

# Southern Maine Forestry Services

## 2022 Newsletter

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### Grow Your Trees, Grow Your Value

When planning this spring newsletter, we decided on “growth” as the natural theme of the season. Several weeks of writer’s block ensued. I was meeting with a customer when their daughter asked me exactly what a forester does. Then it hit me. The simple answer is: We *grow* trees!

Loggers harvest trees. Foresters can supervise harvesting as well as many other tasks. A forester’s license merely indicates a basic level of competency, not who a forester is representing or where their priorities lie. Foresters fall into four general groups: Research, education, government procurement, and consultants who act as fiduciary agents.

Procurement foresters work for mills or loggers who need wood. Their job is to buy as much wood as possible at the lowest possible price. They work for the best interest of their employers, as they should. But they do not represent the interests of the landowner who is the seller.

The last group of foresters is consultants. Consultants work for and represent their client, the landowner, to keep forest trees healthy and vigorous and to maximize income when harvested or both. To truly fulfill this role, a forester must act as a fiduciary agent to their client. There are many foresters advertising consulting services who are not fiduciaries. Many purchase stumpage no differently than a logger. A buyer profits more when a seller makes less. A fiduciary agent needs to be compensated in some way that is directly connected to the client’s success.

Hopefully you have had the chance to walk in your forest. This time of year brings some of the best conditions to get outdoors and assess your land: Good visibility before leaf out, no bugs yet, and warm temperatures after a long winter. It is easy to get excited when we see young seedlings starting to grow in openings made during a harvest.

Those seedlings are the next crop of trees. Their species mix will have the greatest impact on what your forest will become and the potential income it will generate. While these little trees will have the longest to grow to become a mature forest, it is at this stage that is easiest to change the trajectory.

Do you want to grow this species for the next fifty to one hundred years? If the answer is no, now is the time to act. You can weed or selectively change the species composition or completely start from scratch by killing it all. Herbicides can be a great tool for accomplishing this. Killing all of the undesirable established regeneration would be an example of site preparation. A selective application, killing undesirable hardwoods to release white pine, would be an example of release work.

Have you spotted any invasive shrubs and vines? These are not desirable! If you are seeing just a few seedlings, hand-pulling will help keep them at bay. But if you have large mature plants, or large numbers of plants, pulling is not practical. An application of herbicide is the best and likely only way to kill the entire plant. Controlling invasive is another form of site preparation or release to grow desirable species.

Once we have spent time and effort to maximize the growth of volume and quality, the final step is maximizing income from harvested trees. Marketing is required to do this. It requires the unique skills and knowledge of a forester to do this job well and represent the seller.

A landowner who has limited knowledge and is not selling wood on a regular basis doesn't have the knowledge to best represent themselves. Loggers and procurement foresters are experts and represent themselves well. So should you, by hiring a consulting forester.

I frequently hear landowners say things like "I am just cutting off my lot before I sell the land, I don't need a forester." That couldn't be further from the truth. An unskilled seller will have no difficulty selling high quality timber. But they are unlikely to maximize the income.

A timber sale I managed last winter demonstrates this well. A company purchased a piece of commercial land to develop. The prescription was to clear 30-35 acres, while thinning the remaining 25 acres while leaving a productive forest. They tried negotiating with a local well known logger. He made a lump sum offer of \$60,000 for timber on the sixty acre lot. Was that a good deal? How would they know?

I was asked to look at the lot and felt the logger's offer was low. The land owner asked if I could generate enough additional income to cover my fee. I recognized the property and timber had several qualities that would make the timber more valuable: high volume, good quality, and made for a good harvest efficiency. Well drained soils and future development allowed harvest to be done during a time most land would be excessively muddy. In addition, I knew wood prices had risen rapidly over the previous 6 months due to a number of factors.

I quickly advertised the timber by bid amongst quality loggers we regularly work with. I invited buyers from a large area to ensure there would be no collusion. And I promoted the positive qualities listed above.

I was amazed by the half dozen offers we received. All offers were well above status-quo prices we had been receiving. In fact, the prices had grown to the level that we had not seen since prior to the recession.

The winning bid is now our company's record price on pine, \$315 per thousand board feet, including pallet. The final gross stumpage was \$120,900! Talk about growing a landowner's value! The key to generating that price for the landowner was hiring knowledgeable representation. We can't double your money on every job, but we always strive to maximize the value of the forest left to grow, as well as the value of the wood you choose to harvest.

Erik Grove, ACF  
Consulting Forester



## **Growing Trees and Protecting Water Quality on the Lake Auburn Watershed**

The Auburn Water District began working with foresters on its land as early as the 1930's, and in recent decades has utilized Southern Maine Forestry Services. The land base has grown since that time and is now the second largest managed by a water supply in the state of Maine. The primary objective is to provide the highest quality water possible.

High quality water is usually cool and high in dissolved oxygen. The solubility of oxygen is higher in cool water than in warm water. The decomposition of organic materials can reduce or eliminate the supply of dissolved oxygen. This is why LAWPC focuses on management favoring good quality softwoods such as eastern white pine, red pine, and spruce. Cutting cycles are 10-12 years, targeting lower quality, diseased, or damaged trees for removal. This enables LAWPC to capture potential mortality, reduce fuel loads, release regeneration, and promote growth in better quality trees. It is a conservative philosophy with an intensive approach. Through the use of whole tree chipping, LAWPC can also accomplish timber stand improvement. This is a weeding and thinning of smaller diameter stems, which are chipped and sold as biomass.

All skid trails are designated by a licensed forester, with trees marked for cutting oriented to that trail system. There are benefits to this environmentally and economically. Temporary bridges are used on all pre-designated brook crossings, and skid trails are located to minimize soil disturbance and erosion. Timber harvests are scheduled six months to a year in advance so that heavy equipment works when the ground is either frozen or dry.

Today's logging equipment is large and heavy. Modern skidders remove bunches of multiple trees at one time. Properly locating where they travel is important to minimize soil and residual stand damage. Successful results require a thorough understanding of forestry, soils, wildlife habitat, local and state codes, and a working knowledge of civil and mechanical engineering.

### *The economic benefit:*

A recent study in the southeast compared the results of a stand marked by a forester to one that was harvested by an owner/operator. The annual growth post-harvest was 26% high in the marked stand than in the owner/operator selected harvest. Stumpage value prior to the next thinning was \$457 per acre higher in the marked stand.



LAWPC is now thinning some of their timberlands for the fourth and fifth time. On well-drained coarse textured soils with good timber it is not uncommon to grow about one cord per acre per year – more on better sites. The majority of the harvests remove 10-12 cords per acre or 20-30% of the stand volume.

By growing a cord per acre per year and harvesting every 10-12 years, LAWPC never exceeds growth and the forest is managed in a sustainable manner, protecting the soils and growing better quality, more valuable timber. Byproducts of this healthy forest are the increased water quality, and improved aesthetics and wildlife habitat.

Landowners who take this approach set themselves up for future success. While markets for low-grade wood from low quality trees can be tenuous, demand for saw logs from high-quality trees remains more consistent. Healthy forests benefit wildlife, watersheds, and those who live among them.

Chip Love  
Consulting Forester



### **The Changing Forest**

To most people a forest is a constant thing. The trees are just there and never change. However to a forester or other close observer the forest is always changing. At this time of year the buds on hardwood species are swelling. Flowers of red maples, catkins of aspens and willows along with many other species are blooming. Soon leaves will start to open and buds

of softwoods elongate and needles form. The forest changes from bare branches and tired looking softwoods to a kaleidoscope of shades of green as new foliage absorbs sunlight. What are not seen is stems and branches add a new layer of wood and grow in diameter. Also not seen is the struggle for sunlight, water, nutrients and room to expand. Some trees become suppressed while faster growing neighbors take the space they occupied. Come fall fruit and seed mature and fall to the ground. Leaves respond to shorter days by decreasing the production of chlorophyll giving us the beauty of fall colors. Softwoods seal their buds under a waxy coating protecting from the coming cold. Winter comes and the trees rest awaiting spring for another burst of competition and growth to fight for their place in the forest.

This and more is going on all the time but to the casual passer by the forest remains unchanged, trees are in their place not much different from year to year. A forester sees the changes that have occurred and can often predict changes that will occur in the future. Short live species are maturing and soon to die. A wolf tree crowding nice younger stems and will suppress them soon. Seedlings and saplings growing in the shade of the over story and will die if not released.

The forester also sees many opportunities to thin and harvest the stands to direct a forest's growth. Short lived species can be removed salvaging them before the die. Longer lived species can be thinned giving residual stems the room to continue or accelerate growth. Trees over topping those seedlings and saplings can be harvest releasing them to grow if they have greater potential.

Now at the end of my career I have seen many changes in forests that never seem to change.

A young stand of red oak I had thinned for firewood in the late 1970's is now a beautiful stand of 20" diameter trees of excellent quality. White pine seedlings I planted in the 1980's in an abandoned blueberry field that have been thinned once are now over 40 feet tall and 8-10" in diameter. A stand of middle age mixed growth I first had thinned about 40 years ago which has had two more thinning and improvement cuts and is now a beautiful stand with mature stems 80 to 100 feet tall with an understory of desirable saplings and small pole size stems. An old field which had grown up to popple, cherry and crooked pine is now a patch or young habitat used by many species of wildlife.

A forest is for ever changing and a well-trained and talented forester can direct that change to a desired goal.

Rene D. Noel, Jr.  
Consulting Forester

Stand of gray birch, scrub oak and rough under-stocked pine clear cut and planted to white pine in 1991. First thinning applied in 2020. Forests are continually changing.

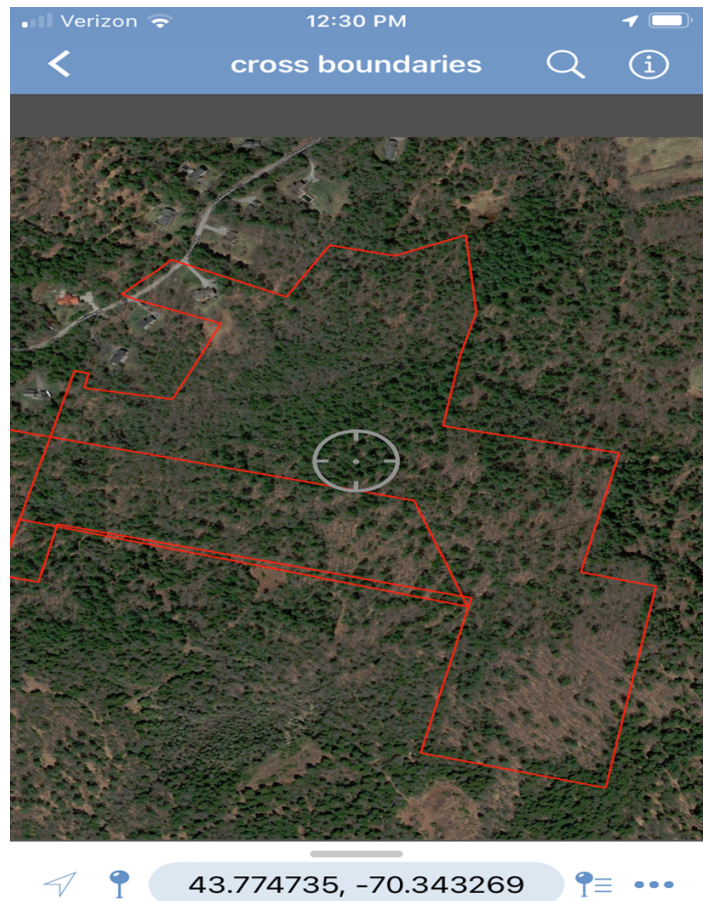




## Perpetual Growth as a Forester

As we attend to our work managing the growth of healthy, productive forests, we as foresters also ensure that we maintain continual growth in our knowledge base and skillset. Many professional fields require, or at least reward, continued education. The practice of forestry is one in which being a “lifetime learner” is particularly essential.

A forester generally begins their career in the woods with a four-year education in forestry which imparts an essential initial knowledge base. But trees grow slowly, the variables at play in forest management are infinite, and the college degree could be thought of as the basic qualification to *begin* the real learning process. Which, like tree growth in a forest, will be ongoing and incremental over years with no predetermined endpoint. Field observations of the results of a forester’s own management decisions, or those of others who have come before, accumulate over the years. With the right mindset and environment there is always more to learn simply from a workday in the woods practicing forestry.



On a broader scale, our collective understanding of forest ecology and silviculture is also continually expanding and being refined. New research builds on, and sometimes brings into question, old understandings of how things work in the infinitely complex system that is a forest. New factors

such as invasive forest pests come into play, and questions of how to best react arise. A forester drawing solely on the lectures and textbooks they encountered in college will, sooner or later, fall behind the curve in the level of expertise they can bring to their work. We all attend various conferences and seminars as an important part of staying abreast of what researchers have been up to, and sometimes just as importantly, an opportunity to chat with and glean knowledge from other practicing foresters. In March, those of us at SOMEFS who were able attended the New England Society of American Foresters annual meeting in South Portland, and contributed our insight as forest managers to field tours of several of our client's properties, ranging from Portland to Denmark, ME.

As our collective and individual understandings of forest management grow and evolve, the associated technology also advances. Foresters have utilized things like GPS and GIS mapping software since the early days of its availability. Since then, traditional GPS units have given way to smartphone and tablet software, and desktop mapping software has evolved. There can be a tendency to stick with the technology that is familiar - after all, a compass, a paper map, and a Biltmore stick are often all a forester should really *need* - but there is much efficiency to be found in periodically investing the time to learn and adopt key upgrades in technology. We have in recent years shifted our GIS mapping processes from the older software to a more up-to-date solution, and invested in desktop and phone/tablet timber cruising software. Most recently, we have started the process of upgrading our database to a system that will better enable us to integrate data between our foresters, and meet our client's needs.

We at Southern Maine Forestry Services have collective experience that would tally up to about a century of managing forests. Enough years for a seedling to become a mature over story tree. As one of the younger foresters on the team, I've benefited from the accumulated experience my peers/mentors, and also observed that the learning process never stops. Here's to another productive growing season.

Nick McDougal  
Forester

## **Forester Licensing Board Studying Forester Ethics**

For the past two years a committee of foresters has been working with the licensing board to advance some changes primarily involving foresters whose job is buying stumpage from you land owners. The committee consists of two consulting foresters who are members of the Association of Consulting Foresters, two procurement foresters, a forester from the Maine Forest Service and a public member. The meetings have been Zoom meetings and I think unfortunately we have seen little participation from other forester organizations or groups which represent landowners. This rule change will have to go through the public hearing process and other bureaucratic procedures or any rule change. I'm hopeful landowners and other foresters will be heard in this process. I am sure those on the procurement side will participate to represent their interests.

This committee came about because of anecdotes of some landowners having not been well treated and possibly misled when they sold timber along with a complaint against a licensee which a number of foresters not on the board but familiar with the case felt the board had misjudged.

The crux of the matter is obvious. A buyer and a seller have opposing interests. The seller wants to maximize their profit and get the most they can in money or services. A buyer wants to pay as little as possible and be able to operate at the lowest cost to maximize their profit.

All foresters have knowledge and skills the average person does not. However, a forester cannot represent both sides of a buy/sell transaction. And a forester working as a procurement forester should not use his position and title of forester to mislead a landowner into believing he or she can represent their interest in the sale of their timber.



To this end we are working to change the rules to require foresters to state who they are representing, in writing and if they are contacting landowners as foresters whose interest is to buy your standing trees. Any forester will still be much more knowledgeable than most landowners but landowners will be on notice that they are involved in a buy/sell negotiation and not engaging a forester who will be representing them with a fiduciary duty to them.

### **Weighted Average Stumpage Prices**

Reflecting Timber Sales between December 1, 2021 to April 30 2022

We get a lot of demand for this information but are always hesitant to publish it. These are average prices over many individual timber sales. Our working area covers from So. New Hampshire to Rangeley, Maine in the North to Waterville, Maine in the East. Markets and trucking cost to those markets vary greatly over that area. We have sold timber that varies from junk to very high grade. Logging chances have varied from difficult to super easy. Consult with someone who has no interest in buying your standing timber. Buyers are making purchase offers or telling you what they'd like to pay. An independent forester who represents sellers can tell you the true value of your timber.

| <b>Species</b>      | <b>Product</b>  | <b>Wt. Avg</b>   | <b>Measure</b>             |
|---------------------|-----------------|------------------|----------------------------|
| <b>All Species</b>  | <b>Biomass</b>  | <b>\$ 1.94</b>   | <b>per ton</b>             |
| <b>Ash</b>          | <b>Sawlogs</b>  | <b>\$ 270.79</b> | <b>per 1000 board feet</b> |
| <b>Beech</b>        | <b>Sawlogs</b>  | <b>\$ 116.38</b> | <b>per 1000 board feet</b> |
| <b>Black Birch</b>  | <b>Sawlogs</b>  | <b>\$ 143.57</b> | <b>per 1000 board feet</b> |
| <b>Black Oak</b>    | <b>Sawlogs</b>  | <b>\$ 332.32</b> | <b>per 1000 board feet</b> |
| <b>Fuelwood</b>     | <b>Firewood</b> | <b>\$ 24.01</b>  | <b>per cord</b>            |
| <b>Hard Maple</b>   | <b>Sawlogs</b>  | <b>\$ 389.25</b> | <b>per 1000 board feet</b> |
| <b>Hardwood</b>     | <b>Pulpwood</b> | <b>\$ 7.43</b>   | <b>per ton</b>             |
| <b>Hardwood</b>     | <b>Sawlogs</b>  | <b>\$ 362.33</b> | <b>per 1000 board feet</b> |
| <b>Hemlock</b>      | <b>Pulpwood</b> | <b>\$ 3.13</b>   | <b>per ton</b>             |
| <b>Hemlock</b>      | <b>Sawlogs</b>  | <b>\$ 88.25</b>  | <b>per 1000 board feet</b> |
| <b>Norway Pine</b>  | <b>Sawlogs</b>  | <b>\$ 112.03</b> | <b>per 1000 board feet</b> |
| <b>Poplar</b>       | <b>Sawlogs</b>  | <b>\$ 97.99</b>  | <b>per 1000 board feet</b> |
| <b>Red Oak</b>      | <b>Sawlogs</b>  | <b>\$ 406.84</b> | <b>per 1000 board feet</b> |
| <b>Soft Maple</b>   | <b>Sawlogs</b>  | <b>\$ 261.23</b> | <b>per 1000 board feet</b> |
| <b>Spruce/fir</b>   | <b>Sawlogs</b>  | <b>\$ 195.97</b> | <b>per 1000 board feet</b> |
| <b>White Oak</b>    | <b>Sawlogs</b>  | <b>\$ 248.47</b> | <b>per 1000 board feet</b> |
| <b>White Pine</b>   | <b>Pulpwood</b> | <b>\$ 1.78</b>   | <b>per ton</b>             |
| <b>White Pine</b>   | <b>Sawlogs</b>  | <b>\$ 246.91</b> | <b>per 1000 board feet</b> |
| <b>Yellow Birch</b> | <b>Sawlogs</b>  | <b>\$ 217.00</b> | <b>per 1000 board feet</b> |

Some of you may be wondering why we are hesitant to give out the expected prices of wood. First is timber and land is too variable to lend itself to wide average prices. Second I recently someone with a woodlot called looking for a referral to a logger. He got upset I wouldn't give him a name. I said to him, "If you strike a deal and latter find it wasn't a good deal, I don't want to have been any part of that."



## **A Thankful Goodbye**

In the past, I have written about what circumstances brought me to the field of forestry, and ultimately to Southern Maine Forestry Services. During my time here I have grown exponentially as a forester. My coworkers have become mentors and lifelong friends. The foresters here at Southern Maine Forestry Services have taught me countless lessons throughout my time. How to put the client's interests first, harvest administration, and proper silviculture, just to name a few. As I move on, these lessons will not be forgotten. I cannot thank Southern Maine Forestry Services enough for the opportunity to learn and grow as a forester.

I have had the opportunity to meet and work with many different people throughout my time. I always enjoy meeting new landowners and doing my best to reach their individual goals. It would not be possible to meet landowner goals without a good group of logging contractors. During my time, I have had the pleasure of working with several excellent contractors. As I move forward to build my own business closer to home, I plan to implement the same passion and ethics that I have learned during my time here. I am fortunate to have been trained by a great group of professionals at Southern Maine Forestry Services. Thank you to my coworkers, the contractors, and the landowners for helping shape me into the forester I am today.

Aiden Heikkinen

## **Wanted: Forest Technician/Forester**

We are sorry to see Aiden leave, but fully understand the call and excitement of starting one's own business.

That said, our plate is full and we are in need of another person on our staff.

At this time, the workload would be largely technical in nature: Invasive species control and release using herbicides, marking timber for harvest, cruising timber, and boundary line maintenance are examples of the tasks a potential hire would be expected to complete.

While in immediate need, we will be looking for the right person for the job. Training in forestry to at least the Associate Degree level is desirable. An interested candidate should buy into our company culture and vision. Our client's needs and goals are always our top priority, and we serve our clients with a fiduciary duty. You should share that ethic. We expect excellent work from ourselves and the contractors who work on our client's lands. You should be interested in working hard, and expect those same standards of yourself. Finally, we are unapologetic forest geeks. We love the forests that are our workplace. We are passionate about creating conditions that grow large, high-quality trees. And when the time comes, we enjoy selling those trees to our client's best advantage and supervising high quality harvesting contractors. In short, we practice forestry as if the lands that we manage were our own.

We would also entertain taking on a more experienced forester. Our company's organization is similar to a law practice, but with titles of intern forester, forester, senior forester rather than associate, junior partner, and partner. If you like the thought of running your own practice, but would like to develop it within the support system of an established firm, this might be for you.

If you are interested in joining a team with this vision, by all means send us a resume or letter of introduction.

Would you like this to be your office?

