LAKE STATES Region

Issues & Trends

Markets

- The winter logging season in the Lake States Region has been a mild one in terms of weather. The region experienced near-record rainfall in the fall of 2019. This winter has also produced snowfall amounts that are significantly higher than average. This has led to difficulties in accessing winter timber sales. Moving snow takes time as it lowers productivity and adds costs to the supply chain.

- The weather has benefited pine sawlog mills as logging capacity remains in upland sites. This is also true for hardwood users, such as aspen, as loggers are moving to harvest uplands sites as the swamps have yet to show signs of freezing. Loggers who are accessing the swamps took steps to prepare roads last season which allowed them to pack them down earlier in the winter to encourage freezing.

- One agency in the region reported that loggers are accessing summer logging sites this winter to meet harvest goals. This may lead to decreased availability of summer wood in the short-term.

- Verso Paper Company announced a project to convert part of its Duluth, MN mill from printing and writing paper to producing recycled paper packaging. The company has hinted a full conversion of the mill from paper to packaging is being considered.

- Flambeau River Papers, Park Falls, WI was acquired by property development company Niagara Worldwide in November 2019. Niagara Worldwide identifies itself as a company that specializes in demolition, mining, construction services, and environmental remediation.

Forest Service

- The Forest Service Region 9 timber program sold the most timber when compared to other Forest Service Regions in FY2019. The Lake States Region accounts for approximately 72 percent of Region 9 timber outputs.

- The Lake States National Forests timber program target for FY2020 is 10 percent more than FY2019. The increased timber volume is primarily due to the growth of the Good Neighbor Authority program in the Region.

Wisconsin Blowout

- Agencies continue to clean up the devastation caused by the wind event last summer in Wisconsin where nearly 300,000 acres of timberlands received wind damage.

- A great deal of cooperation between the agencies and the forest products industry is helping expedite the clean-up.

- Agencies are offering timber sale extensions to loggers for other sales they delay harvesting on if they work on blown down timber clean-up.

- FRA convened a meeting with the forest products industry, the Forest Service and WI DNR to discuss strategies and opportunities to expedite clean-up.

- To expedite harvest of the blowdown virtual boundaries are being used. Loggers use GPS to monitor boundaries as opposed to paint on trees. Historic data is also being used to generate timber volume estimates for the areas sold for salvage harvest.

Transportation

- The Wisconsin Council on Forestry endorsed the Safe Routes Act. In a letter to Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) the Council states “Legislation such as the Safe Routes Act, is needed to allow state-legal log trucks the option to avoid rural and urban streets and highways and populated areas where pedestrian activities are numerous and where frequent intersections increase traffic safety concerns.” The Wisconsin Council on Forestry is charged by Wisconsin statute with advising the state Department of Natural Resources, legislators, and Governor on forestry issues.
On January 28, U.S. District Judge Emmet Sullivan issued a decision on the lawsuit filed by the Defenders of Wildlife, Center for Biological Diversity, et.al. that challenged the listing of the Northern Long-eared Bat (NLEB) as threatened with a 4(d) rule. In the ruling, Judge Sullivan stated that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) failed to properly assess the condition of northern long-eared bats and the current threats to their survival when it declined to give them full protection under the Endangered Species Act. He ruled that the listing decision was arbitrary and capricious and has remanded it back to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for further consideration. Judge Sullivan did not vacate the entire listing decision as to the current threatened listing and 4(d) rule will remain in place until the USFWS determines the listing status of the NLEB. This process will require the USFWS to propose a rule and have a public comment and review period.

Judge Sullivan’s ruling highlights the urgency for the USFWS to complete the Lake States Bat Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) in the event the agency determines the NLEB is Endangered. The HCP will provide a framework to protect the NLEB while allowing for forest management. FRA anticipates the next comment period on the HCP to be early spring 2020.