

WHY WOULD YOU HIRE A PROFESSIONAL FORESTER?

By Mike Wolf, Appalachian Forest Consultants

I have heard this question posed in different situations. Once, I heard a Penn State Extension forester pose this question, rhetorically, to a large group of forest owners. Another time, I heard about a logger who posed this question to a forest owner who recently hired a consultant. In the case of the extension forester, he went on to present many well-founded reasons why hiring a consulting forester was a wise financial decision and a sound stewardship endeavor. In the case of the logger, he went on to question the forest owner's ability to make rational decisions and added even more questions like, "why would you want to pay a middle-man for nothing?"

Both cases point to differing points of reference and differing opinions about the subject of hiring a professional forester. Is it rational to hire a consultant? Do university foresters in public service positions really recommend hiring a pro? Is a consulting forester just a middle-man? If you are unsure about how to answer these questions, you are not alone. I hope the information in this short article will help clear things up.

What do the experts say?

When I am trying to get to the bottom of a tough topic, I like to seek out information and advice from reputable experts whose only agenda is to help me out. I know, this sounds too good to be true, but wait. Our nation's cooperative extension network fits the bill – non-biased, science-based information that is meant to help...wow! With some simple web searches, I found articles from cooperative extension offices in Alabama, Maryland, North Carolina and Pennsylvania that cited studies conducted in these four states and Georgia and Illinois.



Forests are complex! A forester will assess your site's ability to regrow successfully. The dozens of red oak seedlings pictured here in this small area are an important indicator of potential success.



Forests are complex! A forester will assess your site's ability to regrow successfully. The invasive plant being treated with herbicide here is an important step toward potential success.

Without any conflicting opinion, each article came to similar conclusions. Here are just a few excerpts: "the consequences of not seeking professional assistance for timber harvesting can be severe"; "selling timber is legally, financially, and environmentally complex to the extent that any time a sale or harvest of timber is anticipated, a forester should be a key participant"; "a successful timber harvest should include three people: the landowner, the professional forester and the logger";


"benefits of using a professional consulting forester – better job environmentally and more income"; "a significant amount of time and energy is spent educating landowners on the importance of utilizing professional foresters in the management of their land"; "when you harvest timber, it pays to hire a forester"; "woodland owners who do not work with a forester risk receiving a lower income...and a reduced return from lower-quality growing stock on future sales."

continued on next page

Where else can I go for proof?

At a recent field seminar titled, "Timber Sale Basics," a PA Bureau of Forestry Service Forester (another non-biased agency and professional who is there to help you) passed out a paper called, *Top 10 Timber Harvest Mistakes*. One of the 'mistakes' was "consulting forester not used." The paper cited a study from Dr. John F. Kundt, a forestry specialist from the University of Maryland. Landowners in the study received 66 percent more money for their timber when they had assistance from a Registered Professional Forester. The study also demonstrated that landowners retained 250 percent more timber on their land than unassisted landowners and 100 percent more seedlings to regenerate their forest land.

Now that you have heard from your cooperative extension friends, what do *you* think? Is hiring a forester rational? What about the idea of a forester just being a 'middle-man'? Ask yourself, "does a landowner hire a forester just for convenience or access to the market OR is the forester hired to represent the landowner, understand the owner's objectives, manage the owner's timber asset, manipulate the forest with the owner's objectives in mind, provide a professional service, increase bidding competition, and treat the forest well?"

It will be up to you to decide, but this article and the points presented beg the question, "why *wouldn't* you hire a professional forester?" 



This property is loaded with valuable trees. Many timber buyers would love to start cutting tomorrow! If you let them, what will be the result? Besides a short-term financial gain, think about the woods. What will replace the harvested trees - healthy new seedlings of valuable species or just fern, striped maple and birch? Forests are complex!

Mike Wolf is a partner with Appalachian Forest Consultants. He promotes forest health education through a company web site www.appalachianforestconsultants.com and through the new Trees of Pennsylvania web resource www.treesofpa.com where his feature is called 'The Forester.'

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