

TOP STORIES

Boston Bar's New Fire Tops 4,300 Hectares in a Day as Ottawa Convenes Its Fire Group

The Anderson Creek fire near Boston Bar, BC, discovered Tuesday afternoon, covered 4,333 hectares by Wednesday afternoon — more than a fourfold jump overnight — and investigators determined it was human-caused. About 450 properties remain under evacuation order across Boston Bar, North Bend, Nahatlatch, and North Boothroyd, with Highway 1 closed south of the community and evacuees registering at a reception centre in Kamloops. Prime Minister Mark Carney convened the federal government's wildfire response group Wednesday as three fires — Anderson Creek, Brunswick Creek, and Ainslie Creek — burned on the community's flanks. The fire sits in the Fraser Canyon corridor that carries highway and rail freight between the Lower Mainland and the Interior, the second time this month the corridor has closed.

An Oregon-Led Bill Would Put Forest Thinnings in the Fuel Tank

Senators Jeff Merkley of Oregon and Cindy Hyde-Smith of Mississippi, joined by Representatives Cliff Bentz and Bennie Thompson, introduced the Wildfire Reduction Market Expansion Act on Wednesday. The bill would modernize the Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS) definition of renewable biomass so that woody material removed in forest-management and hazardous-fuels-reduction work qualifies under the program. More than 75 organizations endorsed the measure, including the National Alliance of Forest Owners, the Intertribal Timber Council, and the Farm Bureau. Sponsors said the change would create markets for small-diameter material that currently has none — the economics gap behind stalled Western thinning projects. It lands a week after a separate House bill proposing a 30 percent tax credit for new biomass facilities.

SCA's Sawmill Margin Collapses to 5.8 Percent in Its Worst Quarter in Years

SCA's second-quarter report Wednesday showed its Wood segment's EBITDA fell 71 percent from a year earlier to SEK 89 million, with the margin collapsing to 5.8 percent from 17.9 percent. Log costs stayed high, deliveries fell 12 percent to 500,000 cubic meters, and currency moved against the company; group EBITDA dropped 36 percent. Management said selling prices rose through the quarter on sustained raw-material costs and seasonally better demand, but not by enough to offset the squeeze, and noted pine sawlog inventories at Swedish and Finnish producers remain high while spruce stocks are normal. The report echoes the cooperative Sodra's swing to a loss days earlier: Nordic sawmilling is paying more for logs than weak European construction demand gives back.

■ DEEP DIVE: AFTER THE LAST SHIFT

Four Nations, 1,070 Acres

When Canfor's Plateau sawmill near Vanderhoof, BC went quiet, the site did not. Four First Nations — Stellat'en, Nadleh Whut'en, Saik'uz, and Lheidli T'enneh — closed their joint purchase of the 1,070-acre property on June 30 and are relaunching it as the Ncha Koh Industrial Park, keeping the rock quarry and rail siding that made it a mill site in the first place. BC Hydro has already signed a four-year lease to stage construction of the North Coast Transmission Line's first phase from the property. The purchase extends a pattern in BC: Domtar agreed in March 2025 to return a substantial portion of the former tiskwat paper-mill lands at Powell River to the Tla'amin Nation, whose ancestral village stood there, and Tla'amin agreed this February to buy Western Forest Products' Stillwater forest operation — 154,000 hectares of timber tenure, not a mill — for \$80 million.

The Auction Block

Where no buyer wants the whole operation, the assets leave piece by piece. Red Mill Lumber in Casco, Maine, a mill that pivoted from boards to timber mats in 2018, goes to a complete liquidation auction on July 30. In southwest Washington, Cowlitz Fiber Industrial's equipment sells in a timed online auction running July 29 through August 6. Canfor's former Fort St John sawmill went further still, sold to a salvage firm in June for teardown value. The auction calendar is a quiet ledger of capacity exit: machinery that sells at auction rarely reassembles into the same mill, and a liquidation sale is usually the moment an indefinite curtailment becomes a permanent one.

The Hole in the Tax Roll

A closed mill keeps costing its town after the gates lock. Thunder Bay ran a tax-arrears tender on the former Superior Fine Papers waterfront site — roughly \$2.35 million owing — and when the tender closed July 1, nobody bid. Canton, North Carolina budgeted around a \$1 million revenue hole after its paper mill closed in 2023. And in Pointe-aux-Outardes, Quebec, this week's sawmill closure announcement puts about \$215,000 a year of municipal revenue at risk, roughly 38 percent of the village's industrial-park tax base. The pattern is consistent across cases: the mill is usually the largest single assessment in town, and when it stops paying, the burden shifts to houses.

What Makes a Dead Mill Worth Buying

The sites that find second lives tend to share three assets: power interconnection, rail, and water. The non-returned remainder of the Powell River mill property sold to an industrial-park developer that cited exactly that — waterfront access and energy infrastructure. The cautionary case is Millinocket, Maine, where a \$300 million data-center plan for the former Great Northern Paper site was cancelled in April 2025 because the property could not deliver enough power to attract an artificial-intelligence tenant. Environmental legacy cuts the other way: the former Smurfit-Stone pulp mill site near Missoula, Montana carries more than 900 acres of unlined wastewater ponds and sludge dumps, with a federal cleanup start still years out. Buyers underwrite both line items — the substation and the sludge pond — before the first offer lands.

WHAT YOU MISSED YESTERDAY

Wednesday, July 22 — business, markets, and the broader economy.

- **Stocks:** The S&P 500 slipped 0.1 percent and the Nasdaq fell 0.6 percent in a holding-pattern session ahead of mega-cap earnings; the Dow was flat.
- **After the bell:** Alphabet posted 24 percent sales growth with cloud revenue up 81 percent and \$45 billion of quarterly capital spending; Tesla grew revenue 26 percent but missed on earnings.
- **Oil:** Crude rose about 3 percent for a second day — Brent reached a six-week high — after an eleventh consecutive night of US strikes on Iran and Iranian warnings that Hormuz's southern shipping route is mined.
- **Rates:** The 10-year Treasury yield rose to about 4.67 percent as the oil rally pressed on inflation expectations.
- **Movers:** AT&T gained 4 percent on an earnings beat, and Super Micro jumped 26 percent on order backlog.

INDUSTRY & COMPANY NEWS

- **Gull Bay First Nation** in northwestern Ontario ordered a mandatory evacuation Wednesday after lightning raised the count of nearby fires to six; about 2,415 evacuees from the region are now housed in Thunder Bay, Kenora, and Toronto, and Highways 527 and 811 are closed. The region was fighting 146 active fires as of Tuesday evening, 53 of them not under control.
- **BlackRock, Carhartt, Ford, and Google** launched the Alliance for America's Skilled Trades, committing to workforce training across 30 states against an estimated 2.1 million unfilled skilled-trades positions by 2030, a gap that includes the construction, millwork-installation, and plant-maintenance trades wood products depends on.
- **Architecture billings** stayed soft in June: the American Institute of Architects' billings index rose about three points to 47.3 but logged a 41st straight month below the growth line; project inquiries, at 56.1, were the bright spot.
- **Oregon's East Evans Creek Fire** held at 15,705 acres Wednesday with no new growth; all remaining Go Now evacuation notices were downgraded, and the state fire marshal began releasing structural task forces after the fire's first week.

MARKET & FIRE SNAPSHOT

INDICATOR	VALUE	TREND
WTI crude	\$86.83	Up 3.0% Wednesday, a second straight 2%-plus session
Brent crude	\$94.07	Six-week high on the mined-strait warning; up 3.4% Wednesday
USD/CAD	1.4088	Loonie firmed slightly through two days of tariff diplomacy
Russell 2000	2,959.94	Small caps fell 0.9% Wednesday while the S&P was near flat

THE BOTTOM LINE

Quick read for Thursday. Boston Bar's new fire jumped past 4,300 hectares and closed the Fraser Canyon corridor for the second time this month. An Oregon-led bill would let forest thinnings count as renewable biomass under the fuel standard. A major Nordic producer's sawmill margin fell to 5.8 percent as log costs outran weak European demand. The deep dive looks at what happens to a mill site after the last shift. Architecture billings marked a 41st straight month below the growth line.