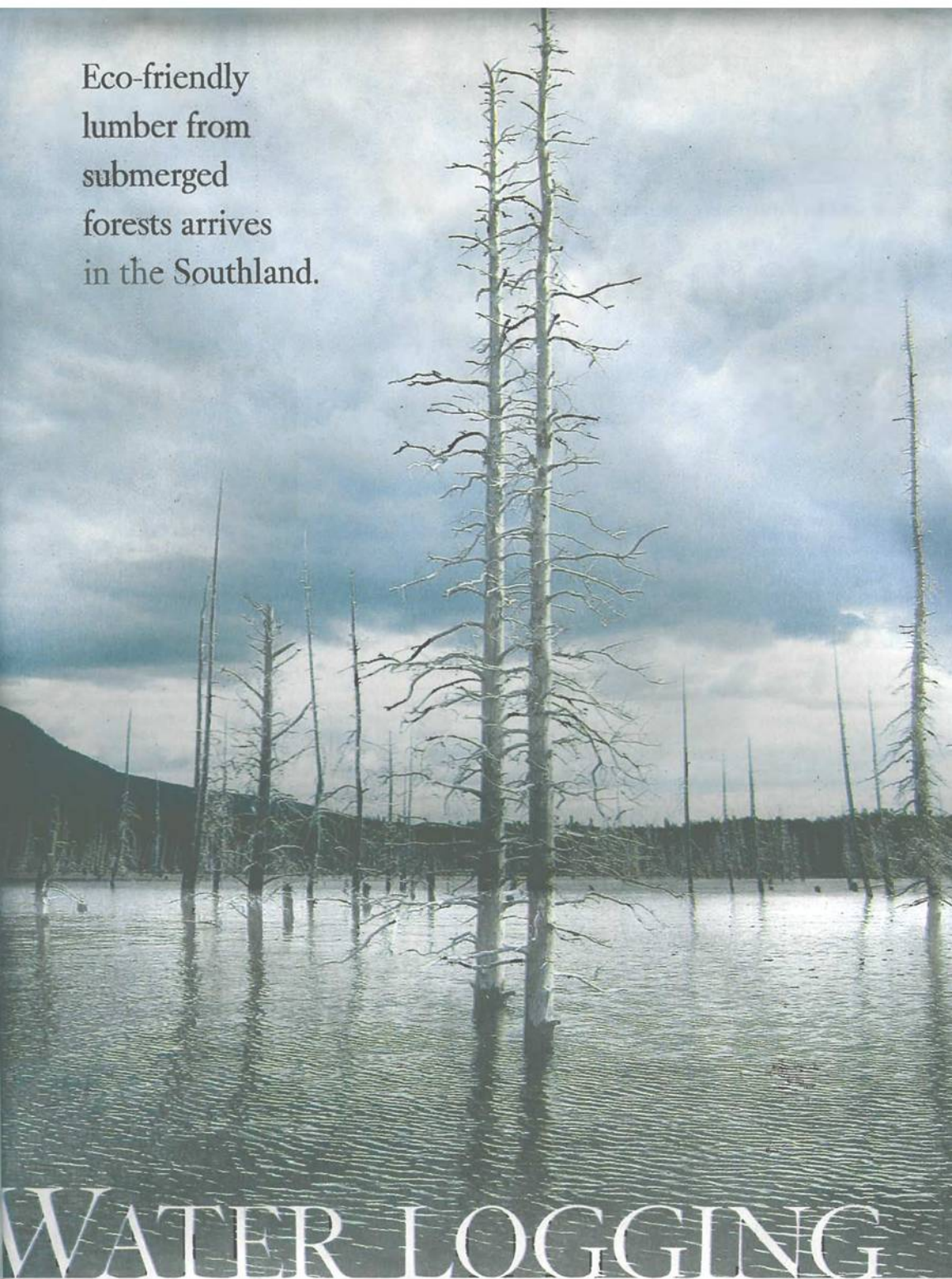


## REAL ESTATE

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Eco-friendly  
lumber from  
submerged  
forests arrives  
in the Southland.



## WATER LOGGING

By JENNIFER LIGLE  
Special to The Times

**I**T'S rare that the origins of newly milled 2-by-4s offer a compelling tale. But the boards, beams and planks that Triton Logging Inc. sells to home builders come from the cold, eerie depths of Canadian reservoirs. There, a remote-controlled chainsaw-wielding submarine called a Sawfish, developed by Triton's founder and chief executive, Chris Godsall, harvests trees killed by 20th century dam projects. Although the robotic lumberjack may conjure images of Jules Verne's primitive Nautilus, its mission is to dive 200 feet down in search of new sources of cedar, pine, spruce and Douglas fir.

The pilot sits in a barge on the surface, scanning multiple video screens to navigate the underwater landscape, a dark, surreal scene in which submerged trees look as though they've been frozen in time with bark and pine cones intact. Using a joystick, the Sawfish operator ties a canvas float to each tree, the saw cuts through its base and the tree rockets to the surface.

The wood has been preserved by the dark, oxygen-poor water, and once it is kiln-dried, it can be used as architectural-grade, old-growth lumber for purposes including support beams and [See Triton, Page K11]



Illustration by JOHN KOCOR

**GREEN MACHINE:** The Sawfish is depicted cutting through a tree trunk, above. A partially submerged forest, top, stands in a British Columbia lake.

# Logging beneath water's surface

[Triton, from Page K1] custom cabinetry. Triton, a small Canadian company based near Victoria, British Columbia, has offered its lumber to builders mainly on a limited, custom-order basis and has had trouble meeting the growing demand for its products in Canada and the U.S. Much of what they produce has been used for Canadian green-building projects, though some has been making its way to construction projects in Southern California.

Since 2004, Triton has harvested trees from two reservoirs in British Columbia, Ootsa Lake and Lois Lake. But with an aggressive plan to build a school of Sawfish and expand production, and with 45,000 untapped submerged forests in the world, Godsall intends to distribute wood products to the public through the company's website at [www.tritonlogging.com](http://www.tritonlogging.com) within a year. In five years, he hopes to be operating on five continents.

It's part of a national trend in which the green-building marketplace is becoming broader and more sophisticated in its offerings as the home-owning public is becoming more interested in buying ecologically friendly products, said Alex Wilson, the president and chief executive of BuildingGreen Inc. The Vermont-based firm publishes newsletters and books on green building — the practice of increasing the efficiency with which buildings and their sites use energy, water and materials, and minimizing the effect on human health and the environment.

## Pro-conservation sentiment

Even Home Depot is seizing eco-friendliness as a viable market. The store now offers an "Eco Options" labeling system, which helps consumers identify products, such as compact fluorescent light bulbs and items made with sustainable forest wood, that have less of an effect on the environment than competing ones.

In developing Triton, Godsall, who has a background as a marketing consultant, felt he was tapping into pro-conservation consumer sentiment.

"There are a lot of people out there who want to feel good about what they own," Godsall said. "They want to know that what they're buying is not destroying the environment."

Godsall hopes that Triton's products, which include basic lumber, wood paneling and finished furniture, will satisfy the requirements of even the most rigorous eco-conscious shoppers.

As "rediscovered" wood, Triton products are certified by the Rainforest Alliance's SmartWood program. The Rainforest Alliance, which runs the SmartWood program, employs tough standards to make sure that the wood it certifies has been harvested in an environmentally responsible way.

Triton wood qualifies for this certification for several reasons. Since its wood is already dead, the company is not destroying live forests, which provide a habitat for wildlife and absorb carbon dioxide, a gas that would otherwise contribute to global warming.

"We don't disturb fish habitat," Godsall also points out, because an underwater forest is not a natural marine habitat.

Also, Triton's harvesting has little effect on the



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**END PRODUCT:** Douglas fir poles from Triton are incorporated in the structure of a home being built in La Jolla, above. Photographs below show the logging process: 1) The remote-controlled Sawfish is launched. 2) Canvas floats help bring the cut trees to the surface. 3) Logs are then milled.

## Eco-friendly resources

For more information on green building and products:

- **The U.S. Green Building Council**, [www.usgbc.org](http://www.usgbc.org), provides information and guidelines about green building and the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design Green Building Rating System, a national benchmark for the design, construction and operation of green buildings.
- **BuildingGreen Inc.**, [www.buildinggreen.com](http://www.buildinggreen.com), is home to the newsletter Environmental Building News and provides information on green building practices and resources.
- **Forest Stewardship Council**, [www.fsc.org](http://www.fsc.org), identifies and labels products that support responsible forest management worldwide.
- **Rainforest Alliance**, [www.ra.org](http://www.ra.org), is an environmental advocacy group that also provides forest-sustainability certification through its SmartWood program.
- **Terra Mai**, [www.terramai.com](http://www.terramai.com), is a broker for reclaimed wood.
- **Build It Green**, [www.builditgreen.org](http://www.builditgreen.org), promotes energy- and resource-efficient buildings in California, connecting consumers and building professionals with tools and technical expertise.

surrounding ecosystem since the company uses roads and infrastructure already in place around the reservoirs and the underwater operation makes less noise than aboveground methods.

Since it can be difficult to obtain high-quality old-growth timber without damaging the environment, green builders are welcoming Triton's expansion.

Robert Thiele, a San Diego architect, said he looked at a lot of wood before he custom-ordered Triton's Douglas fir poles. He used them as support for the pavilion roof of a multimillion-dollar house he is building in La Jolla for a client.

"The wood is special because the material has been suspended in time; the grains are very tight," he said. "I'm not sure how to get poles like that out of regular lumberyards."

Although he's had trouble finding the high-



Triton Logging Inc.



Triton Logging Inc.



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grade material he likes, he said that it's getting easier now, as the market for eco-friendly products has exploded in the four years he's been using sustainable design materials.

"It's like the whole trans-fat thing," Thiele said. "People are getting the message that there are benefits to buying this stuff."

Escott Norton, a Los Angeles-based green builder, said that being able to buy Triton wood online will save him a lot of time looking for reclaimed wood products, many of which come from old barns in other regions of the United States.

"Unless you want old railroad ties, it's hard to find locally," Norton said.

## Still a niche market

Wood harvested in an environmentally sensitive way usually costs Norton about 10% more than conventionally harvested wood, but he says he uses energy-efficient technology in his projects, which saves money down the line.

Most consumers, however, may not take this long-term viewpoint. Higher costs have historically made homeowners reluctant to buy eco-friendly building products, said BuildingGreen's Wilson.

Triton's products currently cost from 5% to 25% more than noncertified land-logged lumber, but Godsall feels Triton can eventually be price-competitive.

After all, there are an estimated 200 million to 300 million trees under water worldwide, and Godsall said it's just a matter of building enough Sawfish — which cost more than \$1 million each — and training enough technicians to access them.

"We will be supplying 250 million board feet within five years, putting us in the top 20 producers in Canada," he said.

So, rather than having a grandmother's tea service as a conversation piece, homeowners may one day be showing off and discussing the provenance of their floors or support beams.

As long as consumers are making eco-friendly choices, environmentalists are happy.

"People might use it so that they can tell their guests at cocktail parties where it came from," Wilson said, "and that's OK."

Jennifer Lisle can be reached at [jentlisle1119@aol.com](mailto:jentlisle1119@aol.com).