

SELECTING THE RIGHT PROFESSIONAL FORESTER

In many respects, landowners benefit greatly from having a professional forester assist with the sale and administration of their timber. Those benefits typically include a well-planned and therefore environmentally friendly harvesting operation, utilization of better forest management practices, and realizing a higher sale price. In fact, a study conducted by the U.S. Forest Service showed that landowners who have secured professional assistance and used the competitive bid process have received 47 percent more money than initially offered, with only about one-half the amount of timber being harvested.

Professional forestry assistance with timber sales can be secured from several sources: West Virginia Division of Forestry service foresters, industrial landowner assistance program (LAP) or cooperative forest management (CFM) foresters, private consulting foresters, and industrial procurement foresters. There are, however, significant differences between the types and amounts of services provided by each. Free service is offered by service foresters and industrial LAP or CFM foresters, who are impartial third parties with the primary responsibility of assisting private landowners with management and sale of timber. Consulting foresters can offer the same types of services but will charge a fee. Industrial procurement foresters also offer similar assistance to private landowners at no charge, but will most likely request the opportunity to purchase the timber themselves. The following page lists several possible services available to the landowner.

Each type of forester has advantages and disadvantages. The landowner should check with each one in the area to see which forester can supply adequate assistance. Different landowners may have different needs and therefore need different professional forestry assistance. In order to be assured of a top-quality professional forester, the landowner should ask some important questions before entering into a contract with a professional forester.

The information the landowner should seek includes:

- Educational background: college degrees, continuing education, etc.
- Certifications held; i.e. certification for the Forest Stewardship Program, etc.
- W. Va. Registered Professional Forester status.
- Experience.
- References from past clients.
- Detail of fees and services provided.

Although a negative response to any of the above questions (particularly certificates held and professional registration) does not necessarily imply that the forester is not an honest, competent professional, it does give the landowner a signal to review some of the other information more closely. The most important information is the list of references. Be sure to contact several past clients for whom the forester has been employed to administer the sale of timber. As with any other type of business transaction, a written contract or employment agreement is needed. This agreement should clearly stipulate what services are to be provided as well as the fees and payment schedule for those services. Such a contract should be provided by the forester; in fact, the forester should insist upon a written contract.

POTENTIAL FORESTRY SERVICES AVAILABLE

TIMBER SALE SERVICES

Conducting preliminary cruise to collect data for volume estimates

Preparing report of findings, including:

- Sampling procedure
- Estimated acreage of sawtimber & map of area(s)
- Estimated volume of sawtimber and other products, by species
- Estimated value of timber
- Calculated sampling error
- Proposed routes for timber removal plotted on map

Locating and marking boundaries

Marking individual trees to be harvested

Designating timber to be harvested (other than by marking)

Providing landowner with a list of prospective timber buyers

Developing bid packet and sending to prospective timber buyers, including:

- Cover letter
- Cruise sheet (by species and diameter class)
- Maps of tract and harvest area(s)
- Bid sheet to be returned with bid

Showing of timber to prospective buyers

Assisting landowner in choosing the successful bidder

Assisting landowner in preparing a timber sale agreement

Holding a performance bond for the harvesting operation

Ensuring proper reclamation

MANAGEMENT PLANNING SERVICES

Identifying landowner's desires, goals, and objectives

Thoroughly cruising the property

Dividing property into stands (management units) based on field data

Developing a quality management plan, which includes:

- Condition of boundary information (map)
- Soils information and map
- Timber type and size class map(s)
- Gypsy moth risk, hazard, and management information
- Cost-share assistance program information
- Recommendations toward goals

Technical assistance in implementing proposed work (i.e., marking, TSI, etc.)