

# ECO Management

**From sourcing wood to spraying finish, Taylor innovation reaches toward greater environmental sustainability**



**E**nvironmentally responsible manufacturing methods are nothing new at Taylor. Improving the efficiency of the guitar-making process has been one of the driving themes of Bob Taylor's career, and one of the dividends of the company's many pioneering innovations has been a reduction in material waste. Changing our cutting specifications for neck wood with mahogany trees, for example, led to a substantial increase in the number of necks that each tree could yield. Improvements in the formula of our finish cut the levels of VOC (volatile organic compounds) released. And the robotic system we use to spray finish on guitars employs an electrostatic attraction method, which allows for an extraordinarily high transfer efficiency (in the neighborhood of 80 percent), substantially reducing the amount of overspray and emissions.

Of the material waste we do produce, much of it is recycled. Our scrap wood is ground in our on-site wood chipper and blended in a container with our sawdust. This wood is then delivered to a processor, where it becomes particle board and mulch. Ultimately, 100 percent of it



is reused. We also recycle all of our oil and coolant, and have a solvent still that we use to repurify our acetone (a cleaning solvent), which is used over and over. Even the used strings from our Factory Service Center find a second home. We send them to the Second Strings Project, a program run by Taylor singer-songwriter Darryl Purpose, after which they are distributed to musicians in Third World countries.

### Direct Sourcing

Sustainable forestry remains the most crucial issue among guitar manufacturers, especially relating to mahogany, spruce and ebony. In the case of mahogany, Taylor innovation has allowed us to "go primitive" and partner with remote forest communities in Honduras to legally and sustainably procure wood. We're now in the fifth year of our Honduran partnerships and are currently working with three communities. Each community has legal rights to a small amount of acreage of tropical rainforest, and their government allows them to take out several mahogany trees every year in compliance with harvesting regulations. They select those mahogany trees and cut them into lumber for Taylor. Because of the controlled harvesting, the impact on the forest is minimal, and because of the high dollar value we pay for mahogany compared to a high-volume logging company, the communities can earn a healthy income.

"Each community is able to cut so few trees because they get more money per tree from us than if a logging company came in and cleared it all out," explains Bob Taylor. "The business we do with these communities provides about 40 percent of their annual income."

### A Policy for Good Wood

Another initiative with major environmental implications is the U.S. Lacey Act, passed in 2008, which effectively issued the world's first official ban on trade in illegal wood. A positive global impact has already been felt, reducing illegal logging according to some reports by up to 40 percent.

Internally, we've established our Responsible Timber Purchasing Policy, which ensures that our purchasing decisions align with the goal of forest sustainability. It applies to every piece of wood we purchase. The policy also addresses the many conditions that surround the procurement process. We've even written a forest floor code of conduct for our wood suppliers. We feel that having a clear, detailed policy in place will help us honor our responsibility to the environment, customers, suppliers and staff to be an accountable, eco-conscious manufacturer.

### Looking Ahead: Timber-Tracking

Taylor is currently exploring a pilot timber-tracking program that would allow the company to track supplies of mahogany from their source point to ensure the integrity of the supply. The program incorporates bar code and GPS technology, and would also allow guitar owners to make a virtual visit to the forest region that produced the raw materials for their guitars. Such technology could help increase environmental awareness among customers and help them become more connected to the process of tree harvesting and to the communities who rely on forestry for their livelihood.

### Bob's Big Picture Outlook

For years, Bob Taylor has been proactive in applying creative thinking to environmental issues. And as an industry leader, his embrace of new guitar-making methods and sustainable alternative tonewoods, such as ovankol and sapele, has given them a legitimacy that has in turn helped change perceptions within the guitar market in healthy ways. He explains how Taylor and other instrument manufacturers can be responsible stewards of the natural resources they rely on.

"I think you need to start by having a grateful attitude that we have these resources," he says. "Most natural resources are sustainable if you don't waste them, if you replace them, or if your participation in some way supports the replacement of them. You also spread the word and encourage others – your colleagues, other people in business – to do the same thing. Rather than be upset about regulations or pressure to not overharvest, you have to slim it down, use the right amount, and get the highest yield. In my case, if a tree comes down and a lot of jobs can be created from that tree, that's better than just a few. Does the tree get cut into two-by-fours and used up fast, or is it cut into a thousand guitar tops and used up slowly? To me, that's a great way to look at it."

**Opposite page:** Bar-coded mahogany lumber is transported from the forest in Honduras (photo courtesy of Greenwood); **This page:** Left: Milling a mahogany tree at the source in Honduras; Above right: A mahogany tree being felled; **Right:** A mill in Belize

