

In the series: *Getting Started with Forestry*

The Benefits of Forestry Add Value to Your Woodlot

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We all hear how much busier we are currently than in years gone by, so how can you justify the time and energy required to deliberately manage your forest or woodlot. Quite simply, deliberate forest management, versus opportunistic forestry, will increase the benefits and enjoyment you receive from your forest or woodlot.

There are numerous benefits associated with deliberately managing your forest, but they can be lumped into a few groups that include increased revenue and reduced costs, greater recreational opportunities, better control over environmental and forest quality, and improved wildlife habitat. Because you plan for these benefits, know when and where they will arrive, and in what quantity, you are able to take advantage of the opportunities they provide. Also, deliberate forest management provides benefits to your community, such as good water quality, forest cover for wildlife, and a supply of high quality sawtimber. You will want to discuss your desired benefits with a Master Forest Owner volunteer, and work towards them with a professional forester from the DEC or a private consulting forester. Here I give a glimpse of what you might expect.

INCREASE REVENUE AND REDUCED COSTS

Quite often the activities that occur in woodlots are driven by economic considerations. While there is nothing inherently wrong with this, you as a forest owner will want to consider all your options. A timber harvest can provide you with a great deal of money. By carefully selecting and then working with a professional forester, you will know the market value of your timber, gauge the seasonal fluctuations of market prices, remove trees that improve the long-term quality of the forest, and select a certified logger, all of which increases your short and long term revenues. Without planning for a harvest, you might respond to an opportunity to sell timber, yet you probably don't know the current market value of the trees or how to arrange the sale contract with the certified logger to ensure the long term productivity of your forest.

Deliberate forest management can also reduce the costs of doing business. The planning and inspection of your forested property is an example. During the planning and inspection stage, you will undoubtedly have the opportunity to walk the boundaries of your property. Make certain your

property lines are clearly marked to help prevent the accidental removal of timber during a timber sale on the adjacent property. And in the event the removal is not accidental, but rather timber theft, the marked property lines will help establish the validity of your claims. Timber theft is a cost you probably want to reduce.

RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Aside from the "in your pocket" values and benefits such as timber harvesting and reducing costs, there are numerous other values or amenities available from your forest. While these might not help you pay your taxes, they make that burden easier because of your fond forest memories. Recreation is one of these amenities, and a primary reason many people own forests. Access is an important part of recreation. Because of the long history of land use in New York (for agriculture and forestry), there may already be access roads on your property. However, inspect the roads to see where they take you and their condition. For example, old farm roads may connect former fields together, but may not take you to your favorite bird watching location, provide a long enough cross country ski trail, or take you to your deer stand. Alternatively, your access roads may have regrown with trees. In either case, you can work with your professional forester to plan and layout access to your property. Road costs vary with terrain and length, but much of the costs may be offset if you coordinate road building with a timber harvest. Make certain your forester knows of your recreational interests to design the road system for ease of use and subsequent maintenance.

ENVIRONMENTAL AND FOREST QUALITY

The art and science of growing trees and managing forests is by nature (no pun intended) a long-term commitment. Forest management is also somewhat utilitarian, providing goods and services we all depend on for our survival and comfort, but necessarily assumes that utilization does not reduce the land's long-term productivity. Deliberate forest management helps ensure the sustainability of future benefits from forests, and the quality of the forest environment. With the New York landscape dominated by forest cover, many forested watersheds provide water to our cities and to other states. Deliberately planning for the continued maintenance of water quality while enjoying numerous other benefits is one example of the compatibility of forest use and sustainability.

The quality of the forest, particularly following a timber harvest, is an important consideration of deliberate forestry. This consideration includes the quality of the road system and minimizing damage to the trees you hope to harvest in the future (this is the residual stand) including tree seedlings that were planted or naturally established. Certainly your forest will look different following a harvest, but deliberate planning with your forester to select a skilled and trained logger will increase the long-term benefits you receive and add value to your forest.

IMPROVED WILDLIFE HABITAT

Deliberately managing forests or woodlots for wildlife is one of the most common owner objectives, and is particularly gratifying because a little work can produce great benefits. Wildlife require food, cover, water, and space (collectively known as habitat), with different species of wildlife requiring different amounts and types of habitat. Everything you do (and don't do) impacts wildlife habitat. The potential wildlife benefits you receive will be greater if you and your forester plan for wildlife habitat based on what is currently available in your woodlot and in all the woodlots in your region. For example, ruffed grouse and chestnut-sided warblers will respond favorably to recent clear cuts

in your woodlot, whereas Barred owls and pileated woodpeckers will respond favorably to large areas that retain some large mature trees. If the woodlots and forests in your region are mostly mature, you may want to increase the amount of young forest on your property and discuss this strategy with your neighbors. Also, if you have a stream in your region, you and your neighbors may want to maintain extra forest cover on both stream sides to maintain water quality and provide a forested corridor that some wildlife species need for traveling.

The opportunity for benefits and increased value of your forest are numerous. Careful and deliberate planning and management will cushion your wallet and increase your pleasures now and in the future.