

# Selecting the Right Logger for Your Timber Harvest

**A**S A FOREST LANDOWNER, you may have wondered from time to time if you and your woods could benefit from a timber harvest. College tuitions are looming, or the habitat is no longer ideal for the deer you hunt or the songbirds you love to watch. Maybe the woodlands are getting crowded, or ice or wind damaged a section, or the growth is well matured and you're wondering just what it's worth.

You are at a critical crossroads. How you sell your trees and select the professional contractors who do the harvesting are important decisions. They can either perpetuate the many values of your forest, or badly damage the land and imperil its ability to bring you future financial income and personal and aesthetic pleasure—the reasons you own the land in the first place.

Fortunately, Americans are becoming more aware of how important forests are to themselves personally and to the nation as a whole. That perception is especially visible in a variety of programs and projects aimed at sustainable forestry—practices based on a stewardship ethic that considers all the many values of wooded lands, including non-timber values such as wildlife and water quality. Among the most notable expressions of this ethic is the American Forest & Paper Association's Sustainable Forestry Initiative<sup>SM</sup> (SFI<sup>SM</sup>).

The goal of the SFI<sup>SM</sup> is to broaden the practice of sustainable forestry. An important component of the initiative aims at enhancing professionalism among timber harvesters, foresters, and others in the forestry community. Specific principles focus on the training and continuing education of these forest professionals in using Best Management Practices (BMPs) during timber harvesting; compliance with laws and regulations; forest regeneration and resource conservation; awareness of the Endangered Species Act and other wildlife considerations; logging safety; and business management.

All of this means that the vital job of selecting the right logger for your timber harvest is getting easier. The purpose of this article is to help you act wisely while preparing for the harvest of your trees.

## What Are BMPs?

Best Management Practices, or BMPs, are good forest stewardship practices to follow during forestry activities to protect the water quality of nearby streams, lakes, or ponds. They are set at the state level and may be mandatory or voluntary, depending on state law. In Alabama, BMPs are voluntary. Common examples of BMPs to protect water quality are:

- Erosion control measures on roads and skid trails, such as culverts, broad-based dips, and water bars.
- Vegetated buffer strips, or “streamside management zones,” along streams, lakes, and wetlands.
- Guidelines for stream crossings to minimize environmental impacts; for example, crossing streams at right angles, using portable bridges, and using culverts.
- Recommended practices for harvesting to protect sensitive areas; for example, to minimize soil rutting by using high-flotation equipment or using mats on skid trails.
- Recommended practices for site preparation for reforestation, matching techniques with soils, slope, and ground cover on each site.
- Guidelines for safe and effective pesticide use; for instance, leaving untreated vegetated buffer strips around water and property boundaries.
- Control of waste disposal on forestlands; for example, servicing equipment away from wetlands and picking up trash.

To obtain a copy of *Alabama's Best Management Practices for Forestry*, contact your local office of the Alabama Forestry Commission or write to Forest Management Division, Alabama Forestry Commission, P.O. Box 302550, Montgomery, AL 36130-2550.

## Qualities of a Professional Logger

Timber harvesters really earn their keep. Their chosen profession is potentially dangerous and physically demanding. It usually entails long hours in remote and difficult terrain and requires a huge outlay in mechanical equipment and personnel costs. To compete safely and efficiently today, a professional logger must be up-to-date on technology and safety, understand and implement the variety of regulations designed to protect natural resources, and manage people effectively—all of which equates to being a good businessperson.

Many states, including Alabama, offer logger education and training programs. It is reasonable to assume that those logging contractors who take advantage of them are likely to qualify as quality contractors for your timber harvesting needs. A “Professional Logging Manager” directory of loggers who have completed this training is available from the Alabama Forestry Association by calling 334-265-8733. You may also find a listing of PLM certified loggers online at [www.pfmt.org](http://www.pfmt.org).

Like any other group of professionals, loggers have a wide variety of skills, experience, personalities, attitudes and equipment. As you talk to candidates for your timber harvest, try to match the logger's operation with your forest stand and objectives. Talk to the logger in person to get a feel for his or her character, reliability, sense of stewardship and willingness to understand and meet your goals.

Always ask a logger for several references from previous clients, and perhaps from mills and woodyards where the logger most often sells forest products. Loggers worth their salt strive to maintain a reputation for fair dealing and ethical practice.

As you narrow your decision down to a very few candidates, visit a current or recently completed harvesting operation for each logger. If you visit an active logging operation, inspect the equipment and the site and look at the work overall.

Items to look for during the on-site visit include the following:

- Condition of the logging equipment and haul trucks.
- Whether woods workers wear hard hats and other personal protective equipment.
- How trees excluded from the timber sale are protected.
- Condition of streams and stream crossings.
- Appearance of skid trails, landings and haul roads at the conclusion of the logging operation.

By paying attention to these types of details, you'll learn a lot about the expertise of the professional timber harvester and whether that particular operation would be right for your sale.

### Questions For Loggers

Here are some questions to ask potential loggers:

- How long have you been in business? How long have current crew members been with you?
- Are you and your employees covered by workers' compensation and liability insurance? What are the dollar limits, and what kinds of accidents are covered? Will you provide me with certificates of workers' compensation and liability insurance coverage?
- What kinds of equipment do you use? How does it match up with the conditions and requirements of my site?
- Do you handle the entire logging process, or use subcontractors for part of the work? If the latter, how do you ensure that your quality goals are met?
- What types of roads and skid trails do you normally construct? What equipment do you use to build them? How will my skid trails, landings, and haul roads look when you've completed the logging operation?
- Have you completed any kind of logger training/continuing education program? Are you accredited, certified, or licensed in any way?
- How would you handle a dispute over timber trespass (the inadvertent or willful theft of timber) or cutting practices? What options do I have if my property or my neighbor's property is damaged?
- What Best Management Practices do you normally implement? Which ones would be needed on my forest?

- Can you supply me with references of previous jobs and to some of the mills you deal with?

### Questions for a Logger's References

Here are some suggested questions to ask the references you obtain from a logger:

- Did the logger fulfill verbal and written obligations for such things as road restoration, fence repair, and cleaning up trash?
- Was the logger willing to listen to your concerns and answer your questions directly?
- Did the logger get the job done efficiently and within the specified time limit? If not, why not? (Be aware that bad weather can cause unavoidable delays.)
- Did the logger take pride in his or her workers and equipment? How about in previous jobs? Was the logger willing to show you any of these?
- Was the logger careful to avoid damaging other trees and land improvements (gates, fences, culverts, etc.)? If there was damage, did he make appropriate repairs?
- Did the timber harvester seem concerned about environmental matters, such as wildlife habitat, water quality, and visual concerns?
- Did he stop or modify operations appropriately during wet weather?
- Did the logger communicate well with you? Did the logger explain, for example, any necessary changes in the operation? Was he or she flexible in responding to your needs? How were the logger's relations with foresters and neighboring landowners?
- In what shape did the logger leave your skid trails, haul roads, and landings?
- Would you use the logger for future timber harvests? Why or why not?

In the final analysis, landowners should exercise as much care in selecting a timber harvester as they would in choosing a carpenter or painter for their home. When it's time for a timber sale, the decisions you make today can create a brighter tomorrow for both you and your forestland.

Source: *Forest Resources Association, Inc., Southcentral Technical Division, Clinton, Mississippi.* 🏠

# Alabama's Sustainable Forests

## A promise is a promise . . .

In 1995, members of the American Forest and Paper Association united in a formal commitment to engage in practices that promote the wise use of our abundant forest resource. In adopting the Sustainable Forestry Initiative<sup>SM</sup> Program, a promise was made to practice responsible forestry and to keep you, the public, up to date on our progress.



## Specifically, we will . . .

- Reforest harvested areas promptly!
- Ensure maintenance of water quality!
- Enhance wildlife habitat!

## Let us know . . .

If you have a comment or question about a forest operation you've witnessed and which is of interest or concern to you, we want to know about it, too.

**So call us, toll free at  
1-800-206-0981**

**Alabama Sustainable  
Forestry Initiative<sup>SM</sup> Program  
555 Alabama Street  
Montgomery, AL 36104-4395**