



Trees killed by the 2021 Dixie Fire, on land owned by Collins Pine.  
Courtesy photo by Collins Pine.

# Sawmill Upgrade Increases Use of Fire-Salvaged Logs

## Wildfire Crisis

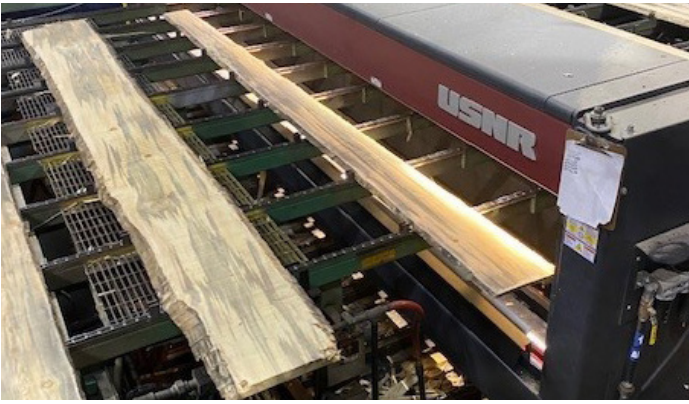
The wildfire crisis in California has been intensifying, with increasingly larger catastrophic wildfires harming people, communities, and forests. In addition to being some of the hottest and driest years in history, the 2020 and 2021 fire seasons ranked first and second, respectively, for the greatest number of acres burned. During those two seasons, 16,044 wildfires burned over 6.8 million acres and destroyed nearly 15,000 structures.

In 2021, the Dixie Fire—the largest single-ignition wildfire in California history—burned nearly one million acres across five counties and produced thousands of acres of burned trees. Standing dead trees deteriorate over time, creating a limited window in which to produce profitable lumber from burned logs.

## Increasing Market Capacity for Wildfire Recovery

As part of the recovery effort, one local sawmill is increasing its capacity to use more fire-salvaged logs. Collins Pine is a family-owned wood products business, founded in 1855. In the area of the Dixie Fire, Collins Pine owns and manages 140,000 acres of forest land. The fire burned nearly 50 percent of this land.

Collins Pine owns and operates several sawmills across the United States, including a 75-million-board-foot sawmill in Chester, CA, that produces dimensional and shop lumber from ponderosa pine, sugar pine, and white fir sourced from public and private lands. Located in Plumas County, Chester is a small rural community, situated between the Lassen



Upgraded edger in Collins Pine Chester sawmill. Courtesy photo by Collins Pine.

and Plumas National Forests. In a county that has an unemployment rate higher than the national average, the Collins Chester sawmill employs 120 people.

With the help of a \$250,000 U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Forest Service Wood Innovations grant, Collins has installed new high-tech scanning software in the Chester sawmill. The new board edger scanner combines full-color vision scanning with a geometric scan to grade each piece and identify knots and defects. With this optimization, each piece is graded and cut for the best possible recovery and yield.

The board edger captures about 500 boards per shift from material that was previously waste wood. It has also increased the value derived from each log, with larger amounts of higher grades. It is expected that overall long-term grade yield will increase by up to 45 percent.

The scanner is one of several improvements that improve the sawmill's efficiency, reduce the need for overtime, and increase throughput. These upgrades will help Collins derive the greatest value from fire-salvaged timber, as well as other lower value timber, before log defect becomes so great that processing is no longer profitable.

Galen Smith, Collins Pine vice president of resources, says, "Collins has been in Chester for 80 years. The board edger project was a great opportunity to reinvest in the location and is part of Collins' commitment to the town, the area, and

the forest. The project will help Collins weather future market fluctuations, advance our forest management goals, and remain a stable source of the local economy, while continuing to make the community stronger."

With increasing impacts from climate change, many experts expect the trend of increased fire weather to continue. Projects like the Collins Pine Chester sawmill upgrade that maximize wood use from California forests will help reduce wildfire risks and increase the pace of wildfire recovery.

### More Information

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## FAST FACTS

- The Forest Service Wood Innovations Grant Program improves Collins' capacity for processing fire-salvaged logs.
- Upgraded sawmill infrastructure can produce more valuable wood products before fire-salvaged logs lose their value.
- Increased use of fire-salvaged timber supports wildfire recovery by removing hazards and allowing for reforestation.
- The Collins Chester sawmill employs 120 people, contributing to the local economy's health and resilience.



Boards at the Collins Pine Chester sawmill. USDA Forest Service photo by Scott Burdette.