

The health of our forests is vital to the well being of people and wildlife in our state. A healthy forest supports a diverse population of wildlife and the people who live there. By carefully maintaining our woodlands, we guarantee that future generations will experience the benefits of a thriving environment.

A number of timber harvesting practices may be employed in order to promote optimal forest growth. Selective cutting is a key component in ensuring the health of a woodland area. Harvesting mature and low-grade trees gives younger, developing trees access to sunlight and more room to grow. A forest with different stages of growth may be harvested continuously over a long period of time, while cutting it all off at once makes the land useless to the next generation. Another harvesting practice that benefits wildlife is clearing small portions of forest. Intense cutting on small plots of woodland promotes new growth in the area that attracts and supports wildlife. Deer, moose, bear, and partridge thrive on the fresh growth that emerges. Employing these practices in woodland areas guarantees the health of both people and wildlife.

The process used when harvesting timber also affects the forest landscape for years to come. Once the trees have been selected also, it is just as important to decide how to harvest. The woodland on my family's farm still reflects poor logging practices twenty years later. Before we purchased the land eighteen years ago, loggers crossed the boundary line and clear-cut ten acres on the property. Either they were in a hurry or they didn't care for the forest. The ruts from their skidders remain to this day. In contrast, my father and I logged with our draft horses on a neighbor's property for three winters and you cannot tell we were there. While horses do less environmental damage than a large skidder, the real difference is made by the operator's choice of action. We were able to minimize our impact on the environment because we waited for the ground to freeze before skidding out logs and stopped when the ground softened. My dad tells me that a careful skidder operator can do a nice, clean job, while a careless horse logger can make a real mess. In other words, it's more the logger's approach than the machine he uses that determines the environmental impact.

The small clear-cut area on our land, still in the early stages of recovery twenty years later, is just one small example of the way poor logging practices result in long-lasting damage to woodland areas. The irreversible damage could have been avoided if appropriate logging practices had been used. In order to prevent similar situations in the future, I would set up workshops and seminars to educate landowners about the importance of preserving our woodland environment. When the time came to harvest timber on their land, they would be better equipped to make educated decisions about the future of their property. Perhaps landowners could have access to a list of loggers who have completed courses in sustainable forestry and could visit jobsites to review loggers' work. This would be rewarding for both parties. Landowners would be reassured that their land would be handled properly, and loggers who employed sustainable timber harvesting practices would receive more job offers.

Making these changes will take time and effort, but as people become more educated, they will begin to make the connection between healthy forests, healthy wildlife, and healthy people.