

Excerpts from: Small-Scale Harvesting for Woodland Owners

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Factors to consider in a timber harvest

The first question to address is why you want to harvest your timber. Objectives such as timber stand improvement, revenue generation, wildlife habitat enhancement and clearing an area for a building project are all reasons for tree removal. Depending on your goals, type of harvest and timber volume, you may or may not generate a profit. Though your objectives may be less about profit and more about minimizing impacts on the landscape, no one wants to lose money in the harvesting process. So, as much as possible, consider the harvest in terms of offsetting the work with the value of the timber. There are two important aspects to consider: maximizing the value of your logs and minimizing operating costs. Harvest profitability depends on many factors. Some of them include:

- Distance to the mill
- Total volume harvested
- Tree size
- Log quality
- Market conditions
- Ease of operation
- Seasonality

A minimum amount of timber volume is needed to cover the fixed costs of logging, which include equipment mobilization to your

property. For that reason, an operation resulting in one truckload is not likely to be profitable.

Over the past few years, trucking costs have constituted an increasingly larger portion of the total expense for a timber harvest. Choosing a mill involves evaluating the dollars-per-MBF values from each mill and the associated cost of getting the logs from the landing (places where logs are processed and stored for hauling to the mill) to the mill. Usually, the most economical choice will be the mill closest to your property.

The value of your trees

Measuring your trees to estimate volume (which largely determines value) may cause you to reconsider your original plans. Money may not have been part of the initial plan, but it has a way of altering it. Let your objectives for the harvest area determine which trees will remain and which will be harvested, not the value of the trees (unless maximizing your profit is your objective). After all, once a tree has been removed, it will be a long time before there is another of equal stature. Regardless of tree species, a merchantable sawlog usually requires a diameter of at least 5 inches at the small end.

Summary

Harvesting small timber volumes on small acreages has many unique aspects and challenges. Market timing, contractor selection, timber type, purchase order structure and your individual objectives all play a part in the financial viability of your operation. If you invest the time and energy, you can feel more comfortable in the planning and process of logging and selling your timber while also achieving your goals and objectives.