

Smart Timber Harvesting on a Property Requires Planning

There are a number of reasons why you may want to selectively harvest timber after you buy a recreational property:

You may want to clear a site for a cabin. You might need to improve access to the property.

Or as is the case with many Potlatch properties, your tract may have mature timber that offers the opportunity for cash flow.



As with most things in life, though, smart selective harvesting requires a plan. Before you buy, work with a knowledgeable real estate broker and a consulting forester to understand the timber on the property, says Brian Bignall, Minnesota Wood Procurement Manager for Potlatch.

“Then, after you buy the property, create a plan for selective harvesting that will help you reach your goals,” he says. “To start, you will need to know what the short- and long-term harvesting opportunities look like.”

Bignall, who creates harvesting plans for landowners across northern Minnesota, begins his work by assessing the age and health of the pine and hardwood trees on a property. Pine trees as young as 25 years can generate revenue, while hardwoods qualify as merchantable timber after 40 years of growth.

To gauge the health of a pine tree, Bignall says, the “live crown ratio” is the standard measurement, based on the number of green branches on a tree. A ratio of 30 percent or higher is good: If green branches cover 30 feet or more of a 100-foot tree, for example, it’s considered a healthy tree. Meanwhile, there are other ways used to gauge the health of hardwoods.

With the knowledge of your tree stands in hand, the next step in creating a quality harvesting plan is to consider the opportunities for revenue and then match those up with what you want to do with your property. If you want to improve the quality of wildlife on the property, for example, you may want to keep some downed hardwoods in place, since those can create quality wildlife habitats.

As you are making your plans, also think about the time of year that will be best for harvesting. Harvesting in the winter has advantages, because frozen ground holds heavy equipment better than muddy trails impacted by heavy summer rains.

The market for timber is strong year-round, Bignall says, and the market has been very consistent in recent years, making the revenue projections in your plan more predictable.

If all this seems complicated, know that you don’t have to figure everything out yourself. That said, the time to think about timber harvesting possibilities is before you buy. Get started by [contacting a Potlatch Preferred Broker](#): They are experts in knowing how to tie timber harvest planning into your purchase decision.