



Media Contact: Kim Drew, APR
706.568.9504
kimdrewpr@gmail.com

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LUMBER INDUSTRY FIRST: NEW WOOD SPECIES INTRODUCED
Norway Spruce Prevalent Throughout Maine

(Cumberland, ME) – Momentous news from the U.S. lumber industry and the Cumberland-based Northeastern Lumber Manufacturers Association: Effective immediately, Norway Spruce becomes the first new, major, U.S.-grown, softwood species to be tested and approved for construction use since the lumber testing process began in the 1920s. Norway Spruce was approved for use by the American Lumber Standards Committee (ALSC) on October 20, 2016. Complete information on Norway Spruce may be found at www.nelma.org/norwayspruce.

The Northeastern Lumber Manufacturers Association (NELMA), the lumber grading agency for the Northeast, announced today that Norway Spruce will join the already-existing SPF (spruce-pine-fir south) grading category, indicating the wood is approved for home construction applications such as wall studs, floor and ceiling joists, and industrial applications.

“This is a once-in-a-lifetime occasion for the lumber and building industries,” said Jeff Easterling, president of NELMA. “The addition of a new species hasn’t happened in almost a century, and it’s been an exciting year as NELMA has worked to shepherd it through testing and bring it into the mainstream.”

Maine: Testing Information & Economic Impact

Norway Spruce strength value testing was completed in partnership with the University of Maine’s Advanced Structures & Composites Center, and lasted from October 21, 2015, to February 2, 2016. A total of 1,320 full-size pieces of 2x4s, 2x6s and

2x8s were tested in the process. The testing results were submitted to the ALSC beginning in early 2016 for review. The Norway Spruce samples were destructively-tested and lumber strength data calculated for the entire spectrum of design values: Modulus of Elasticity (MOE), Fiber Stress in Bending, Tension Parallel to Grain, Horizontal Shear, and Compression Parallel and Perpendicular to Grain.

Within the state of Maine there is an estimated 40 million board feet of sawtimber volume.

The Look

In the forest, Norway Spruce is easily recognizable by its large, drooping “branchlets.” Fun fact: the Rockefeller Center Christmas Tree has been a Norway Spruce the vast majority of times over the last several decades, including the 2015 tree, a 78-footer from Gardiner, New York.

Once cut into logs, Norway Spruce is virtually indistinguishable from native eastern spruce species, with even the most experienced of graders not able to discern one species from the other. Grade-wise, approximately 65% of Norway Spruce is expected to be graded at #2 and above, making it a strong, promising addition to the SPFs category. The primary market focus for the lumber will be on home construction applications such as wall studs, floor and ceiling joists, and industrial applications.

History

In the 1930s, FDR’s Civilian Conservation Corps was tasked with planting Norway Spruce across the northeast on abandoned agricultural properties for the purpose of soil stabilization. More than 113 million seedlings were provided by state nurseries for this government project. Looking back even earlier, a Harvard University study on Norway Spruce, authored in 1936, recorded evidence of the first Norway Spruce plantings at Woods Hole, Massachusetts, in 1860 by immigrants who brought stock from Europe.

Fast-forward to 2014, when NELMA members began to ask in earnest about the procedures necessary to gain acceptance of the species for use as a resource to manufacture construction lumber. Recognizing a need, the association began the process of identifying locations where the Norway Spruce was growing, cutting test logs from a broad geographic area, then testing the lumber to determine its appropriate strength values for proper end-use applications.

The Future

“As strange as it may sound, our goal for Norway Spruce is for it to simply disappear as a singular species name,” concluded Easterling. “Once it’s in a dimension mill, it’s simply part of the SPF’s group. Introducing a new species is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, but our goal is for it to blend seamlessly with the other wood in its category, benefitting our industry all the way down the line.”

Founded in 1933, [NELMA](#) (Northeastern Lumber Manufacturers Association) is the not-for-profit rules writing agency for Eastern White Pine lumber and the steward of the lumber industry in the Northeast. NELMA is also the grading authority for Eastern Spruce, Balsam Fir, the Spruce-Pine-Fir (SPFs) grouping, and other commercially important eastern softwood lumber species. For more information, please visit www.easternwhitepine.org and www.nelma.org. Find NELMA on Facebook at NELMA (Northeastern Lumber Manufacturers Association) and on twitter @inelma.

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