Resource Dependency of Lumberjacks

The forest products industry is, by most standards, Alabama's leading industry. It is the state's largest industrial sector as measured by number of businesses, payrolls, value added, and value of shipped goods, and is second only to the textile industry in the number of workers it employs. Jobs in the woods, the mill, or in related businesses are the mainstay for many communities, providing not only employment, but also the income necessary to drive local economies. Without the forest products industry, many Alabama communities would not survive economically.

While virtually every part of the state is heavily forested, containing the resource base necessary for forests product industries, only about one third of the counties are presently timber dependent, i.e., economically dependent on these industries.

A major theme in the research dealing with timber dependency has been the relationship between timber dependency and community well-being. Community well-being is typically defined in terms of a set of social indicators - socioeconomic, demographic, health, educational, etc. variables. While the results are far from uniform, they have, in general, shown a negative relationship between the level of timber dependency and community well-being. The relationship certainly holds for Alabama, where non-timber dependent rural counties have higher scores on indicators of community well-being than timber dependent counties. In each of the following characteristics, the conditions in timber dependent counties of Alabama were worse than non-timber dependent counties.

- Per Capita Personal Income
- Median Household Income
- Percent Persons Below Poverty Level
- Average Unemployment Rate
- Percent Persons Receiving Food Stamps
- Infant Mortality Rate
- Per Capita Local Taxes