

# FORESTRY 101

## Selecting a Logger

by Jeff Stringer

Timber harvesting is one of the most significant activities that many woodland owners undertake and one that can have the biggest impact on the long-term quality and health of the woods. Ensuring that the harvest is completed properly is important for anyone who is interested in maintaining or improving their woodlands. There are a number of concerns that most woodland owners have about conducting a harvest, including obtaining a fair price for their timber, making sure the woods are treated properly, and making sure liability issues and laws are being addressed. Ultimately the woodland owner is responsible for dealing with these concerns. While woodland owners can obtain assistance (see Getting Assistance) in dealing with some of these concerns selecting a qualified professional logger is critical.

### *Professional Loggers*

It is ultimately the competency and professionalism of the logger that can make or break a timber harvest. The logger's job is to cut and skid the timber that is designated for harvest by the woodland owner (or a forester who is working on behalf of the woodland owner). Professional loggers are those who are in the logging business for the long-term. They have the proper equipment to log safely and have experience and training that allows them to do a good job for woodland owners.

They care about their reputation and the viability of their business. Professional loggers can harvest efficiently and safely obey all laws and regulations while protecting the remaining trees, soil, and water. The following are reasonable expectations of any logger.

### *Merchantable Timber*

The logger has the responsibility to ensure that all of the timber or pulpwood that is designated for harvest is cut and removed. When a tree is cut, all merchantable parts of the trees should be removed; not doing so is wasteful. Not every part of Kentucky has the same markets for all trees, and professional loggers know the local markets and what parts of the tree are marketable. Woodland owners are the beneficiaries of this knowledge. If the logger has purchased the timber lump sum, knowing the markets means that all the trees that are supposed to be cut are cut, which can benefit the health of the woods. If the woodland owner is getting paid as a percentage of timber or pulpwood that is being delivered to the mill, then leaving merchantable material in the woods reduces the amount of money the woodland owner is receiving. Either way, removing all merchantable and agreed-upon timber is good logging practice.

*Photos courtesy: Jeff Stringer*





## Protecting Trees

If the logger is not clear cutting, then trees are left (residual trees) that have to be protected from both top damage and from bark being torn from their base (basal damage). The University of Kentucky conducted a research study to look at harvesting damage to residual trees. The results showed that the amount of damage was from either improperly felling trees into residual trees, resulting in top damage, or from improperly skidding trees next to residual trees, leading to basal damage. Further the study showed that the size of equipment was not important, nor was size of the timber or terrain they were working in. The two most important factors were whether or not the logger cared about the job and the logger's competency in directional felling and skidding. Research found that loggers that are competent in cutting and skidding and care about protecting residual trees can conduct a harvest and harm less than 10 percent of the residual trees greater than 8 inches in diameter (smaller trees are susceptible to damage, and most woods have enough smaller trees to adequately respond to some being damaged).



*Knocking the bark off of trees that are left standing during a harvest creates internal rot reducing their long-term value. Thoughtful and technically competent loggers protect these trees from skidding and felling damage.*

## Protecting Soil and Water

Professional loggers do a good job with implementing Best Management Practices (BMPs). BMPs are a set of practices that are designed to reduce or eliminate water pollution including the erosion of soil that ultimately can cause muddy water. The practices include: leaving some standing trees next to streams and other water; properly



*Photo courtesy: John Auel*

*Professional loggers are competent in the use of Best Management Practices (BMPs) to protect soil from eroding and reducing or eliminating water pollution. Water bars and revegetation as shown above are commonly used BMPs to close out skid trails and logging roads. The water bars stop gully formation and the grass holds the surface soil in place. No erosion results in clean streams.*

crossing streams; properly draining skid trails and logging roads; and correctly retiring the logging operation by removing ruts, constructing permanent water control structures, and seeding appropriate areas when done. The use of BMPs is required by Kentucky's

Forest Conservation Act, a state law that makes

## Getting Assistance from Foresters

Foresters can make recommendations that are helpful to most woodland owners, including determining if the woods are ready for harvest and determining which trees or types of trees should be cut. They can also provide other information that can be helpful to those wanting to conduct a harvest.

Both consulting foresters—private individuals or companies—as well as foresters with the Kentucky Division of Forestry (KDF) commonly provide woodland owners with recommendations on whether a harvest is recommended and how it should be conducted. KDF foresters provide these services free of charge, and for a small fee, the Division can mark woodlands for harvest. However, they cannot directly provide woodland owners with assistance in selling their timber. Consulting foresters provide their services for a fee, including providing all of the services needed to sell timber. Consulting foresters work solely on your behalf protecting your interests and woodlands. Most consulting foresters in Kentucky are certified through the Association of Consulting Foresters.

In some areas, foresters working for industries such as sawmills or pulpmills can provide similar assistance. Regardless, the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service recommends that woodland owners get assistance from foresters who can provide up-front advice on harvests and direction for conducting timber sales.

of Forestry's county ranger/technicians responsible for inspecting logging jobs that they find or are notified of for the use of BMPs. All commercial logging sites (with the exception of those using animals) are required to have a Kentucky Master Logger on-site and in charge. The Kentucky Master Logger designation means that they have been trained in logging safety, water quality, and BMP use. Go to [www.masterlogger.org](http://www.masterlogger.org) to search for Kentucky Master Loggers. KDF rangers check to see if there is a Kentucky Master Logger present and for the use of BMPs. If logging operations don't have a Kentucky Master Logger on-site, they can be shut down. If they have been found not to have followed BMPs, the logging firm can be designated as a Bad Actor unless they ultimately correct the BMP problems (see Bad Actor sidebar on page 12).

## Trash, Debris, and Aesthetics

All logging jobs can look messy to the untrained eye. However, professional loggers keep trash picked up. Logging debris such as

tops and "cut offs"—short portions of logs that are generated at the log deck—are kept out of sight or neatly organized at the landing. Further, loggers can maintain uncut buffers next to roads to provide for better aesthetics.



*Professional loggers use practices like an aesthetic buffer zone that improves the appearance of a timber harvest.*

## Safety and Protection

Professional loggers have adequate insurance and use federal- and state-approved safe logging practices. This includes keeping their personnel away from dangerous situations, and working around equipment safely. Professional loggers use required personal protective equipment, such as hardhats and chainsaw operators also wear foot, leg, eye, and ear protection. It is important to remember that active logging jobs are inherently dangerous, and all those entering the woods during harvesting including woodland owners are at risk for injury. Professional loggers also will be mindful of protecting your property (fence, gates, fields, and driveways) as well as keeping mud off of paved roads.

## Tips for Selecting the Right Logger

Woodland owners should ask about each of the issues discussed above. Professional loggers will have no problem with providing references of woodland owners they have worked with in the past; ask for these. Further, many of these issues can be dealt with in contracts, something that consulting foresters typically provide for woodland owners. Consulting foresters know who the professional loggers are in your area and can also ensure that a professional logger is working on your property. Check the Kentucky

Master Logger Web site ([www.masterlogger.org](http://www.masterlogger.org)) to see if the logger is a Kentucky Master Logger and whether they are designated as a Bad Actor. There are also loggers that are members of the Certified Master Logger Program ([www.certifiedmasterlogger.com](http://www.certifiedmasterlogger.com)) who are available in some parts of Kentucky. These loggers are certified through



## Bad Actors

If loggers are found not to have followed the appropriate use of state mandated Best Management Practices (BMPs), they can legally be designated as a Bad Actor under the Kentucky Forest Conservation Act. Check the Kentucky Master Logger Web site ([www.masterlogger.org](http://www.masterlogger.org)) or contact your local County Cooperative Extension Agent or KDF forester to check for Bad Actors. The Bad Actor designation is only given to a logger if he or she fails to correct BMP problems over the course of many months and a four-step process that provides ample opportunity for loggers to fix problems. Receiving the designation typically means that the loggers are having trouble technically completing the BMPs or they are disregarding their use. There is a provision in the law that allows for loggers to get their Bad Actor designation removed. This involves reporting their logging jobs for a two-year period and successfully implementing and being inspected for BMP use by KDF. Loggers can also receive more than one Bad Actor designation if they are repeatedly harvesting and not using BMPs. If they have repeated violations (which can be seen on the Web site) it means that they have more than one instance of not using BMPs. This is a clear indication that they have not met some of the minimum requirements of a professional logger.



Rainforest Alliances' SmartLogging Program and are audited regularly to see that they are abiding by good logging standards. Regardless, there are a number of ways to ensure that you have a professional logger working on your property. Taking the time to ensure that this is the case will go a long way in conducting a successful timber harvest.

### About the Author:

**Jeff Stringer, Ph.D.**, is a extension professor at the University of Kentucky and is responsible for continuing education and research in hardwood silviculture and forest operations. He is also an editor of the Kentucky Woodlands Magazine.

Cooperative Extension Service, Department of Forestry, University of Kentucky, 201 Thomas Poe Cooper Building, Lexington, KY 40546-0073; Phone: 859.257.5994; Fax: 859.323.1031; E-mail: [stringer@uky.edu](mailto:stringer@uky.edu)