

FACT SHEET

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Timber & Timber Harvesting in West Virginia

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The Value of West Virginia Timber

Trees are dominant on 77.9 % of West Virginia. The forest communities are complexes of plants and animals which produce an astonishing array of benefits. Some of the benefits would be jobs, clean water, oxygen, timber, wood products, hunting & fishing, fall color, erosion protection, scenic vistas and a multitude of recreational opportunities. West Virginia's forests contain more than one hundred species of trees, all but twelve being hardwoods. These are classified in various timber cover types – varying from red spruce in the highest mountains down through northern hardwoods and oak-hickory at the lower elevations. Some forests in the east-central and southeastern counties have nearly solid forests of white pine. There are various admixtures of pines, commercial hardwood species and other hardwoods. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, timber was removed from West Virginia hillside in order to prepare the land for the raising of agricultural crops. As the frontier moved westward, many of the state's citizens followed and the multitude of small farms were allowed to be re-clothed with trees.

During the clearing of forests to create agricultural lands, trees had little value. In fact, land with trees sold for less than bare land. However, with the advent of modern sawmilling and the great increase in the nation's population, trees began to have a value. In the first half of the last century, it was quite common for the timber on a tract of land to be sold for eight dollars per thousand board feet. Some of these cutting contracts were established for a minimum of 50 years.

With the rapidly increasing populations, which need land for housing as well as timber for everyday products, and the setting aside of land for recreational and other purposes, timber has increased greatly in value. The market has also been helped by the development of uses for low grade hardwoods which has meant that the logger can sometimes pay his overhead by removing previously unmerchantable hardwoods from the forest. This also provides better forest management.

In view of the above, the price of standing trees has fluctuated from year to year and from species to species as the demand for a particular species has increased or

decreased as the consumers preferences for a particular wood has also increased or decreased.

The (stumpage) value for standing hardwood trees, depends on the type of tree, the quality of the tree and to some extent the location of the tree in relation to potential markets. In general, West Virginia's highest value trees are Black Cherry, Hard or Sugar maple, Black Walnut and Red Oak. The lower value species are Hickory, Beech Elm, and Yellow Poplar. In recent months, stumpage prices for Black Cherry have been as high as \$1,800 per thousand board feet. At the same time, Hickory and Beech have commanded only \$30 and sometimes buyers without a ready market give them a negative value. Veneer prices are much higher than lumber prices as many more square feet of veneer can be produced than can board feet of lumber from the same log. For good veneer, stumpage prices may be as high as \$5,000 per thousand square feet.

West Virginia forests also have values other than timber, but most of them are based on the timber being present. These include aesthetics, woodland recreation, hunting and fishing, clean air and clean water, among others. These commodities are hard to value. Since most tourists come to see the mountains, the fall color, ski or take a whitewater rafting trip, aren't these just other forest values?

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