“Call Before You Cut” Article

Ben Robinson, ODNR State Service Forester

Southern Ohioans own forest land for many reasons, and their level of involvement in the management of that land varies widely. In a survey conducted by SFFI (Sustaining Family Forests Initiative), Ohioans with 10+ acres of woodlands cited several reasons for owning their forest by level of importance. Of the 12 reasons they own their woods, “timber” fell second-to-last in importance – ranked behind other reasons such as wildlife, aesthetics, recreation and investment. However, 20% of landowners reported cutting trees for sale in the past 5 years, and 21% said they were likely to do so in the next 5 years. Whether harvesting timber is at the top or at the bottom of your priority list, I recommend that you seek advice from professional foresters when making forest management decisions. Foresters are trained in the art and science of growing trees, which is referred to as “silviculture”.

The first step to making wise forest management decisions is to identify your objectives as the landowner. The trees that will be left to grow are an equally important consideration as the trees that are marked for harvest. A timber harvest should always work to improve your forest, and never compromise your objectives as the landowner. Every stand of timber is not ready for a timber harvest – based on your objectives and the condition of the forest, a professional forester will be able to advise if the time is right for a timber sale, or if it’s wise to wait for a few years. The Ohio Department of Natural Resources - Division of Forestry has 22 state service foresters, such as myself, who are a free resource to consult when considering a timber harvest. As employees of the State, we do not sell, value or estimate the volume of your standing timber. Instead, we are a free resource to help address your timber sale questions and make site visits to advise on whether or not a timber harvest is the right management tool for your situation. It’s likely that we will discuss topics beyond timber harvests - such as invasive species control, timber stand improvement and wildlife habitat improvements.

Private consulting foresters and industry foresters are located throughout the state and can assist landowners in all aspects of planning and implementing a timber harvest. A consulting forester can mark your timber for a harvest that fits your objectives. They advertise your timber for sale, working to get you competitive prices for your timber and developing a solid timber sale contract between you and the prospective buyers. The forester will also be responsible for the administration of the timber sale, ensuring that the operator is meeting the contract requirements. At the end of the sale, the forester will work with the operator to leave the harvest site in proper shape – following Ohio’s BMPs (Best management practices). Rates for private forestry services vary between individuals. Visit callb4ucut.com or call (877)424-8288 for forester directories along with factsheets and other information to help educate yourself on the topic of timber harvesting.

Whether you are ready to harvest timber or just beginning to think about forest management in your woodlands, there is a professional forester out there in Ohio that is ready to help you navigate those decisions. I like to point out to landowners that selling timber is a process that most people will undergo maybe once or twice in a lifetime. The average American will purchase 9 vehicles in their lifetime. Think about the research and preparation you put into that! Why not spend as much time researching, identifying your objectives and setting expectations for management of your woodland? If you’re considering a timber harvest, or have general forestry questions, feel free to give me a call or send an email, and I’d be happy to chat with you about management of your woodland.

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