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Turning Blanks Edition
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THE LUMBER DAILY

TOP STORIES

East Evans Creek Fire Nears 8,000 Acres as Washington Orders an Eastside Burn Ban

The East Evans Creek Fire in Jackson County, Oregon grew roughly 2,500 acres overnight into Wednesday and stands at 7,843 acres with 5 percent containment. The fire ignited Friday afternoon 14 miles northeast of Rogue River and has shown extreme behavior, with long-range spotting, group torching and crowning; a spot fire on Board Mountain has itself reached about 1,000 acres. New Level 3 go-now evacuation orders were issued Wednesday for zones near Shady Cove, more than 1,300 personnel are assigned, and smoke has reached Seattle. Across the border, Washington's Department of Natural Resources will ban outdoor burning, campfires and charcoal on the forest lands it protects in eastern Washington starting Friday, citing low winter snowpack and statewide drought. Nationally the season sits at preparedness level 4, with 48 uncontained large fires and year-to-date burned acreage at 132 percent of the 10-year average.

Juken Confirms Kaitaia Sawmill Will Close After Buyer Search Fails

Juken New Zealand said Wednesday it will shut its Northland sawmill at Kaitaia by August 21, ending a consultation that began June 24 and cutting about 60 jobs. The Japanese-owned company put both Kaitaia operations, the sawmill and the neighbouring Triboard plant, up for sale earlier this year and ran a tender through late May; no workable offer for the sawmill emerged. Juken cited falling demand in key markets, rising costs and insufficient work to run the mill sustainably, and posted a NZ$39.7 million loss for its latest financial year. The company says it remains open to conversations with potential buyers for the land and assets and will offer affected workers redeployment across its other sites. The closure leaves Far North radiata logs with one less domestic processing outlet.

Wildlife Agents Search Two Missouri Walnut Operations

Agents with the US Fish and Wildlife Service's Office of Law Enforcement executed federal search warrants Tuesday morning at two southwest Missouri hardwood businesses: Missouri Walnut, near Neosho, and D&D Hardwoods, near Racine in Newton County. The service said the investigation involves natural resource laws, adding in a statement that the illegal commercialization of American natural resources undermines lawful trade and damages American businesses. No charges have been announced. D&D Hardwoods said the agents' arrival came as a complete surprise, that it understands authorities are broadly examining the purchase, sale, transportation and shipment of logs for compliance with federal law, and that it is cooperating fully; its mill remains in operation. Black walnut is the highest-value widely-traded American hardwood, and both firms sit in the heart of the native walnut belt.

■ DEEP DIVE: TURNING BLANKS

What a blank is

A turning blank is wood dimensioned for the lathe rather than the planer. Spindle stock is cut with the grain running the length of the piece, typically 1x1 through 4x4 squares in six-inch to three-foot lengths, for chair legs, tool handles, balusters and boxes. Bowl blanks are sawn as thick squares or discs, commonly 4x4x2 for small work up to 10x10x4 and beyond. Pen blanks are standardized at 3/4 x 3/4 x 5 inches so they fit common kit hardware. The commercial logic runs opposite to the grade ladder. Lumber grading penalizes short lengths, knots and wild grain; the blank market pays a premium for character, so crotch figure, spalting, curl and burl move a piece up the price list instead of down it.

The drying problem

Blanks fail in drying, not on the lathe. Thick squares and bowl stock cannot be pushed through a standard kiln schedule without checking, so the trade splits three ways. Smaller sections are kiln-dried and sold with a guarantee to clean up at a stated dimension, such as a 3-inch square guaranteed to true up at 2-3/4. Thick bowl stock is sold green with waxed ends and faces, and the turner does the seasoning: rough-turn a thick wall while the wood is wet, let the piece air-dry for months, then re-turn it round, the twice-turned bowl. Small stock air-dries on its own schedule; hobbyists report 2-inch discs stabilizing in three to four months and bagged pen stock in well under a year. Inventory time, not machinery, is the producer's main cost.

The math on a blank

Retail listings this week make the value ladder visible. Kiln-dried black walnut turning squares list at $30.95 for four 3x3 pieces six inches long, rising to $144 for four three-footers; 2-inch walnut bowl blanks run $25.95 to $39.95 a pair; highly figured walnut pen blanks list at $14.95 for five, about $3 apiece. Convert to lumber terms. A 3x3x36 square holds 2.25 board feet, so the $144 four-pack contains 9 board feet and prices the wood at $16 a board foot. A pen blank holds about 0.02 board feet, which puts the $3 blank near $150 a board foot. Sawing, drying, sorting and packing earn much of that spread, but the raw material is the same tree that otherwise leaves the yard as ordinary lumber.

Supply and demand

Turning stock is a recovery product. It monetizes what boards cannot: lengths below the grade ladder's minimums, crotch sections, storm and urban salvage, and spalted logs partway to decay. Several hardwood mills run turning squares as a product line alongside lumber, cutting them from cants and rippings. The demand side is unusually organized for a craft market. The American Association of Woodturners counts more than 12,000 members across 365-plus chapters, with club instruction and symposiums feeding a steady retail trade in blanks by the piece. Species mixes tell their own story: variety packs pair walnut, cherry and curly maple with bloodwood, purpleheart, wenge and zebrawood, one of the few remaining channels where tropical species reach an American consumer by name.

WHAT YOU MISSED YESTERDAY

Wednesday, July 15 - business, markets, and the broader economy.

- **Markets:** The S&P 500 rose 0.4 percent to 7,572.40, the Nasdaq gained 0.6 percent to 26,269.23, and the Dow added 0.3 percent to 52,658.64. Large technology names led, and Apple closed at a record high.
- **Inflation:** June producer prices fell 0.3 percent on the month against expectations for no change; the core measure rose 0.2 percent and the annual core rate eased to 4.7 percent. It was the second cool inflation print in two days, following Tuesday's consumer-price report.
- **Rates:** The 10-year Treasury yield eased to 4.59 percent after the producer-price data.
- **Oil:** WTI crude for August added 26 cents to settle at $79.60 and Brent settled at $84.95. US strikes on Tehran continued and Washington reinstated its naval blockade of Iranian ports, but the session's moves stayed modest.
- **Bank of Canada:** Held its policy rate at 2.25 percent, as expected, noting growth picking up and inflation projected to ease; it flagged the Middle East war and US trade policy as the main risks to the outlook.
- **On deck:** July builder confidence lands this morning; June housing starts and permits follow Friday.

INDUSTRY & COMPANY NEWS

- **The Bureau of Land Management** is recruiting about 130 forestry technicians, survey technicians and equipment operators in western Oregon, using direct-hire authorities plus a new Field Unit Local authority that emphasizes recruiting from the mill towns where the work sits. An informational job fair runs Friday in Eugene. The push lands while the agency's draft plan to raise western Oregon harvest volumes remains in process.
- **Mercer International** will cut about 350 positions at its Torgau, Germany wood-products complex in stages through roughly the second quarter of 2027, starting with about 100 contractor roles this month. The site makes construction and packaging lumber, pallets, planed wood, pellets and briquettes; the company cited global economic uncertainty plus raw-material and energy costs.
- **Woodland Pulp** drew a pointed federal update on the January hydrogen sulfide release that killed two young workers at its Baileyville, Maine kraft mill: investigators said no personal gas monitors had been issued, the building had no fixed detectors, and the hazard in the acid sewer piping was known to the company before the release.
- **The Canadian Real Estate Association** downgraded its 2026 forecast again and now expects home resales to fall 1.4 percent from 2025, reversing its earlier call for a small increase; it cited the weak first half, the spring bond-yield and mortgage-rate spike, and faster-than-expected population decline. June sales edged up month over month.
- **PacifiCan** directed more than $8 million in federal money to Surrey, BC businesses, including a manufacturer of mass-timber connection hardware, extending Ottawa's run of value-added wood investments in the province.
- **West Coast Helicopters** lost a Hughes 500 working forestry operations in the Loughborough Inlet area of the BC coast Tuesday morning; the pilot and a forest-management contractor were killed and one person survived. The crash is under investigation.

■ MARKET SNAPSHOT

INDICATOR	VALUE	TREND
10-yr Treasury yield	**4.59%**	Eased after June producer prices fell 0.3% on the month
WTI crude (Aug)	**$79.60**	Up 26 cents Wednesday; Iranian-port blockade reinstated
US producer prices, June	**-0.3% m/m**	Core 4.7% y/y, below forecasts; second soft print of the week
Single-family permits, Jan-May	**380,130**	Down 6.1% y/y while multifamily permits rose 6.5%
US uncontained large fires	**48**	Preparedness level 4; YTD acres at 132% of the 10-yr average

■ THE BOTTOM LINE

Start with the fires. East Evans Creek is near 8,000 acres at 5 percent containment, eastern Washington's burn ban starts Friday, and the national season is running a third above the ten-year average on acres. Federal wildlife agents searched two Missouri walnut operations, and the direction of that investigation is not yet public. Capacity kept leaving the market, with Kaitaia's sawmill set to close in August and about 350 positions going at Torgau. The deep dive prices the lathe trade: a $3 pen blank works out near $150 a board foot, and blanks pay up for exactly the figure and short lengths the grade ladder discounts. The macro news was friendlier: producer prices fell, the 10-year eased, and the Bank of Canada held.

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