

Guidelines for Marketing Your Timber

Timber is one of Pennsylvania's renewable and most valuable resources. A properly managed and maintained forest can remain healthy and productive from generation to generation. In Pennsylvania, it often takes between 80-120 years for a commercial, sawtimber-sized stand to develop. At some point, the harvesting of trees is usually essential for both financial and biological reasons. With sound planning, a timber harvest will not only benefit you financially but should benefit the health and sustainability of your forest!

As a forestland owner, the burden is on YOU to plan for the health and productivity of your forest. Before any tree is even marked for harvest, it is essential for you to determine your goals and objectives for your property. Look at your forest as a long-term investment, much like a retirement plan. When you retire you don't "cash in" all your money from your pension or retirement plan all at once; you make a plan on how to wisely manage your money so it will last throughout your retirement years. Similarly, you should not "cash in" on your forest by cutting all the biggest and best trees for a one time monetary gain. If you decide to have timber harvested from your property it is imperative that you make sure sound, sustainable harvesting methods are practiced. A sustainable harvest not only generates income today, but it retains or improves the overall health and value of your forest for the future.

The best way to determine what you can do is to know what you have. Developing a forest management plan can supply you with much of the necessary information that you will need to make sound forest management decisions. There are several types of plans ranging from the structured and very detailed plans to the shorter, more concise plans; but all plans should contain: map(s), detailed descriptions (including history) and management activity prescriptions specific for your property. Only after a careful review and analysis of all the available information can you make a responsible decision to sell your timber. **NEVER be pressured into selling your trees. Even in extreme cases of disease, insects, or salvage a timber sale should be a carefully thought out decision.**

When preparing for a timber sale, each tree that will be harvested should be marked, tallied and scaled for volume. Before selling, you should already have an impartial estimate of both the quantity and quality of the trees being sold. You are encouraged to hire a professional forester to assist you in this process. It is important when hiring a professional forester to make sure they are able and willing to help you meet your goals. They should have the experience to incorporate your goals into sound, sustainable forest management practices in your forest. Contact several foresters before making a final choice and then choose the professional who best understands and reflects your goals for your property. A professional forester will focus on the trees that will be left in the stand, as much as those that will be harvested.

High-grading is a practice that is occurring all too often in our Pennsylvania forests. It refers to a practice of removing all the highest value (often largest) trees and leaving the lower value trees in the forest. This practice biologically, economically and aesthetically degrades the forest for many, many years to come. It gives no consideration for future regeneration, species composition, tree spacing or wildlife value. Proper forest management involves looking at the age, spacing, species and size of all the trees and is not simply removing all the "big" trees to make room for the "smaller" trees. High-grading is not only hard on the forest resources but it is not a sustainable harvesting practice. Diameter limit cutting, or removing all trees over a certain diameter, is just as bad for the same reasons.

Once the timber has been marked and the volume tallied, the professional forester will generate a written document called a **prospectus**. A timber sale prospectus should contain the following:

1. Species, volume and log rule for the timber you are selling.
2. Map and written location of the proposed timber sale.
3. Tour date.
4. Bid opening date.
5. Any sale specifics (Roads, slash, seeding, machinery restrictions, etc.)

The prospectus should be mailed out to all potential buyers, several months in advance of the intended sale date. The sale is usually awarded to the highest bidder but the seller should always reserve the right to reject any or all bids. Since there is no one set price for standing timber, the competitive bid process is the only method that will ensure that forest landowners get the maximum exposure and highest return for their forest products.

Before any tree is cut, the landowner and the buyer should sign a **written contractual agreement** that clearly states the responsibilities of all parties. A contract should at least contain the following:

- ✦ Name and address of parties within the contract.
- ✦ Date and location of contract signing.
- ✦ Location and legal description of the proposed sale.
- ✦ Description of the timber that is being sold.
 - This would include: number of trees by species, approximate volume by species, dollar value of species and the method of marking.
- ✦ Guarantee of timber ownership.
- ✦ Specific harvesting requirements.
 - Beginning and ending dates for cutting or other time limitations.
 - Shut-down specifications (i.e. for hunting season, wet conditions, etc.).
 - Requirements for stump heights and top lopping.
 - Cull tree requirements
 - Residual tree damage penalty clause.
 - Logging methods specifications.
 - Repair to existing roads or other damaged features.
 - Litter clean up.
- ✦ Erosion and Sedimentation (E & S) control.
 - E & S plan attached.
 - Avoidance or protection of springs, seeps and streams.
 - Obtaining all required permits covering stream crossings and wetland encroachments.
 - Use of best management practices.
 - Specify the post-harvest erosion control methods.
- ✦ Amount of bond and performance agreement.
 - This is payment over and above the selling price, held in escrow until sale termination, to ensure sale performance and adherence to the contract.
- ✦ Proof of current liability insurance from the buyer.
- ✦ Payment terms. Including rates for damage to residual trees.
- ✦ Liability protection from property damage and bodily injury.
- ✦ Requirements of buyer to abide by all local, state and federal laws and to obtain all necessary permits.
- ✦ Date of contract expiration.

Forestry is never a risk-free venture but becoming well informed on what you have and well educated on how to sell it will go a long way toward marketing your timber wisely and profitably. The Pennsylvania Bureau of Forestry has field offices in almost every county in the state. The Bureau's Service Foresters can offer advice on how to sell your timber properly. They cannot, however, mark commercial timber sales for private landowners, except in rare cases due to extraordinary circumstances. Service Foresters can also provide information on many other forestry-related topics and can put you in touch with other forest landowners in your area, who are willing to share their forestry experiences. **Your Service Forester is awaiting your call.**

Crawford County	21742 German Road, Meadville, PA 16335 - (814) 763-2545
Erie County	12723 Rt 19, Po Box 801, Waterford, PA 16441 – (814) 796-6787
Forest/ Venango Co.	2 nd Floor, 484 Allegheny Blvd., Franklin, PA 16323 – (814) 437-3368
Warren County	323 N. State St., N. Warren, PA 16365 – (814) 723-0262