

## General tips for private forest owners

This article explains a variety of important practices for forest owners interested in good forest management.

### **Develop a complete forest plan.**

All forests benefit from proper planning and implementation of the plan. Through this process, forest owners learn a great deal about the species, size, and quality of the trees on their property. Generally speaking, forest plans include an inventory of timber, maps, descriptions of stand quality, and a schedule of activities to improve the condition of the forest to meet the owner's goals. A forest plan need not be complicated nor expensive. They act as good "memory joggers" during the years you will own a forest.

### **Mark your forest boundaries clearly on a map and in the woods.**

Use bright flagging to mark the actual property line, which helps prevent timber theft. If your property survey is outdated, consider hiring a surveyor to make corrections and updates. Use paint to mark a property boundary only with the assistance of a professional crew or clear agreement with your neighbor.

### **Use caution with surprise offers to cut timber on your property.**

Dishonest loggers or timber brokers who make "cold calls" may not have your interests in mind. In many cases, New York landowners have been cheated out of the real value of their timber, thinking that the offer was too attractive to pass up. Check their credentials or ask a professional forester for a second opinion.

### **List the things about your forest that are important to you.**

Setting your goals and reasons for owning forestland is easy and important.

### **Look into property tax and income tax aspects of private forest ownership.**

Thousand of dollars are given up in taxes each year by forest owners unaware of special programs for tax abatement on forested lands and income tax implications of private forest management. Contact a professional forester or Cornell Cooperative Extension educator for more details.

### **Monitor for disease and insect infestation.**

Forest owners can alert biologists to the threat of insects and other pests that can bring great harm to forest stability. Spend time observing the bark, leaves, and branches of the trees in your forest. If you encounter unusual conditions, make a point to record all the information you can about your observations and bring them to a qualified diagnostic entity, such as Cornell Cooperative Extension, a forester, or an arborist.

### **Walk your woods with a volunteer Master Forest Owner or a DEC forester.**

Their free advice will help you gain insights about how timber is managed and sold these days. DEC foresters can also inventory your woodlot. Consider contacting Cornell Cooperative Extension for information about non-timber woodland projects like ginseng production, forest-grown mushrooms, and maple syrup production.

**Investigate cost-sharing programs.**

Education, assistance, and sometimes special funds are available through the Natural Resource Conservation Service, DEC, and the Soil and Water Conservation District in your county. These government programs greatly increase your abilities and reduce your costs for planting trees, creating habitat, preventing destructive forest fires, and preventing forest health problems.

**If your plan stipulates a timber sale, contact a qualified forester.**

The consulting forester you chose can review your plan, mark trees to be harvested, and request bids from logging companies. The company submitting the highest bid, and is willing to harvest according to your plan, can sign a timber sale contract. This contract focuses the harvest to the marked trees for a set compensation. You may have to negotiate items like habitat restoration, removal of treetops, and erosion control activities.

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