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How Forest Disease Cuts Our Wood Crop by Half

By James Kay, B.Sc., F.

While a member of a party cruising a tract of virgin timber in Southern British Columbia and Western Montana this summer, I was struck by the large amount of damage done to trees by wood rotting fungi.

Forest fires are spectacular, and combatting them is a source of worry and expense, and the damage and loss is self-evident, whereas the loss caused in the forest by fungi may often escape notice owing to the insidious nature of its attack, the loss may only be evident after felling, or after the trees have been sawn at the mill.

Forest trees are subject to mechanical injuries—snow-break, trees falling and breaking branches and scraping bark off the trunks, bears and deer also damage the stems by tearing and scraping the bark. It is at these injured points that the spores of fungi find lodgement and

if ample moisture is present they will germinate and will develop a white fibrous or matted body called the mycelium, which grows and spreads in all directions in the wood. The wood rotting fungi, however, excrete certain ferments which extract the lignin from the cell walls; also in most cases they are able to dissolve completely the basic structure of the cell wall by other ferments.

The number of fungi which affect the lumberman, most closely, are the bracket fungi, and are broadly represented by the perennial form "Fonces" and the annual form "Polyporus." The species Fonces form hard woody shelf-like structures, and as long as the mycelium can obtain food material in its advance into the wood it will develop a new layer of tubes on the under surface each year. Thus, the size of the fruiting body increases yearly.