

Selecting a Forester

Introduction

The decisions that New Hampshire's private landowners make regarding how their forests are managed are crucial to this vital resource. Forests cover 84% of our landscape. They provide us with clean water, scenic beauty areas for recreation and wildlife habitat. They also provide raw materials to support the third largest industry in the state, the forest products industry.

Most of the forest land in our state, more than 75% in fact, is privately owned. The majority of New Hampshire's forest landowners don't have the experience, technical training or time necessary to adequately manage their forest resources. Fortunately, there is a large group of professional foresters in the state available to provide a variety of forest resource management services. The state requires individuals who provide forestry services for compensation to be licensed in order to maintain a high standard of forestry practices.

Forest management is a flexible science that, to a certain extent, is governed by the goals and needs of the landowner. Clear communication of the goals to the forester will help ensure the desired results. It is very important landowners take time to establish reasonable objectives and priorities before contacting a licensed forester. Landowners should consider and rank the following: forest and wildlife habitat improvement, income generation, aesthetics, development of recreational opportunities, protection of water quality, and tax considerations.

The qualifications, experience and services offered by foresters vary. Landowners should ask questions about a forester's training and experience to be certain the individual will satisfactorily accomplish their management goals. It's also a good practice to ask for and investigate references. Contacting other landowners with similar management goals will provide information about the capabilities of prospective foresters and valuable insights into the results of forest resource management activities.

Foresters who provide assistance to landowners are frequently categorized as consulting or industrial foresters. Consulting foresters are either self-employed or work for a consulting forestry firm, while industrial foresters are generally employed by a specific forest industry/firm and most often have some responsibility to purchase raw material for their employer.

A written contract or work order is recommended. It should include a description of the services to be provided, an expected time frame for the services to be accomplished, and fees. The fees and method of payment charged for forestry services vary with the type of management service provided. For instance, tree marking fees and commissions based on the gross receipts of timber sales are common timber sale-related, billing procedures. Other services might be charged on a set fee per acre or hourly rate. Some foresters provide services through industrially-sponsored landowner assistance programs where service costs may be offset by the reduced stumpage prices.

Forester Licensing Laws

The Forester Licensing Law RSA 310-A:103, addresses the issue of fees and their disclosure, and requires that "...when dealing with the public, forester shall:

- I. Identify clearly themselves, their employer, and in whose interest they are working.
- II. Disclose fully any financial or purchase interest they or their employer may have in the land or timber which they are working.
- III. Disclose fully all direct or indirect costs or obligations of services provided, including hourly or daily rates and commissions, as well as exclusive contracts to sell forest products to certain individuals or firms.
- IV. Provide complete services requested by landowners or disclose clearly that such services cannot be provided."

Services

Foresters provide a variety of services to landowners including management plan preparation, timber appraisals, timber sale administration, wildlife habitat improvement, boundary marking, timber stand improvement, and recreation and aesthetic improvements. In addition, some foresters may have particular qualifications and interest in providing assistance in land surveying, urban forestry and landscape, Christmas trees, taxation, legal or other natural resource-related matters.

Federal cost-share programs are available to forest landowners for accomplishing conservation-related practices. These include programs to help defray the costs of management plans, wildlife habitat, timber stand improvement activities, and trail and access road construction. Many foresters utilize these programs for their clients and provide assistance with the application process and related paper work.

Management Plans

Landowners seriously interested in the long-term management of their forestland and its resources are encouraged to develop written management plans. Written management plans are valuable documents landowners can refer to in their tenure as stewards of the forest resources. A plan should provide information about the past uses of the land, its current condition and recommendations and options for meeting landowner goals. The value of management plans to landowners is well documented. They are now mandatory requirements of the Tree Farm and Stewardship Programs. Plans are also needed for current-use stewardship documentation purposes for lowering forest land assessment.

Management plans may vary in sophistication from a short report based on a brief walk-through of the woodland to a detailed document which may include wildlife habitat and forest resources inventories, computer-simulated growth projections, and year-by-year schedules of activities with projected costs and/or income. Whatever the level of sophistication desired, it's important landowners have plans developed that are easily read documents accurately reflecting their goals and needs. If a written management plan is desirable, be sure to ask prospective foresters about their experience in writing plans, and examine their work.

Appraisals

Done separately or incorporated into a detailed management plan, timber appraisals are estimated of the quality, volume and value of the wood products currently growing in a parcel of forestland. An appraisal of timber-related assets is useful for determining estimated timber sale revenues, real estate values, estate planning, and federal income tax purposes. Appraisals are often required for permanent land protection efforts such as conservation easements and are useful for planning forest management activities.

Timber appraisals can be done at different levels of accuracy which are reflected in the cost. These can

range from a very rough estimate based on a quick walk-through, to a detailed inventory and analysis based on carefully measured plots distributed throughout the woodland.

Wildlife Habitat Improvement

Many of New Hampshire's forest landowners have strong interests in maintaining, enhancing or creating wildlife habitats on their property. Wildlife habitat improvement practices include a wide assortment of management options. While these most often complement traditional forest improvement practices, wildlife habitat emphasis may employ land management practices specifically designed to improve or create wildlife habitat(s). Landowners with a special interest in wildlife management may want to inquire about an individual's training, experience and interest when selecting a forester.

Boundary Marking

Foresters are often called upon to maintain the location of property boundaries. While only a New Hampshire Licensed Land Surveyor can establish boundaries common to another owner, a forester can remark established boundaries, research deeds and help to determine if surveying work is required. Some licensed foresters are also licensed land surveyors.

Timber Stand Improvement

Timber stand improvement (TSI) is a term applied to a variety of silvicultural (forest care) practices used to improve the growing conditions and quality of trees. These include weeding and thinning in young forest stands, pruning of potential crop trees, tree planting and soil scarification for natural regeneration. Foresters often perform TSI work for landowners or may arrange to have the work completed through other contractors.

Timber Sales

Timber sales present an opportunity for landowners to generate income and improve or modify their forests to meet their management goals. While timber harvesting can be a valuable management tool, it's important for landowners to keep in mind timber harvesting has long lasting affects on all aspects of the forest environment. The decisions made regarding how a harvest is done are often the most important management activities made by landowners in their term of ownership. The next section of this booklet deals with this matter in detail.

Foresters prepare and monitor timber sales in a number of ways. The steps taken will depend on the management goals of the landowner, the forest products harvested and their relative value. Landowners should expect a forester will, as a minimum, designate the harvest area, enter them into a legally binding contract with a reputable logging contractor, and provide some level of supervision of the harvest. More intensely prepared and supervised timber sales involve:

- pre-harvest marking, measurement and volume estimated of trees to be harvested
- preparation of harvest contracts including details of utilization specifications, down payments, performance bonds and payment schedules
- compliance and assistance with timber tax and other permitting requirements
- layout of skid trails, wetland crossings and landing sites
- showing and sealed bid procedures for awarding contracts
- a higher level of timber harvest supervision
- assistance with income tax reporting

A clear understanding of what level of services will be provided is essential when selecting a forester to assist with a timber sale.

Recreation and Aesthetic Improvements

Foresters often provide assistance with recreation and aesthetics improvements by combining these objectives with soundly applied forest management practices. Recreation trails can be developed for hiking, cross-country skiing and horseback riding by improving the skid trails used during timber harvests. Access roads constructed through cost-share programs often serve as recreation trails as well. Aesthetic improvements may be accomplished by patch cutting to create views, cleaning and seeding log landings after timber harvests, lopping slash and clearing and seeding skid trails, modifying timber harvests to protect or create aesthetically pleasing stands, or thinning areas adjacent to homes to make them more attractive.