

Voluntary Report – Voluntary - Public Distribution

Date: April 09, 2021

Report Number: JA2021-0049

Report Name: Japan Grants Equivalence Recognition to US-Graded Norway Spruce Lumber

Country: Japan

Post: Tokyo

Report Category: Wood Products

Prepared By: Daisuke Sasatani

Approved By: Mariya Rakhovskaya

Report Highlights:

On March 31, 2021, Japan's Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism expanded its recognition of American Lumber Standard Committee's (ALSC) grading of the Spruce-Pine-Fir South (SPFs) grouping to include U.S.-grown Norway spruce lumber. Now, U.S.-grown Norway spruce dimension lumber certified as SPFs by a U.S. grading agency no longer requires further approval prior to use in 2x4 construction in Japan. ALSC added U.S.-grown Norway spruce to its SPFs grouping in 2016.

General

Prior to 1997, Japan's Building Standard Law mandated the use of Japan Agricultural Standard (JAS) graded structural dimension lumber for the 2x4 construction method. In 1997, MLIT permitted the use of U.S. dimension lumber without a JAS stamp in 2x4 construction, provided the lumber was graded by North American grading agencies certified by the American Lumber Standard Committee (ALSC). Since then, the vast majority of North American dimension lumber exported to Japan has been graded by ALSC-certified North American grading entities, rather than JAS graders (for details see [JA2020-0087](#)). Please see [JA2019-0214](#) for Japan's import regulations and standards for wood products.

The Spruce-Pine-Fir South (SPFs) dimension lumber is manufactured from logs harvested in the United States, while the Spruce-Pine-Fir (SPF) dimension lumber is produced from Canadian logs. Japan's Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism (MLIT) accepted as JAS equivalent the ALSC category of SPFs dimension lumber. That initial SPFs group included nine U.S. wood species: lodgepole pine, Engelmann spruce, Sitka spruce, red spruce, black spruce, white spruce, balsam fir, jack pine and red pine. On October 20, 2016, the ALSC Board of Review added U.S.-grown Norway spruce to its SPFs grouping. ALSC adopted the same design values for the use of U.S.-grown Norway spruce in construction as for the other nine SPFs species.

On March 31, 2021, MLIT recognized the inclusion of U.S.-grown Norway spruce in the SPFs dimension lumber grouping. Accordingly, dimension lumber, finger-jointed lumber, and machine stress rated (MSR) lumber manufactured from U.S.-grown Norway spruce lumber certified as SPFs by U.S. grading agencies¹ no longer requires further approval prior to use in 2x4 construction in Japan.

Background

North American dimension lumber manufacturers use single species grading (e.g., Douglas-fir, Western red-cedar, Ponderosa pine, Sitka spruce) and mixed species grading (e.g., Hem-Fir, Southern Yellow Pine). Due to similar performance properties and overlapping production areas of specific spruce, pine and fir species grown in the United States, ALSC developed a composite "SPFs" lumber grading category.

In the 19th century, European settlers introduced Norway spruce (*Picea abies*), native to Europe, to the United States. In addition to the United States, Japan imports Norway spruce lumber from Europe as "European whitewood" lamstock for glulam production.

In 2020, Japan imported 4.3 million cubic meters of spruce, pine and fir lumber, of which 54.0 percent came from European countries (Norway spruce and Scotch pine), 20.2 percent from Canada (SPF dimension lumber), and 18.4 percent from Russia (Russian red pine, Yezo spruce, etc.). Japan imported

¹ These include the Northeastern Lumber Manufacturers Association (NELMA), Pacific Lumber Inspection Bureau (PLIB), and Western Wood Products Association (WWPA).

2,919 cubic meters of spruce, pine and fir lumber, including SPF's dimension lumber, from the United States in 2020. Sitka spruce lumber², primarily used for musical instruments and furniture, represents approximately half of spruce, pine and fir lumber imports from the United States to Japan.

Attachments:

No Attachments.

² Although Sitka spruce can be included in SPF's grading category, Japanese consumers typically demand "Sitka spruce" single species grading.