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## Storms leave glut of timber that may affect market

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The destruction unleashed on coastal forests during the Dec. 2 storm has suddenly left public and private forest owners with a glut of dubiously valuable logs in an already dismal timber market.

"This is going to put an awful lot more volume out there," said Tom Savage, district forester for Oregon Department of Forestry's Astoria district.

Judging from aerial surveys, the damage was particularly severe within 10 miles from shore, with Clatsop County being particularly hard hit.

"Those winds were just mowing everything down," said Savage.

The number of snapped and uprooted trees is estimated to be greater than after the December 2006 storm that knocked down roughly 20 million board feet of timber in the Clatsop State Forest alone, he said.

That amounted to about \$17 million dollars of salvageable timber, said Ron Zilli, assistant district forester for ODF's Astoria District.

Exactly how much revenue can be derived from the most recent blowdown remains to be seen; the recovered value will depend partly on timber quality, which will likely be compromised, he said.

On ODF land, the affected stands will be sold to the highest bidder, who will then pay loggers to extract the fallen trees, explained Zilli.

Existing stands that have been put up for sale will need to be re-appraised to assess whether they've retained their initial value after the storm, he said.

Planned thinning projects will also need to be re-evaluated, since wind gusts may have rendered the operations unnecessary, said Zilli.

As for private landowners - both timber companies like Weyerhaeuser and family forest owners - the outlook is even more complicated.

The price for softwood framing lumber has plummeted to about \$260 per thousand board feet from the most recent high of about \$460 in May 2004, according to a composite from the Random Lengths forest products information

service.

Log prices have fallen accordingly, which has left forestland owners questioning the economic sense of salvage efforts, said Michael Bunch, president of the Clatsop chapter of the Oregon Small Woodlands Association.

Bunch estimated that roughly 10 percent of the trees on his 35 acre property were blown over, which is comparable to what other forestland owners in the area have experienced, he said.

"We lost about 500 trees," said Bunch. That's a big hit to a small woodland owner."

The scattered nature of the collapsed trees will complicate their extraction, hiking up the cost of salvage and reducing already thin profit margins, said Bunch.

"How efficient is it really going to be?" he said.

Given the already slow demand for logs, Bunch is also worried that local timber prices will take a further plunge when salvaged wood starts arriving at the mills.

"If all the sudden there are a million trees on the market that weren't there before, I don't know what that will do to the price of timber," he said.

If the weather is conducive, however, there may still be a lot of time for Douglas firs to be salvaged in the coming years. As long as the wood remains moist, it's not as prone to decay, said Zilli.

"Wet is good, dry is bad," he said, summarizing the conditions that influence preservation of Douglas fir, the most common tree in Oregon.

Cedar trees are even more resilient - old growth that blew down in the 1960s is still being salvaged - but the species is relatively rare, Zilli said.

At the other end of the spectrum, alder and hemlock are very prone to decay and will need to be recovered as soon as possible, not just to retain value but to prevent fire and disease risk, he explained.

Of course, the actual situation on the ground is still being assessed, so splintering and other defects will also determine how much timber is salvageable, said Savage.

"We don't know what the marketability is," he said.

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