

MENOMINEE TRIBAL ENTERPRISES CELEBRATES 100 YEARS OF SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT

Learning from Best Practices of the Past for a Viable Future

Menominee Tribal Enterprises (MTE) is an integrated sustainable forest management and wood products manufacturing enterprise which markets wood products from 14 quality hardwood and softwood species. MTE is located on the Menominee Reservation in the north central portion of Wisconsin and the Menominee Forest comprises approximately 230,000 acres.

This year, Menominee Tribal Enterprises is celebrating 100 years of business as the Neopit, WI sawmill was built in the year 1908. Today, the sawmill still operates at the same location and according to a 2007 Economic Impact Study provides \$96 million dollars of direct impact to the immediate and surrounding communities. Of course, the written history of MTE covers the last 140 years but the “Menominee People have been managing this land since the end of the ice age,” states Adrian Miller, President and CEO of MTE.



In a time when “green” and “sustainable” terminology has become high profile, it’s remarkable to see a company that has been practicing (and please note: prospering) sustainable forest management practices well before its popularity became main stream. “An 1850’s assessment of the Menominee Forest declared there to be 1.3 billion board feet of timber,” today Miller explains “there is an estimated 1.7 billion board feet of timber available and we have harvested the land two and half times over. What we have is healthier timber.”

So what can be learned from MTE? What can 100 years of sustainable forest management show us? According to Miller there are traditional beliefs that are the foundation of the management practices and principles of today’s operations. A balance, if you will, between the environment, the economy and the community:

“The fortunes of local economies, communities and ecosystems go hand in hand.”

“Sustainability means thinking in terms of whole systems, with all their interconnections, consequences, and feedback loops. This way of thinking avoids artificial and often misleading categories, such as humanity versus nature or jobs versus the environment.”

“Sustainable development of human culture means improving the quality of human life while living within the carrying capacity of supporting ecosystems.”

“Sustainability means living on interest, not drawing down capital. The idea of sustained yield of natural resources is far from new; it means, for example, harvesting trees at a rate within the forest’s capacity to regrow.”

MTE has won awards and received numerous accolades for their management practices including the 1996 President’s Honors Award for Sustainable Development awarded through President Clinton’s Council on Sustainable Development. But speaking with Adrian Miller you get a sense of what MTE takes great pride in. There is great pride in the quick response to the 2007 tornado that put 3,000 acres or 30 million board feet of timber down on the ground. The damage was assessed, the main roads were cleared, a second shift was started at the mill to accommodate the huge volume of logs and at the end of the clean up efforts less than 1 percent of the fallen timber was lost. And there is great pride in the collective efforts to act as responsible stewards of the land.

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The Menominee Forest was the second in the nation to receive certification some time ago, but recently the forest has undergone a recertification program with FSC, SFI and Chain of Custody. “We are a practical example of how this works,” explains Adrian Miller. He further explains that the process took some time but MTE didn’t alter or change their forest management practices. The process just put a seal of approval on the methods and the self-certification MTE had already been doing. “We have seen an increase in demand for FSC lumber and forest products so we invited the process. We should be certifying them not them certifying us” Miller jokingly adds.



But setting all jokes aside, MTE is worth observing, worth noting and worth applauding. The sustainable forest management practices they have utilized for hundreds of years have yielded a more healthy environment and community and will enable all of our children and children’s children to benefit from their vision. “And it’s only our first hundred years,” Bill Schmidt, Marketing Manager for MTE exuberantly concludes.

Adrian Miller is an NHLA Inspector Training School graduate – 54th Class.

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