



Timber Selling Tips: Forestry Fact Sheet for Landowners

Adam Downing, Forestry and Natural Resources Agent, Virginia Cooperative Extension

Jennifer Gagnon, Project Associate, Forest Resources and Environmental Conservation, College of Natural Resources and Environment; Coordinator, Virginia Forest Landowner Education Program

Timber harvesting is a valuable tool to help forest landowners realize certain financial and land management goals. Following are some suggestions to consider before selling timber.

- Work with professionals. A great place to start is with your local Virginia Department of Forestry forester. Ask the forester to walk your woods with you in light of a possible timber harvest. Based on your goals and objectives and the status of your woodlands, a state forester can help you decide if your timber is ready to sell.
- If you decide to sell your timber, find a professional forester to work with you. A professional forester can help you leave your woods in better shape to grow quality timber in the future while also getting you a higher profit for your sale and meeting other goals you may have, such as wildlife habitat. Your local VDOF office can provide a list of professional foresters who can assist with the timber sale process. Just like finding an accountant, builder, or lawyer, you will be more satisfied with the results if you take your time finding the right forester to work with.

Here are a few tips to help you choose and work with professional foresters.

1. Ask about their experience and credentials.
 - Do they have a forestry degree?
 - Are they members of professional organizations such as the Society of American Foresters, Virginia Forestry Association, or Association of Consulting Foresters?

2. Ask foresters how they choose trees to harvest.

- Listen for indications that they harvest trees of all sizes and species so that forest health, vitality, and diversity are improved.
- If they talk about only harvesting the big and old trees, they are most likely talking about diameter-limit harvesting or high-grading. This is like shooting the winner of a horse race as it crosses the finish line and breeding all the losing horses. The best trees in your forest are



winners, in part, because of their species and genetics, not just their age. For the sake of your forest, do not work with someone who only wants to harvest your best trees. While your woodland may look good, the potential for it to maintain good diversity and grow quality timber will be diminished. Note: A good forester will consider the future forest.

3. Ask foresters if they follow forestry best management practices for harvesting timber. These are voluntary guidelines designed to minimize soil erosion and water quality problems.
4. Look for cues that they have your interests in mind. Do they understand your goals and are they talking about how to help you meet your goals?

5. When money is discussed, make sure that everyone is talking about the same trees. Someone who only wants to harvest the best trees may offer more money than someone who will help you improve the forest.
 - Try to avoid getting caught up in maximizing profit; this frame of mind clouds good decision-making.
 - If maximum short-term gain is necessary, the best harvesting method may be to clearcut. While most people think this is bad, it is actually a preferred tool to regenerate certain kinds of trees. It allows the forest to regenerate trees requiring full sun.
6. Before the first tree is cut or road is built, make sure you have a written contract. This ensures that all parties are on the same page and provides some recourse if terms are not followed.
7. Lastly, know that the visual effect of a timber sale is often dramatic. Brace yourself for this and remember that forests are very dynamic and that proper timber harvesting works within the natural laws of a forested ecosystem to achieve certain goals.

Learn more about sustainable forestry by participating in the Virginia Forest Landowner Education Program. The program is run by Virginia Cooperative Extension in cooperation with the Virginia Forestry Association, VDOF, Virginia Tree Farm Committee, and the forest industry (through the Sustainable Forestry Initiative State Implementation Committee). VFLEP provides a host of educational programs and materials for forest owners. Visit the VFLEP website at <http://forestupdate.frec.vt.edu> or contact your local Extension office.