

In the series: *Getting Started with Forestry*

Getting Started with a Timber Sale

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Many New York forest owners, from those with 5-acre corner woodlots to large tracts have been exposed to the notion of a timber sale. Some have actively sought a logger while others have been contacted by a logger. A timber sale differs from a yard sale, and there are several strategies that will help land owners interested in selling timber. However, selling timber is a complex process and this article is only a starting point.

Since the early decades of this century when farms began reverting to forests, New York's landscape has become increasingly tree covered. In recent decades, those even-aged forests that dominate in New York have become mature. At the same time, our demand for forest products has increased. Consequently, with greater supply and greater demand, there are ample opportunities to sell timber from your forest or woodlot, yet many land owners are apprehensive.

Apprehension often results because most owners don't know the value of their timber and don't want to sell too cheaply; owners fear their woodlot or forest will be ruined as a result of timber harvesting; or owners think that timber harvesting causes environmental damages. While all these fears can be true they can also be easily avoided through some advance planning. Ultimately, your goal should be for you or someone working for you to be in control of a timber sale on your property. Sales that are "logger's choice" are seldom in the best interest of the forest owner. Think about it this way, if you have a yard sale or a garage sale and someone offers you \$200 to pick and choose from throughout your house you would (or should) say no, then why give someone unrestricted access to your timber.

The first step before you consider selling timber is to make sure a timber sale is consistent with your written forest management plan. This is especially true if you are approached by a logger or a timber buyer (sometimes called procurement foresters) to sell your timber. Selling timber too soon may not allow you to achieve your management objectives. Your management plan should describe the timing, location, and intensity for a timber harvest.

Once you decide to sell timber, the next step is to locate competent help from the key players. An initial contact might be a Master Forest Owner (MFO) volunteer through your county association of Cornell Cooperative Extension or a Department of Environmental Conservation professional forester. A MFO volunteer can give you information and help you contact reputable people, while a DEC professional forester can provide the same information plus give you technical advice. You will also likely need to make contact with a consulting or industrial professional forester who will help you find a logger. A forester will also be able to make sure you get a fair price for your timber while representing your interests. Ask for references, and check them, before you begin working with a forester and a logger. Many forest owners find it to their advantage to have their forester mark their timber and then put it out for bids from several reputable loggers. You might not want to select your logger based only on the value of their bid, but also consider whether the logger has participated in the New York State "Trained Logger Certification" program and other evidence of professionalism and commitment to forest stewardship.

Another issue to discuss with your forester before any trees are marked, is how the timber sale meshes with your management objectives. If you are interested in wildlife then discuss leaving large mast trees for wild turkey, making small patch cuts and leaving large downed logs for ruffed grouse, or leaving or creating snags for cavity nesting birds. If you are interested in recreation and property access, discuss ways to route the skid and haul roads so you can use them for skiing, hiking, or bird watching. These are a few of the options you can explore to get more than cash from your timber sale.

The next step is for you to discuss with your forester any concerns you have regarding how the timber is harvested and how your forest looks after the harvest. This is important information the forester will need to develop a timber sale contract that reflects your interests. Many of these concerns are commonplace and known as best management practices (BMPs). For example, you will likely want your road system marked in advance of harvesting to minimize damage to the residual trees and to have the fewest number of stream crossing (using bridges or culverts where necessary) to maintain water quality. Other sale contract language may include the condition of the road and landing following the harvest, the payment style and schedule, penalties for harvesting unmarked trees, the height of trees tops left in the woods, and the amount of the performance bond. Samples of timber sale contracts are available through the DEC. Read the contracts closely to make sure they meet all your needs. Remember also that the stipulations you add to the timber sale will reduce the amount of money you receive. Require the stipulations that are appropriate, but consider each one carefully. For example, tree tops left in the woods are unsightly to many people, yet lopping tops so they can't be seen is time consuming, dangerous, and costly. By not lopping tops you reduce risk to the loggers, save time and money, provide habitat for some wildlife species, and may protect some tree regeneration from deer browsing.

Additional topics to discuss with your forester and logger are environmental and stewardship concerns. These are important to maintain the health and productivity of your forest and woodlot. If you have "classified wetlands" or streams special precautions must be taken before harvesting trees in and adjacent to these areas. (Note - legal restrictions may apply in some situations, consult your DEC forester) Make certain your forester and logger consider the need to encourage the regeneration of desirable tree species. Too often poorly planned timber sales take only the best trees or biggest trees and leave behind the poor quality trees to provide seed. Discuss the time of year that harvesting will occur and the need to avoid skidding trees during the mud season to minimize

damage to soils and erosion. Be certain your property boundaries and the harvest area boundaries are clearly marked.

Having a timber sale on your forested property can be an exciting and profitable event that, if done correctly, can increase your ownership enjoyment without reducing the environmental quality of the land and waters. However, a timber sale is not an activity you should hastily pursue. The actions you take in your forest will be evident for decades and will determine the future benefits you and others receive from your forest. A timber sale will be your signature on the land. Several good brochures and sample timber sale contracts are available through your local office of the DEC and several good publications through your county association of Cornell Cooperative Extension. Good publications are Logging Aesthetics (123NRAES60), the video Biodiversity for Farms and Forests (147VBFFF), Timber Management for Small Woodlands (147IB180), and Cornell Cooperative Extension Conservation Circular volume 21 No. 5 - Guide to Selling Timber.