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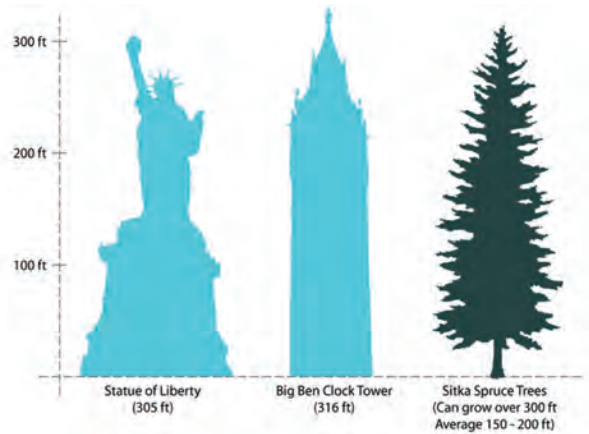
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Musicwood

This new documentary sets to identify how our treasured guitar tonewood resources can be best used for music and preserved.

The Tongass National Forest is the largest temperate rainforest in the world at 17 million acres, (nearly 69,000 km²), but it is being readily harvested for its natural resources at an incredible rate. It is also inhabited by native Alaskan peoples to whom some of this vast resource belongs as part of their natural heritage. Within this habitat's waters is great natural diversity of wildlife including tens of millions of salmon, seals, sea lions and humpback whales, deer and many other animals. With some of the harvested

woods being used for guitar manufacturing, we speak to the director of Musicwood, Maxine Trump, who has the goal of publicising this harvesting and more importantly encouraging sustainable use of our treasured spruce tonewoods.

What is the expected longevity of the Tongass National Forest at the current rate of clear cutting?

There are two sections to the forest. We are currently concentrating on the private lands, which have less protections in place for wildlife, clear cutting and so on. It is

the private corporation who supplied wood to the guitar manufacturers, Taylor, C.F. Martin and Gibson.

How can the wildlife habitats be sustained?

When a forest is clear cut, if the area isn't subject to landslides and rivers haven't been filled with silt etc, the forest in some areas can grow back, but a second growth forest grows back evenly, this sounds good but what it actually means is the undergrowth initially can allow movement for wildlife but as it continues to grow it becomes uniform and very thick

and impassable for deer, wolves, bears and other animals. I have personally tried to hike through this stuff and it's impossible, it's like a thick wall of branches. I am not a biologist, but we have interviewed a number now for our film, and what they recommend is tracts of virgin forests, almost avenues that can allow habitat to move freely within the logged areas, and from avenue to avenue.

Another alternative is selective harvesting by helicopter which only takes out a certain randomly selected individual trees, but this is very expensive and so many logging companies cannot do this alone.

The FSC, (The Forest Stewardship Council), is the best standard we can see so far, (most of the big environment groups agree, WWF, Greenpeace etc), which reduces the cut size, leaves buffers and old growth areas intact and it is also a consumer recognised label. Most of the guitar companies involved in



Musicwood have an ambition to become totally FSC certified for their guitars.

What are the projected time frames for conservation measures to take effect if in fact they were implemented?

Sealaska the major private logging company in the Tongass, have a last piece of the forest that they're negotiating with the government over right now. It's 85k acres - quite a huge area. They have taken their time to choose this land as they now want to change the area that they can log to receive a better financial return. If we can encourage Sealaska to carry out logging under the FSC gold standard then they wouldn't be able to clear cut this whole area. They would do smaller cuts and allow them to have enough wood for the future and extend the economy and lifeblood of the area to last a significant amount of time. They are currently running out of wood to harvest from their three hundred thousand acres over the last forty years, because they hadn't enforced a sustainable rotation of logging.

How can old growth forest be restored and how long does this take?

Old growth can only be restored when these trees of two hundred and fifty years to one thousand years old can grow back. That's the sad fact.

What needs to be done to make this happen on a scale that preserves the resource and who would be required to be motivated to organise such



“Old growth can only be restored when these trees of two hundred and fifty years to one thousand can grow back, that's the sad fact.”

initiatives as replanting?

Again this would involve the FSC. The company would have to decide to make less profit initially by extending the rotation of harvest by taking measures such as smaller cuts. However, FSC wood garners a better economic value for the wood supply, for example it's more expensive to buy. The guitar guys don't use a lot of wood, and it might mean that the logging company would need to look for more high end purchases of this wood, like furniture makers rather than exporting logs in the round to Asia.

Tell us about your achievements as a result of making an informed working relationship between the loggers and the guitar manufacturer companies.

We hope that through our documentary it keeps the 'dream alive' so to speak. The guitar guys can't always be in Alaska having these negotiations, but we have made further visits. The guitar manufacturers might have to look at other forests for their supply as they have had to do continually for all of their wood stocks for other parts of the guitars. Will they have to look at more synthetic materials? We hope not. The guitars of Martin, Taylor and some of Gibson are mostly made in the USA, having the wood also home grown which is an amazing story of craftsmanship in a Western world when so much manufacturing is moving to Asia.

When you walk in their workshops, you can observe true craftsmanship at work



and it's been a beautiful thing to film. Our hope is that music can build a bridge, save this primeval forest, the largest coastal temperate rain forest in the World. Martin, Taylor and Gibson are aggressively moving towards FSC manufactured Guitars. With the wonderful resurgence for acoustic music, this seems like it has become ever more important.

How and when can the documentary Musicwood DVD be seen?

We will complete the film by the fall to be released by early 2012. If you want to film to be screened in your area or on Netflix, please become a friend of our facebook page and we will do everything in our power to get it to your neighbourhood.

Russell Welton

www.facebook.com/musicwoodthefilm