



How To Choose A Quality Logger

Time for a timber sale?

Decisions you make today
can create a brighter tomorrow
for both you and your forest land

As a forest landowner, you may have wondered from time to time: might you and your woods benefit from a harvest of some of your trees? College tuitions are looming, or the habitat is no longer ideal for the deer you hunt or the songbirds you love to watch. Maybe the woodlands are getting crowded, or a section was damaged by ice or wind, or the growth is well matured and you're wondering just what it's worth.

You are at a critical crossroads. How you sell your trees, and select the professional contractors who do the harvesting, are important decisions. They can either perpetuate the many values of your forest virtually forever, or badly damage the land and imperil its ability to bring you future financial income and personal and aesthetic pleasure — the reasons you own the land in the first place.

Fortunately, Americans are becoming more aware of how important forests are to themselves personally and to the nation as a whole. That perception is especially visible in a variety of programs and projects aimed at Sustainable Forestry — practices based on a stewardship ethic that considers all the many values of wooded lands, including non-timber values such as wildlife and water quality. Among the most notable expression of this ethic is the Sustainable Forestry InitiativeSM (SFISM).

The goal of the SFI is to broaden the practice of sustainable forestry. An important component of the initiative aims at enhancing professionalism among timber harvesters, foresters, and others in the forestry community. Specific principles focus on the training and continuing education of these forest professionals in using Best Management Practices (BMPs) during timber harvesting; compliance with laws and regulations; forest regeneration and resource conservation; awareness of the Endangered Species Act and other wildlife considerations; logging safety; and business management.

All of which means that the vital job of selecting the right logger for your timber harvest is

getting easier. The purpose of this brochure is to help you act wisely while preparing for the harvest of your trees.

What Are BMPs?

Best Management Practices, or BMPs, are good forest stewardship practices to follow during forestry activities to protect the water quality of nearby streams, lakes, or ponds. They are set at the state level and may be mandatory or voluntary, depending on state law. Common examples of BMPs to protect water quality are:

- erosion control measures on roads and skid trails, such as culverts, broad-based dips, and water bars;
- vegetated buffer strips, or "stream-side management zones," along streams, lakes, and wetlands;
- guidelines for stream crossings to minimize environmental impacts; for example, crossing stream right angles, using portable bridges, and using culverts;
- control of waste disposal on forest lands; for example, servicing equipment away from wetlands and picking up trash.

QUALITIES OF A PROFESSIONAL LOGGER

TIMBER HARVESTERS really earn their keep. Their chosen profession is potentially dangerous and physically demanding, usually entailing long hours in remote and difficult terrain, and requires a huge outlay in mechanical equipment and personnel costs. To compete safely and efficiently today, a professional logger must be up to date on technology and safety, understand and implement the variety of regulations designed to protect natural resources, and manage people effectively — all of which equates to being a good business person.

CONTINUING EDUCATION

SFI offers logger education and training programs, and it is reasonable to assume that those logging contractors who take advantage of them are likely to qualify as quality con-

tractors for your timber harvesting needs. Individuals interested in searching for a logger or forester who maintains current PA SFI training can visit their website at www.sfiopa.org and review the list of current PA SFI cardholders, found under the Logger Training header.

Like any other group of professionals, loggers have a wide variety of skills, experience, personalities, attitudes, and equipment. As you talk to candidates for your timber harvest, try to match the logger's operation with your forest stand and objectives. Talk to the logger in person to get a feel for his or her character, reliability, sense of stewardship, and willingness to understand and meet your goals.

REFERENCES

Always ask a logger for several references from previous clients, and perhaps from mills and wood yards where the logger most often sells forest products. Loggers worth their salt strive to maintain a reputation for fair dealing and ethical practices.

ON-SITE VISIT

And finally, as you narrow your decision down to a few candidates, visit a current or recently completed harvesting operation for each logger. If you visit an active logging operation, inspect the equipment and the site, and look at the work overall. Items to look for during the on-site visit include: condition of logging equipment and haul trucks, whether woods workers wear hard hats and other personal protective equipment, how trees excluded from the timber sale are protected, conditions of streams and stream crossings, and appearance of skid trails, landings, and haul roads at the conclusion of the logging operation. You'll learn a lot about the expertise of the professional timber harvester and whether that particular operation would be right for your sale.

QUESTIONS FOR LOGGERS:

- How long have you been in business? How long have current crew members been with you?

(Continued on back page)

- Are you and your employees covered by workers' compensation and liability insurance? What are the dollar limits, and what kinds of accidents are covered? Will you provide me with certificates of workers' compensation/liability insurance coverage?
- What kinds of equipment do you use? How does it match up with the conditions and requirements of my site?
- Do you handle the entire logging process, or use subcontractors for part of the work? If the latter, how do you ensure that your quality goals are met?
- What types of roads and skid trails do you normally construct? What equipment do you use to build them? How will my skid trails, landings, and haul roads look when you've completed the logging operation?
- Have you completed any kind of logger training/continuing education program? Are you accredited, certified, or licensed in any way?
- What options do I have if my property or my neighbor's is damaged?
- What Best Management Practices do you normally implement? Which ones would be needed on my forest?
- Can you supply me with references of previous jobs and to some of the mills you deal with?

QUESTIONS FOR A LOGGER'S

REFERENCES:

- Did the logger fulfill verbal and written obligations for such things as road restoration, fence repair, and cleaning up trash?
- Was the logger willing to listen to your concerns and answer your questions directly?
- Did the logger get the job done efficiently and within the specified time limit? If not, why not? (Be aware that bad weather can cause unavoidable delays.)
- Did the logger take pride in his or her workers and equipment? How about in previous jobs? Was the logger willing to

show you any of these?

- Was the logger careful to avoid damaging other trees and land improvements (gates, fences, culverts, etc.)? If there was damage, did he make appropriate repairs?
- Did the timber harvester seem concerned about environmental matters, such as wildlife habitat, water quality, and visual concerns?
- Did the logger communicate well with you? Was he or she flexible in responding to your needs? How were the logger's relations with foresters and neighboring landowners?
- In what shape did the logger leave your skid trails, haul roads, and landings?
- Would you use the logger for future timber harvests? Why or why not?

IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS ... Landowners should exercise as much care in selecting a timber harvester as they would in choosing a carpenter or painter for their home. The questions above, if asked with sincerity and good humor, will help greatly in the selection process.

Publication sponsors note that following the suggestions in this publication does not guarantee, but will provide a better chance of selecting a quality logger.

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