

VIRGINIA FOREST LANDOWNER UPDATE

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What's in your Forest?

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Do you really know what you have in your forest land? Forests provide us with many benefits that improve our quality of life. Forests help filter out air pollution, provide clean water, help reduce erosion, provide habitat for many animals, offer numerous recreational opportunities, and produce wood products for the many items that we need every day.



Your management plan may vary depending on the species composition of your forest. Shown here is a yellow poplar plantation in SW Virginia. Photo by: Jennifer Gagnon.

One of the first planning activities that a forest landowner should pursue is obtaining a written forest management plan from a professional forester. Professional foresters will be able to collect information on your property to determine what resources you have, the quality and quantity, and make management recommendations based on your goals for the property. Many landowner goals involve some type of timber harvest for a variety of goals including wildlife habitat management and/or economic returns. Before you consider a timber sale you need to know the type and values of your forest. The inventory that the forester provides in the management plan will help to select the most appropriate type of harvesting method in order to meet landowner objectives and to regenerate the desired species.

The type of harvest you conduct will impact the species of trees that will regenerate and grow into the new forest. Shade intolerant species (such as yellow poplar) will not regenerate in the shade and need complete sunlight on the forest floor in order to grow. Shade tolerant species (such as sugar maple) will regenerate and grow well in the shade. While some other species are considered intermediate in shade tolerance (such as red oak) and may regenerate and survive in the shade, they will not grow well until they get full sunlight.

As you can see, determining what species you want to grow in the next generation will be greatly impacted by the decisions you make regarding the timber harvest method. These decisions are complicated, but they can be simplified with the help of a professional forester. If you would like to have a professional forester develop a management plan for your property, contact your local Virginia Department of Forestry (VDOF) office to request a visit from the Area Forester so that they can write a management plan for your property. Private consulting foresters are also available to help you develop a management plan and strategy for your forest land. To find your local VDOF office or to obtain a list of private consultant foresters, visit the VDOF website at www.dof.virginia.gov. The Virginia Cooperative Extension office also has information and publications on forest management and timber harvesting available through the local extension office and available on the extension website at www.ext.vt.edu.

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