

“Caring for the Land: Why Go It Alone?”

Written by Karen Bennett, Extension Forestry Specialist

If you are one of the 84,000 people who own a piece of New Hampshire’s forest, you are a steward of our clean water, beautiful scenery, abundant wildlife, fresh air, natural and cultural heritage, not to mention the basis of our forest industry and much of our recreation.

Owning land gives many rewards and, as with most precious things, the more you pay attention and care for your land, the greater those rewards. Wendy Scribner, UNH Cooperative Extension Educator, Forest Resources, Carroll County, encourages owners to know their land.

“It’s important to think about what you really want from your land. You can grow firewood and timber, create a haven for wildlife, cut trails, and so many other things. The list is endless,” she notes.

Her colleague in Cheshire County, Steve Roberge, agrees. “Owning land gives you many options and I’m here to help.”

There is an Extension Forestry Educator like Scribner and Roberge in each county. Their job it is to provide assistance and advice to landowners. You don’t have to go it alone. They are a phone call away. If you don’t know your local Extension Forestry Educator, a call to the UNH Cooperative Extension Forestry Information Center at 1-800-444-8978 will connect you.

In addition to these forestry educators, there are over 200 foresters offering a range of services, including forest stewardship planning, current use assistance, inventory and appraisal, buying and selling standing trees, tending and nurturing young trees (weeding and thinning), cutting for regenerating the next forest, wildlife habitat management, and trails and other recreation improvements. In New Hampshire, all foresters offering services to private landowners for compensation must be licensed.

UNH Cooperative Extension compiles a directory of licensed foresters offering services to landowners, but no list compensates for an informed consumer. “I can walk the land with landowners and help them know what they can get out of the land,” says Roberge, “Caring for land can be complicated.”

Selling timber is possibly the most complicated woodlot activity and yet timber sales can be an important tool to achieve personal objectives, which may include generating more income, improving wildlife habitat, or constructing woods roads. Your forester helps you avoid mistakes by marking the trees to cut, arranging for a buyer, preparing a written contract, collecting payments, and making sure environmental laws are followed.

Does it pay to hire a forester to help you take care of your woodlot? Scribner is a believer in plans, “Thoughtful planning pays. Studies show that forest owners with management plans double their timber sale income, leave twice the number of trees to grow for the future and do a better job of enhancing wildlife than owners without plans.”

One way of looking at the question of “does it pay?” is to look at the income from selling timber. A recent study in Massachusetts found that prices offered varied as much as 212 percent.

Without experience in the market place, would you be able to evaluate the fairness of an offer? A New Hampshire study cited the benefits of using forestry assistance during timber sales as generating a higher income, improving the quality of the stand, and having more remaining trees in your lot.

Only you can select a forester who can meet your needs, someone you trust and with whom you feel comfortable. The forester needs to understand your objectives, interests and limitations. You can care for your land and you don't have to go it alone.

Wendy Scribner is an Extension educator in forest resources with UNH Cooperative Extension in Carroll County. She can be reached at wendy.scribner@unh.edu or 539-3331.

UNH Cooperative Extension programs and policies are consistent with pertinent Federal and State laws and regulation on non-discrimination regarding age, color, handicap, national origin, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or veteran's status. University of New Hampshire, U.S. Department of Agriculture and N.H. Counties cooperating.