



## Best Management Practices for Timber Production

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[www.ForestConnect.info](http://www.ForestConnect.info)

<http://CornellForestConnect.ning.com>

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Timber management can be a fun and potentially rewarding venture. Like any effort and investment, your return can vary even if you do everything correctly. Your focus on optimizing versus maximizing is appropriate; maximizing any single output often causes deficiencies elsewhere. It is also worth noting that many actions you take in support of your timber objective will have positive impacts on wildlife, aesthetics, and recreation. Here are several strategies you can consider. Many of these strategies are described in detail in recorded webinars available at [www.ForestConnect.info](http://www.ForestConnect.info). Also, a new website is available that allows woodland owners to ask and answer questions in a forum, and interact in other ways. See this new site at

<http://CornellForestConnect.ning.com>

A current and thorough forest management plan is an essential part of timber management. A plan will be written by a forester based on your objectives, interests, time, and resources. NYS DEC foresters will write a forest stewardship plan for no cost to you; contact information for DEC is here [www.dec.ny.gov/about/27790.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/about/27790.html). The plan will describe the property, and the abundance, sizes, and quality of tree species. The plan will note any special features of your property. Based on your objectives and the current condition of your forest, the forester will recommend a work schedule of activities that will transition your current forest into your desired forest. Activities might include creating access trails, thinning areas with too many trees for optimal growth, or controlling undesirable plant species. For those tasks you decide not to complete yourself, the forester can help you through the process of selecting a qualified contractor.

Make sure your management plan identifies fast tree growth, and increased volume of high quality stems per acre as top priorities. Fast growth of desirable high quality stems is a primary determinant for your timber objective. Also, fast growth will help ensure the trees are vigorous and best able to recover from stresses such as



drought, insect defoliation, or ice storms. Faster growth will help trees get bigger faster (not a surprise), but will also improve their unit value. For example, a tree might have a quality grade of “select”, but a few inches of diameter growth would elevate the grade to “prime.” In addition to the increase in board foot volume (a board foot is 12” x 12” x 1”), the unit value of the log might increase by 10% to 20% or more per board foot depending on species.

Use the unique talents of foresters and loggers. Foresters are trained to make recommendations and prescriptions that will help your woodland achieve your desired end point. They can measure the forest, understand the ecological interactions of the trees, and plan for optimizing economic, ecological, and social outcomes. Different foresters have different skills and experiences so find the forester that best matches with your particular needs. Loggers are trained to work efficiently and effectively in felling, skidding, and bucking trees for the best return. Different loggers have different types of equipment, different markets, and different capabilities. Some loggers and foresters will offer services other than those related to timber sales. Because you may have many tasks to complete before your sell timber, find the forester and logger that have a wide range of experiences. Your forester can help you select a logger that matches your needs for a particular task.

Avoid the all too common practice of high-grading or diameter-limit-cutting. These exploitive practices remove only the biggest and best trees and leave behind primarily low value and poor quality trees. These practices degrade your woodland by reducing future volume growth potential, reducing future revenue potential, and encouraging the growth of poor quality less desirable species and stems. Many factors can contribute to high-grading, so learn the features of a high-grade, and specify to your forester that you want to avoid this practice.

High quality trails, and where appropriate roads, will improve your access and efficiency of work tasks. Even owners who are comfortable walking through the woods spend most of their time on or near trails. Trails allow you to access work areas, improve safety, and allow for more thorough inspections of your woods for potentially damaging organisms. If you will work with a contractor or neighbor for harvesting, clearly describe the desired locations of trails and roads and the soil conditions, particularly saturated soils, that will result in road closure. When you visit other woodland owner properties during NYFOA woods walks, ask questions about how the owner designed, installed and maintains the trails and roads.

Take steps to avoid becoming a victim of timber theft. Several recent articles by H. Canham and R. Pedersen in this magazine have described the characteristics of



timber theft. Timber theft is most common on private lands. Perhaps because a large number of owners are absentee owners, only approximately 40% of thefts are noticed immediately. The best prevention is to obtain a legal survey of your property lines and then blaze and paint those lines. The boundary should be inspected annually and the paint freshened as needed to be prominent. Blazed and painted trees on boundary lines alert potential timber thieves that you know your property, and remove their ability to effectively claim ignorance. If you have a timber sale, only work with reputable loggers and foresters. Have a written contract that is reviewed by your forester and your lawyer. All trees selected for cutting should have a “stump mark,” and an unmarked stump should prompt an immediate conversation with the harvester. Communicate with your neighbors so they know when you are harvesting trees and ask them to tell you as well. Meet the loggers who work in the area and offer to show them your boundary line to avoid any confusion. Have friends and neighbors be alert to unusual activity.

Avoid damage to your residual trees when you are harvesting trees. You may harvest trees for a variety of reasons, but whatever the reason be careful to avoid or significantly minimize scuffing the bark at the base of trees or rutting the soil and disturbing the roots. Unfortunately, many owners damage their future high value sawtimber trees in the process of removing low value firewood. It is tempting to try and utilize all trees you cut during a thinning activity, but damage to just a few future high value trees can be worth several times the value of a few cords of firewood. Only competent and trained individuals with appropriate equipment for the terrain should be allowed to remove trees. When harvests occur, keep trails and roads as straight as possible, use bumper trees to protect more desirable trees, and avoid harvesting in late spring and early summer when large sections of bark may be easily scuffed from trees.

Timber management is a long-term venture, so help control costs by actively using state and federal tax codes to your advantage. In NY, the forest tax law, 480-a, allows for up to an 80% reduction in the assessed value of forest land, excluding buildings, used for the production of forest products. Participants need to have a written management plan, at least 50 acres of woodland, and a forward rolling 10 year commitment. Forest owners who carefully scrutinize and recognize a fit with the forest tax law requirements can achieve considerable savings in school and town property taxes. The federal tax code currently allows for owners who actively participate in the management of their woodlands to enjoy increased opportunity for deductions of allowable expenses, capital gains treatment of income, and increased deductions of some capital expenses. There are of course definitions and details to learn, but owners



can find what they need to start asking informed questions about federal code at [www.timbertax.org](http://www.timbertax.org).

Continue to learn all you can about your woods, and stay connected with other woodland owners. Cornell Cooperative Extension through ForestConnect and many county based programs has the responsibility and capacity to provide for most of your educational needs. Educational resources include, for example, bulletins and fact sheets, workshops, conferences, webinars, demonstration sites, and Master Forest Owner trained volunteers ([www.CornellMFO.info](http://www.CornellMFO.info)). There are also opportunities to stay connected with other owners in NY and beyond through social networking websites. Web links for these educational resources were mentioned in the first paragraph. Another important resource is NYFOA. Beyond the *NY Forest Owner* magazine, the chapters are superb resources for meeting other owners in your area and learning what to do and not do on your property. Take advantage of woods walks in your chapter and neighboring chapters if possible. Also, consider volunteering some time on the chapter steering committee or state board. Your volunteer time will pay significant dividends.