

Offsetting U.S. Tariffs on Canadian Softwood Lumber: A DSGE Analysis of Domestic Subsidies

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Abstract

The United States has imposed increasing tariffs on softwood lumber Exports from Canada. In order to offset the effect of the tariffs, this paper proposes a direct subsidy for domestic softwood lumber usage in the construction industry. Using a small open dynamic stochastic general equilibrium model, we can model the subsidy's ability to offset the loss of export demand. By exploring the relationship of softwood lumber to Canada's economy and demand from the United States, we can calibrate the model to simulate the softwood lumber industry. The model will stimulate output from softwood lumber from sawmills, towards construction firms. The efficacy of this policy can be determined by comparing the effect of a negative shock on demand with or without the policy. This policy will have the secondary effect of increasing the housing stock in Canada, at a time where the country is facing a housing crisis.

1 Introduction

1.1 Weakness in the Softwood Lumber Industry

The softwood lumber industry is a prominent part of the Canadian economy. Over the past 20 years it has displayed an inability to self-correct against negative demand shocks. Since 1997 Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting industries made up an average of 1.94% [18], with Forestry making up 1.2% on its own in 2022 [10]. This has declined slightly in recent years, with the industries only making up 1.76% in 2024 [18]. Within Forestry there are many components, however softwood lumber production made up 98% of lumber production in 2020 [15]. In aggregate softwood lumber production has decreased since 2004 [20]. The industry is declining in output in the long run [13].

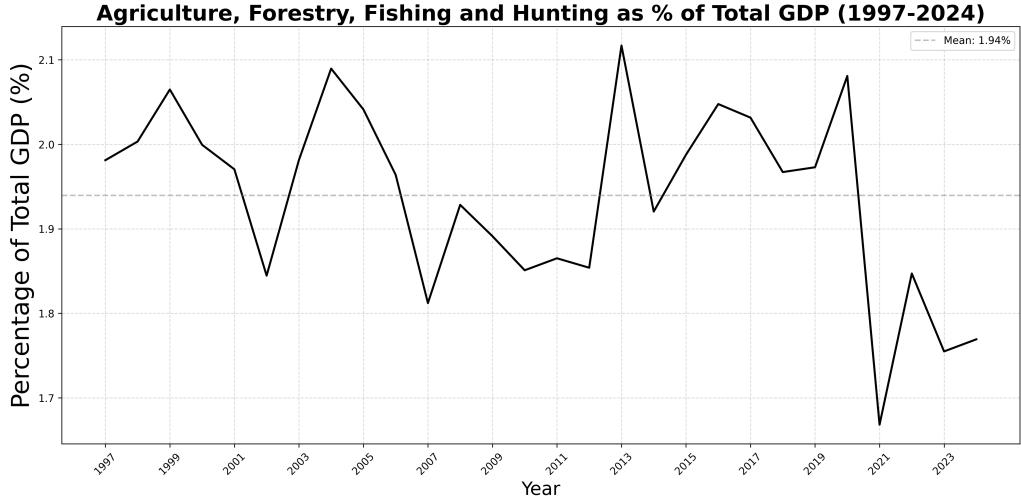


Figure 1: Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting as Percentage of Total GDP (1997–2024). Source: Statistics Canada [18], Table 36-10-0434-03. Notes: Author’s calculations.

When looking at employment levels since 2001 [17], we can see that there was a large negative shock to employment around the great recession. The sawmill industry has been unable to meaningfully recover its employment levels since then (Figure 2). While it has seen an increase in output per worker (Figure 4), it has not made up for the overall lack of labour inputs to the sector. The industry has seen closures which has made it harder for employment to recover [15].

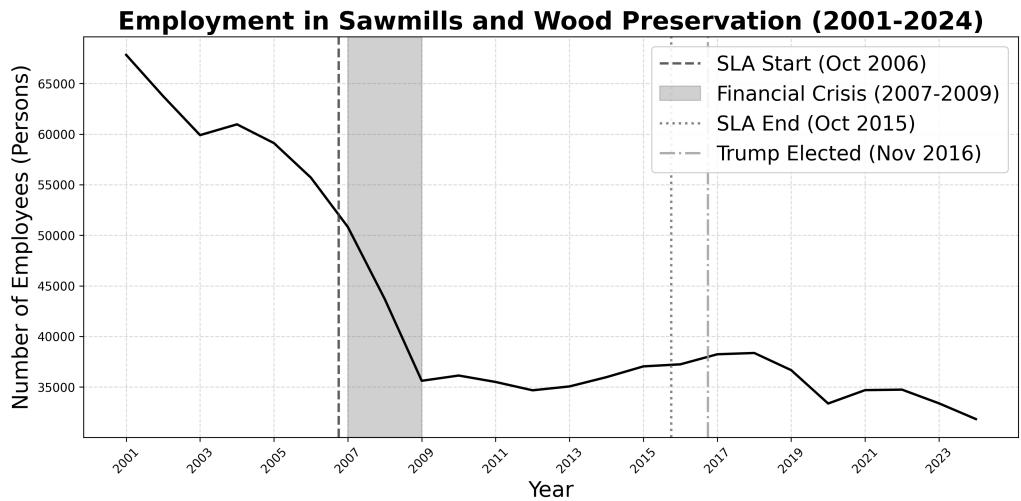


Figure 2: Sawmill Employment (2001–2024). Source: Statistics Canada [17], Table 14-10-0202-01

Despite the declining output, sawmills have seen large spikes in revenue in the past 10

years [16]. In 2021, lumber prices spiked dramatically [21], leading to this higher revenue. This shows a divergence between price and output, where if a price spike can't cause a recovery in employment or output in the industry. After the crisis there was an increase in the output per worker, peaking around 2016 [13] [17]. However this was not associated with an increase in employment.

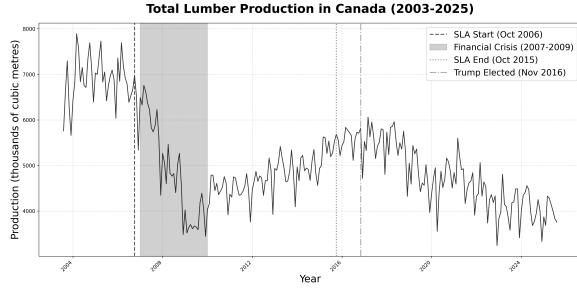


Figure 3: Lumber Production (2003–2025).
Source: Statistics Canada [13], Table 16-10-0017-01, Table 16-10-0045-01.

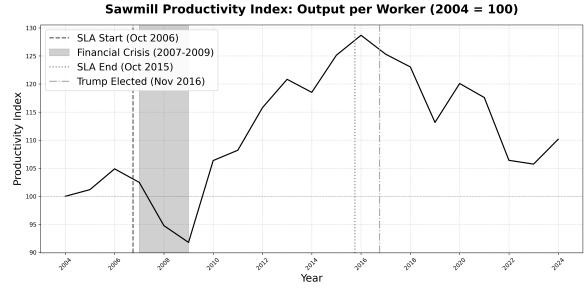


Figure 4: Sawmill Productivity Index (2004–2024), Source: Statistics Canada [13], Table 16-10-0017-01, Table 16-10-0045-01, Table 14-10-0202-01. Notes: Author's calculations

Despite the falling employment and production, the industry saw a large spike in revenue around 2021 (Figure 5). This was correlated with a massive price spike in lumber (Figure 6). This massive spike in revenue would be expected to be correlated with a long term decaying increase in production and employment in order to take advantage of the price opportunities.

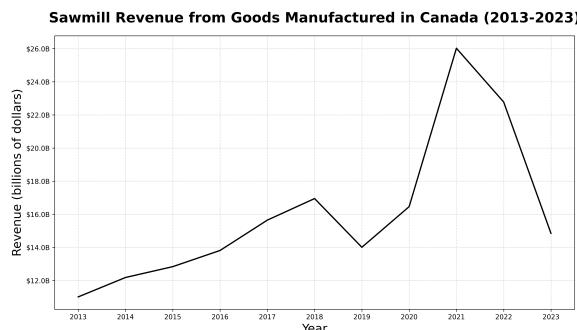


Figure 5: Sawmill Revenue. Sources: Statistics Canada [16], Table 16-10-0117-01.

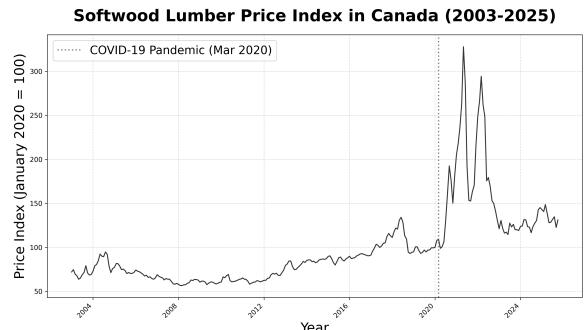


Figure 6: Indexed lumber prices. Sources: Statistics Canada [21], Table 18-10-0266-01.

However this recovery in employment never came. Showing that the lumber industry in

Canada cannot self correct to its pre financial crisis levels of production and employment, even given massive price spikes in its output goods.

This suggests that the industry is unable to self correct. Given the possibility of additional negative demand shocks on exports, the industry needs to find a way to make up for the losses in a way that domestic demand currently cannot. This is possibly due to the many natural challenges the industry faces, such as wildfires and mountain pine beetles [15].

1.2 Reliance on Exports to the U.S.

The softwood lumber industry is particularly reliant on exports to the United States. In both 2006 and 2020 around 67% of all softwood lumber production was exported [15]. The construction industry spent \$1,514 Million on softwood lumber imports in 2016 [22]. With the United States making up 75.8% of those in January 2017 [14]. This means the industry is at risk due to its large dependence on exports to the U.S.

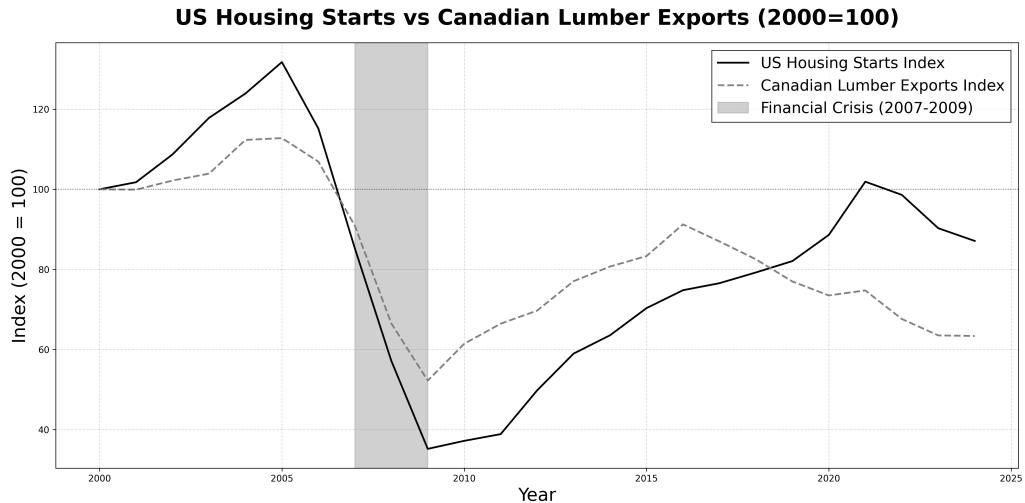


Figure 7: U.S. Housing Starts vs Canadian Lumber Exports (2000–2024). Sources: Statistics Canada [14], Table 16-10-0045-01. Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis [3]. Notes: Author's calculations

Historically the demand for softwood lumber in the U.S. has been correlated with the number of housing starts in the U.S. [3] [20] [13]. When housing starts fell in 2006-2009 during the financial crisis in the United States (Figure 7), employment in the sawmill industry also fell sharply. Since then employment has sat steady at 50% of its peaks [17].

Even as U.S. housing starts have recovered, this was not correlated with an increase in employment in the industry

While employment had not recovered, from 2010 to 2016 there was a resurgence in sawmill production [20] [13], mirroring the increase in housing starts in the U.S. This was mostly driven by an increase in output per worker. Showing that the industry has been stabilized in the past by this demand by the United States.

1.3 Tariffs on Canadian Softwood Lumber

From 2006 to 2015 lumber trade between the U.S. and Canada was governed by the Softwood Lumber Agreement (SLA 2006) [23]. This agreement contained no countervailing duties or anti-dumping tariffs. Instead it relied on export taxes and quotas which varied alongside the price of lumber in the United States [23]. These export taxes ranged from 0% to 15% [9].

Following the end of this agreement, there was no deal in place, meaning no tariffs, export quotas, or export taxes. This period corresponded with the a local peak in lumber production [20].

Since 2017 the correlation between U.S. housing starts and lumber exports has shown increased residuals as seen in Figure 9. Indicating that housing starts are no longer an accurate indicator of export demand for softwood lumber in the United States. This implies that an increase in housing starts in the U.S. will not correspond strongly with increased production or employment in the industry.

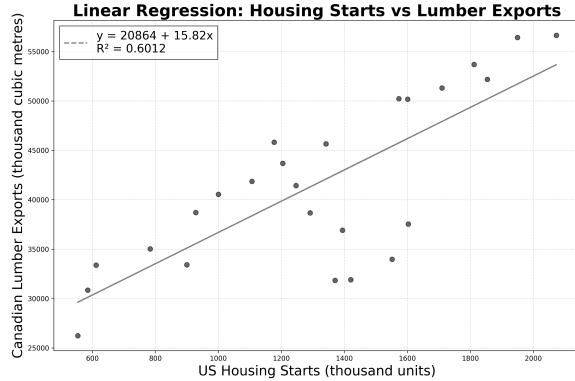


Figure 8: Linear Regression: Housing Starts vs Lumber Exports. Sources: Statistics Canada [14], Table 16-10-0045-01. Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis [3]. Notes: Author's calculations

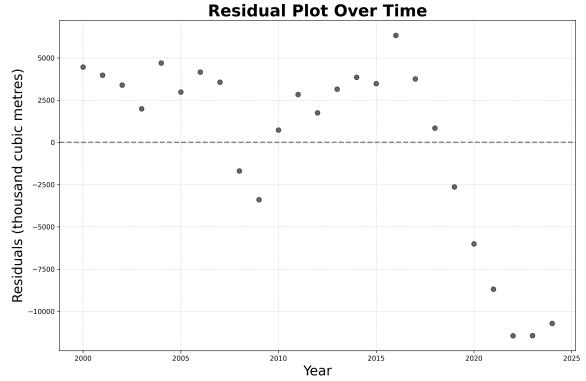


Figure 9: Residual Plot Over Time. Sources: Statistics Canada [14], Table 16-10-0045-01. Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis [3]. Notes: Author's calculations

In 2017 the United States began investigating Canadian softwood lumber producers, accusing them of being unfairly subsidized [25]. The first investigations began in January 2017 [2]. This investigation concluded that Canadian softwood lumber producers are subsidized by the stumpage fees that they pay on government land [2]. It was assessed that the subsidy amounted to 3.34%-18.19% [24] depending on the firm. As a result the United States began imposing two types of tariffs on Canadian lumber producers [6]. Anti-dumping rates and countervailing duties. Anti-dumping rates are intended to offset the effect of low cost commodities bringing down the domestic price of the goods. Countervailing duties are meant to offset the subsidies given by foreign governments to their domestic firms.

These rates took effect in 2017, and have been under annual review since then [7]. The rates were assessed for individual firms, based on their calculated subsidy rate, as well as a rate for all other firms. By using market share in 2023 [4], we have calculated an effective tariff rate on the industry.

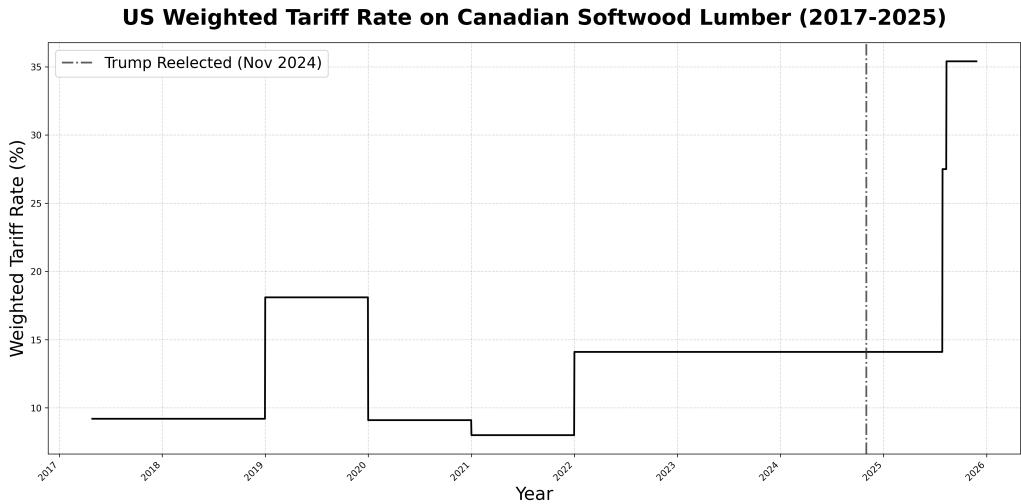


Figure 10: U.S. Weighted Tariff Rate on Canadian Softwood Lumber (2017–2025) Source: Government of British Columbia [8]. ForestNet [4]. Notes: Author’s calculations; see Appendix 4.2

While these rates varied slightly from 2017 to 2025, they have spiked upwards this year with the re-election of Donald Trump (Figure 10). It is hard to assess the full impact of these tariffs, but with the anti-dumping rates almost tripling this year [8], they must be considered when looking forward in the softwood lumber industry.

1.4 Inducing Domestic Demand through Subsidies

In the face of these increased tariffs, there is a risk that the industry will face another negative demand shock that it cannot recover from.

In order to compensate for this demand loss, this paper proposes a model for inducing demand through subsidies for the construction industry.

This is in line with Prime Minister Mark Carney’s proposals to offer loans to sawmills and ensure government construction projects use Canadian lumber [11]. With Canadian housing starts currently higher than they have been since 2008 (Figure 11), it makes sense to leverage lumber during this time.

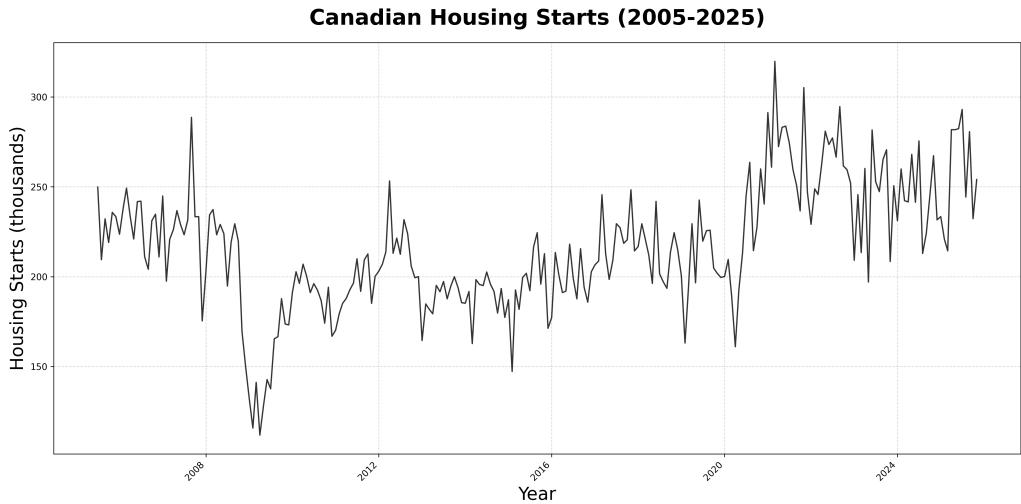


Figure 11: Canadian housing starts (2005-2024) Source: Statistics Canada [19].

In 2024 the construction industry contributed \$165 Billion to Canadian GDP [18], compared to \$40 Billion by the entire agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting industries [18]. The scale of this industry makes it a strong target for inducing demand in the much smaller lumber industry.

Construction firms can often substitute between concrete, steel, and lumber for different projects depending on prices [12]. Figure 12 shows a large spike in lumber prices around covid 2019, and that its current price is now closely comparable to ready mix concrete when indexed from 2010 prices [21]. This gives the government the opportunity to make lumber a more appealing material for construction by lowering its real price to be in line with steel and concrete.

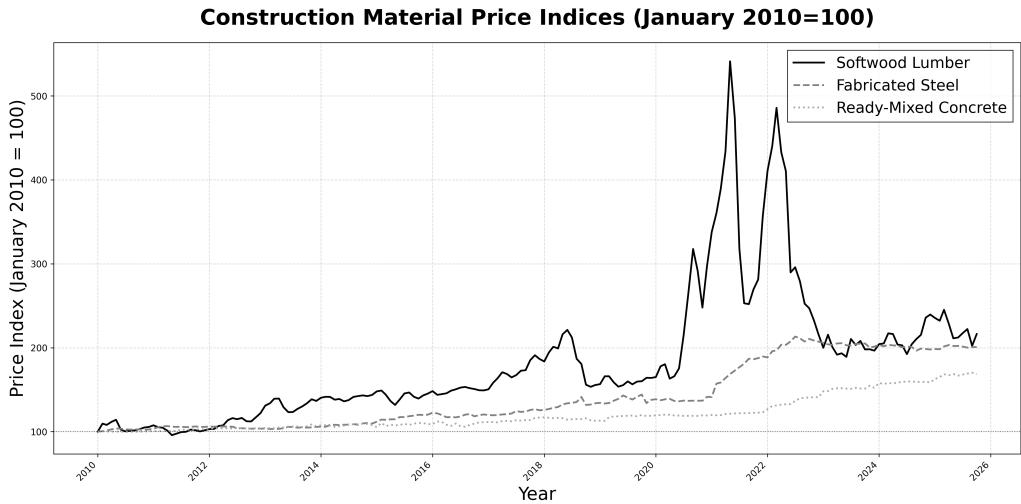


Figure 12: Construction Material Price Indices (2003–2025). Source: Statistics Canada [21], Table 18-10-0266-01. Notes: Author’s calculations.

2 Literature Review

This paper relies on previous knowledge of DSGE models, and the techniques for adjusting them to the specific use cases. Gomme and Midrigan [5] outlines the method of calibration for DSGE models which would be used to calibrate this model. A methodology for extending the standard DSGE model to include intermediary goods can be found in Christiano et al. [1].

For general background on the lumber dispute between the United States and Canada, there are two recommended papers. van Kooten [26] covers the original SLA, and more historical background on the trade dispute. Hoover and Fergusson [9] is about the effects and details of the SLA agreement in place from 2006-2015.

3 Theoretical Model

3.1 Overview

The model proposed in this paper is a small open economy DSGE model. It relies on two types of firms, sawmills and construction firms, with softwood lumber being an intermediary good between them. Additionally it has a household consumer, and a

government.

The sawmills produce softwood lumber from capital and labour using a Cobb-Douglas production function. Technology is provided as a static parameter. $\alpha \in (0, 1)$ denotes the share of income spent on each input.

$$Y_t^W = A^S K_t^\alpha L_t^{1-\alpha} \quad (1)$$

Sawmill firms will be constrained by the cost of their inputs and the value of their outputs. They pay the market rates for wages and the rental rate of capital, and earn income based on their output quantity and the price of softwood lumber. Sawmills will choose K_t and L_t to maximize output.

$$P^W Y_t^W = r_t K_t + w_t L_t \quad (2)$$

The output of the sawmill firms will be used as an input for the construction firms. Who will use softwood lumber alongside alternatives to lumber in order to create the final good. The production function for construction firms is a Constant Elasticity of Substitution function. Allowing the model to fine tune the ability of the model to adjust how substitutable lumber and its alternatives in construction are. Technology is provided as a static parameter.

$$Y_t^F = A^C \left(\theta W_t^\phi + (1 - \theta) \Psi_t^\phi \right)^{1/\phi}. \quad (3)$$

The construction firms will be constrained by the cost of their inputs and the value of their outputs. They pay below the market rate for lumber based on the size of the government subsidy.

$$\mathcal{P}_t^W = (1 - \omega) P_t^W. \quad (4)$$

They pay the static price for alternatives to lumber. They receive revenue based on their output. They choose W_t^ϕ and Ψ_t^ϕ to maximize output. The final good has its price

normalized to 1.

$$Y_t^F = \mathcal{P}_t^W W_t + P_t^\Psi \Psi_t. \quad (5)$$

The government pays the lumber subsidy based on the set rate ω . They only pay this subsidy on the portion of lumber which is used as input for the construction firms.

$$G_t = \omega P_t^W W_t. \quad (6)$$

The government pays for this policy by collecting a lump sum tax on the consumers. Such that their budget is balanced.

The households will provide labour and capital to the sawmills firms. They will earn income on their provided capital and labour which they will spend on consumption, investment, and lump sum transfers to the government.

$$C_t + K_{t+1} - (1 - \delta)K_t = w_t L_t + r_t K_t - T_t. \quad (7)$$

The households will derive utility from leisure and consumption of the final good. The utility function has been defined as a summation of logs. Where γ represents the preference weight between the two goods.

$$U = \log(C_t) + \gamma \log(1 - L_t). \quad (8)$$

At each time step the consumer will make the choice between consumption and investment based on the Euler equation.

$$\frac{1}{C_t} = \beta \frac{1}{C_{t+1}} (r_{t+1} + 1 - \delta). \quad (9)$$

They additionally will choose how much to work and consume based on the given wage.

$$\frac{\gamma C_t}{1 - L_t} = w_t. \quad (10)$$

In order to model export demand, an additional exogenous variable X will be defined. This will be used to simulate shocks due to tariffs.

4 Appendix

4.1 Model

4.1.1 Model Definition

Sawmill Firms

Table 1: Notation for Sawmill Firms

	Symbol	Description
Variables	Y^W	Lumber output
	K	Capital input to sawmill firms
	L	Labour input to sawmill firms
Prices	r	Rental rate of capital
	w	Wage rate of labour
	P^W	Price of lumber
Parameters	A^S	Technology parameter for sawmill firms
	α	Capital share parameter, $\alpha \in (0, 1)$

Production Function:

$$Y_t^W = A^S K_t^\alpha L_t^{1-\alpha} \quad (1)$$

Budget Constraint:

$$P^W Y_t^W = r_t K_t + w_t L_t \quad (2)$$

Construction Firms

Table 2: Notation for Construction Firms

	Symbol	Description
Variables	Y^F	Final output produced by construction firms
	W	Lumber input used in construction
	Ψ	Alternative inputs to lumber
Prices	\mathcal{P}^W	Effective price of lumber
	P^Ψ	Price of alternative inputs
Parameters	A^C	Technology parameter for construction firms
	θ	Input share or scaling parameter in construction production
	ϕ	Governs the elasticity of substitution between lumber and alternatives

Production

$$Y_t^F = A^C \left(\theta W_t^\phi + (1 - \theta) \Psi_t^\phi \right)^{1/\phi}. \quad (3)$$

Budget Constraint

$$Y_t^F = \mathcal{P}_t^W W_t + P_t^\Psi \Psi_t. \quad (5)$$

Effective price of lumber

$$\mathcal{P}_t^W = (1 - \omega) P_t^W. \quad (4)$$

Government

Table 3: Notation for Government

	Symbol	Description
Variables	G	Government expenditure on lumber tax credits
Policy Instruments	T	Lump-sum tax levied on households
	ω	Tax credit rate applied to lumber inputs

Lumber tax credit expenditure

$$G_t = \omega P_t^W W_t. \quad (6)$$

Government budget constraint

$$G_t = T_t. \quad (11)$$

Households

Table 4: Notation for Households

	Symbol	Description
Variables	C	Consumption of the final good
	L	Labour supplied by the household
Parameters	γ	Preference weight on leisure in utility

Preferences

$$U = \log(C_t) + \gamma \log(1 - L_t). \quad (8)$$

Budget constraint

$$C_t + K_{t+1} - (1 - \delta)K_t = w_t L_t + r_t K_t - T_t. \quad (7)$$

External Demand

Table 5: Notation for External Demand

	Symbol	Description
Variables	X	External demand for lumber

4.1.2 Market Clearing Conditions

Table 1: Notation for Market Clearing Conditions

	Symbol	Description
Markets	Y^W	Lumber market clearing output
	Y^F	Final goods market clearing output
	L	Labour market clearing quantity

Market clearing in each sector requires:

$$Y^W = W + X, \quad (12)$$

$$Y^F = C, \quad (13)$$

$$L = L^D. \quad (14)$$

4.1.3 First Order Conditions

Households

The household chooses $\{C_t, L_t, K_{t+1}\}_{t=0}^\infty$ to maximize utility subject to the budget constraint. The first-order conditions are:

$$\frac{1}{C_t} = \lambda_t, \quad (15)$$

$$\frac{\gamma}{1 - L_t} = \lambda_t w_t, \quad (16)$$

$$\lambda_t = \beta \lambda_{t+1} (r_{t+1} + 1 - \delta). \quad (17)$$

These conditions imply the Euler equation:

$$\frac{1}{C_t} = \beta \frac{1}{C_{t+1}} (r_{t+1} + 1 - \delta). \quad (18)$$

And the Intratemporal Consumption Leisure Tradeoff

$$\frac{\gamma C_t}{1 - L_t} = w_t. \quad (19)$$

Sawmill Firms

Sawmill firms choose K_t and L_t to maximize profits given prices. The first-order conditions are:

$$(1 - \alpha) P_t^W A^S K_t^\alpha L_t^{-\alpha} = w_t, \quad (20)$$

$$\alpha P_t^W A^S K_t^{\alpha-1} L_t^{1-\alpha} = r_t. \quad (21)$$

Construction Firms

Construction firms choose W_t and Ψ_t to minimize costs subject to the production function.

The first-order conditions are:

$$\theta A^C \left(\theta W_t^\phi + (1 - \theta) \Psi_t^\phi \right)^{\frac{1}{\phi}-1} W_t^{\phi-1} = \mathcal{P}_t^W, \quad (22)$$

$$(1 - \theta) A^C \left(\theta W_t^\phi + (1 - \theta) \Psi_t^\phi \right)^{\frac{1}{\phi}-1} \Psi_t^{\phi-1} = P_t^\Psi. \quad (23)$$

These conditions imply the price ratio between the goods.

$$\frac{\mathcal{P}_t^W}{P_t^\Psi} = \frac{\theta}{(1 - \theta)} \left(\frac{W_t}{\Psi_t} \right)^{\phi-1} \quad (24)$$

4.2 Effective Tariff Rate

Calculating the Rate

The effective U.S. tariff rate on Canadian softwood lumber is constructed as a firm-weighted average of countervailing and anti-dumping duties:

$$\tau_t = \sum_{i \in \mathcal{F}} \omega_i \tau_{i,t}, \quad (25)$$

where $\tau_{i,t}$ denotes the tariff rate applied to firm i at time t , and ω_i is firm i 's share of Canadian softwood lumber exports.

Export Weights

Table 2: Production Weights Used in the Construction of the Effective Tariff Rate

Firm	Weight
West Fraser Timber Co. Ltd.	0.136
Canfor Corporation	0.111
Resolute Forest Products	0.096
J.D. Irving, Limited	0.055
All remaining Canadian softwood lumber producers	0.602
Total	1.000

Tariff rates are calculated based on the dates of actions taken as part of the Annual Reviews (AR) 1 through 6 [8]. Constant weights were used for this paper based on 2023 export quantities [4]. After AR3, resolute was not given individual tariff rates [8]. After AR5 J.D. Irving was not given individual tariff rates [8].

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