continued to rise:

- Alaska Housing and Finance Corporation: new building permits fell by 15% in the last year because of high lumber prices
- National Association of Home Builders: lumber prices increase single family home construction by as much as \$36,000
- Tanana Chiefs Conference report: an eight-foot 2X4 can cost as much as \$30.00 in remote Alaskan communities

“The benefits of a local construction lumber program go far beyond soaring prices and supply chain issues,” **said Helge Eng, Director of the Division of Forestry and Fire Protection.** “Small sawmill operators would independently inspect their product to confirm it meets the necessary specifications for construction, save cost-prohibitive membership fees for certifying agencies, and access a larger market for the rough-cut dimensional lumber that they produce. This program will also support rural Alaskan communities in particular moving from cash-only purchases to financing quality, reliable housing like the rest of the state.”

Seven other states have Local Use Lumber laws or regulations. The Alaska concept is a voluntary program with the State creating regulations, and municipalities that determine building

codes able to opt in to allow the use of local lumber. A stakeholder meeting on Sept. 23 ([meeting details](#)) with home builders, house inspectors, the home financing industry, mill operators, and municipal code enforcement officers will kick off the process and help the State identify any issues. It usually takes about 1.5 years to finalize regulations; without any challenges the program could be developed in as little as a year.

The public is invited to attend the Alaska Board of Forestry meeting on Oct. 20 to hear more about the Local Use Lumber proposal. An upcoming public notice will have meeting details.

The Department of Natural Resources' mission is to develop, conserve, and maximize the use of Alaska's natural resources consistent with the public interest.

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