

Sustainable Forests

A resource for Georgia landowners, sponsored by the SFI Implementation Committee.

The Right Time to Harvest



For pine forests in the Coastal Plain or Piedmont regions of Georgia, a 28- to 35-year rotation is fairly typical. Depending on your personal goals, you may prefer a longer rotation.

For most pines, a first thinning should happen around 15 years, with subsequent thinnings for pulpwood every five to seven years.

Hardwood forests may not be ready to harvest for 50 years; and thinning is not typically a recommended practice for hardwoods.

In addition to age and size of a stand, you also should also consider current demand and prices for your timber before planning your harvest.

Timber! Planning Your Harvest

While burly lumberjacks armed with axes and crosscut saws shouting “Timber!” is the classic depiction of logging, modern timber harvesting is a far cry from that image. Heavily mechanized and efficient, most timber harvesting today is done by professional loggers who are reputable business people, current with the latest harvesting techniques.

Leave Nothing to Chance When You’re Ready for Harvest

While the caliber of logging professional is much higher than in the past, as a forest landowner, you shouldn’t leave anything to chance. Make sure you’re prepared when it’s time to harvest your timber.

If you’re fortunate enough to own thousands of acres, you’re probably planning or managing timber harvests on a regular basis, or may even have a professional forester or consultant to help. However, if you’re a typical Georgia landowner, you may only have a chance to plan a final timber harvest two or three times during your lifetime.

This issue of *Sustainable Forests* offers a few reminders and things to consider. We also direct you to other agencies and online resources in the *More Resources* section.



Selling Your Timber

When you're ready to sell your timber, you may solicit bids from multiple buyers or you may negotiate the sales price directly with a reputable wood procurement forester, wood dealer or logging contractor. You also may get unsolicited inquiries about your timber. Regardless of the process, your decision should not be based on price alone.

You need to ensure that the buyer's offer and harvest plan—whether thinning or final harvest—accurately reflects the value of your timber while protecting your land's ability to grow future forests.

If you work with a forestry professional and already have a forest management plan, timber harvesting is probably addressed in that plan. Reforestation plans also should be considered at the time of harvest: Will you plant seedlings or plan for natural regeneration?

Several things to consider before harvesting:

- First, consider working with a professional forester, especially if you're not familiar with forestry and selling timber.
- What acreage and trees will you harvest? If a selective harvest, who will mark the trees?
- Are your property lines clearly marked? Also make sure that both boundary lines and harvest areas are spelled out in a harvesting plan and contract.
- And, importantly, have you and the logger or forester discussed forestry Best Management Practices (BMPs) that will be applied on your land?
- County taxes on timber sales are due at the time of harvest. These should be discussed with the buyer.

Critical Forestry BMPs

While all forestry BMPs are important, those related to road construction and streamside management zones have the potential to negatively impact your property and even result in fines or regulatory issues. Pay close attention to those BMPs that are designed to protect water quality and prevent erosion, including BMPs related to:

- Stream crossings (see photo below)
- Forest road construction
- Maintenance of no-cut or limited-cut buffer zones along streams and rivers
- Clean-up of trash and debris—always make sure a logger properly disposes of oil cans

The Georgia Forestry Commission is responsible for developing and monitoring Georgia's Forestry BMPs. See *More Resources*.



Here's an example of a bridge used to skid timber over a creek crossing. This particular bridge is 24-feet long and is made from hickory and red oak.

A Written Contract is Essential

You wouldn't sell your house, your truck or any other asset without a legal contract, so why would you even consider harvesting your timber without a legal contract?

A written timber sales contract ensures that all parties agree on the details of the harvest operation, including:

Price

Terms of payment

Permitting

Length of contract

BMP compliance

Boundary lines

Area to be harvested

Provision for damages

Any harvest restrictions

Hold harmless clause

Provision for log security (e.g. security tags)

A sample Forest Products sales contract is available on the Georgia Forestry Commission website. See *More Resources*.

Harvesting: By the Numbers

- 15** Typical age of pine stands at first thinning.
- 35** Normal rotation age for pine stands in the Piedmont or Coastal Plain region of Georgia.
- 80** Pine sawtimber trees per acres at final harvest. (on average)
- 1,000** Approx. number of logging contractors in Georgia.
- 229,000** Non-corporate forest owners in the South that own more than 100 acres.

Choosing A Logger

In Georgia, look for professional loggers that bear the Georgia Master Timber Harvester designation. This means that they have completed training that addresses technical, environmental and business practices through a program supported by the Sustainable Forestry Initiative of Georgia and offered in cooperation with the University of Georgia. (See *More Resources* for link).

A Master Timber Harvester is a good place to start, but you should still be diligent and do your homework when choosing a logger.

What You Should Ask

First, find out how long they've been in business. Ask for references. If possible, plan an on-site visit to one of their active or previous jobs.

- Do they have liability insurance and workers' compensation?
- Will the owner or a supervisor be on site at all times?
- What type of equipment will they use?
- Do they follow Georgia Best Management Practices (BMPs) for forestry?
- In particular, ask them how they would handle: roads and skid trails, culverts and stream crossings, as needed.
- What measures will they take to control erosion?
- How will they handle the land and timber adjacent to streams or other bodies of water?

You should also make sure that you and the logger agree on when communications are needed as well as the preferred method of communication.

Specialization Hits the Woods

Most professions have specialists and logging contractors are no exception. While some larger contractors may be equipped to handle all types of harvesting operations, there are several common areas of specialization.

Thinning – Contractors that specialize in thinning are adept at navigating the woods with minimal damage to your residual timber stand and often have a reputation for high quality work. They typically have a piece of equipment called a delimitator that strips the branches off the pine pulpwood during first and second thinnings.

Hardwoods vs. Softwoods – Hardwood specialists are often more skilled with a chainsaw and may use tracked feller bunchers for operating on wet sites. Softwood operators may have 3-wheel cutdown machines for operating in tight spots.

Wet Weather – With current rainfall levels, wet weather logging has not been much of a concern in Georgia, but when you're faced with wet conditions, due to rainfall or the location of your property, you should ask a logger if they're experienced operating in wet conditions.

Absentee Landowner?

Make sure you have someone local that you trust to represent your interests when you're not around to handle things personally. This could be a reputable logger, forester or consultant. For help, call the Georgia Forestry Commission at 1-800-428-7337 or log on to the GFC website.

More Resources

There are many resources available online or via a telephone call. Some of these include:

Master Timber Harvester

For a list of Master Timber Harvesters and more about the program: <http://ga-mth.forestry.uga.edu> or call 706-542-7691.

SFI Georgia

For more SFI information, helpful links and past issues of the *Sustainable Forests* newsletter: www.sfi-georgia.org or call 706-542-7691.

Georgia Forestry Commission

For Georgia BMPs for forestry, sample timber sales contract, list of foresters and general forestry questions: www.gatrees.org or call 1-800-GATREES.

Georgia Forestry Association

Legislative updates, general forestry information and Georgia Tree Farm contacts: www.gfagrow.org or call 478-992-8110.

Georgia DNR Wildlife Resources Division

Wildlife conservation assistance programs that are part of the Private Lands program: www.georgiawildlife.com/landowner.programs_conservation.aspx.



**Sustainable Forestry Initiative
SFI Implementation Committee**

Center for Forest Business
Warnell School of Forestry
and Natural Resources
University of Georgia
Athens, Georgia 30602-2152

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SFI: From the Forest to the Marketplace

Voluntary third-party forest certification began in the 1990s in response to market concerns about forest management and illegal logging, primarily in developing countries. Today, the Sustainable Forestry Initiative program is governed by SFI Inc.—an independent, non-profit organization responsible for maintaining, overseeing and improving a sustainable forestry certification program that is internationally recognized and among the largest in the world.

Locally, the Georgia SFI Implementation Committee (SIC) is led by SFI participant company representatives and others across the forestry community. The Georgia SIC promotes the practice of sustainable forestry in the state—supporting forester and logger education, promoting voluntary BMPs that protect water quality, and applying SFI principles on program participant lands and through wood procurement practices.

The SFI 2005-2009 Standard is based on principles and measures that promote sustainable forest management and considers all forest values. It includes unique fiber sourcing requirements promoting responsible forest management on all suppliers' lands.

SFI certification also extends to the market. When they see the SFI label on a product, consumers can be confident they are buying wood or paper from well-managed, legal sources—whether it is reams of paper, packaging or two-by-fours.

Georgia Votes for Forests

By an overwhelming margin, Georgia voters approved Amendment 1 on November 4. Passage of this historic measure, supported by leading agricultural, environmental, sportsmen and business organizations, will lead to the implementation of the Georgia Forest Land Protection Act of 2008. Amendment 1 will provide protection from development for many of the state's large timberland properties. The next step for this new tax program is the rule-making process to be led by the Property Tax Division of Georgia Department of Revenue.

"Amendment 1 means that many landowners will be spared the decision to sell some or all of their property primarily due to an inability to pay property taxes," noted the Georgia Forestry Association's Steve McWilliams. "The people of the state have made it abundantly clear that they hold our forests in high regard."

(As reported by the Georgia Forestry Association: www.gfagrow.org)

For More Information about SFI, call 706-542-7691 or log on to www.sfi-georgia.org

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