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Learning to Talk the Talk of Forestry

Communication is key. In almost any life circumstance, a human's ability to communicate with others can significantly impact the outcome of an event. Whether that situation is trying to make a connecting flight from Naples to Miami, or establishing a legal contract with a logger before he enters your private property, your ability to communicate your ideas and desires is imperative. When dealing with foresters, loggers, timber brokers, and others you may be find it challenging to convey your exact ownership intentions and objectives. This could severely affect your primary goals in a formal stewardship plan, for instance, or the amount of timber that is extracted from your property. Forestry is a diverse field and includes a tremendous amount of lingo that you likely do not hear or use in everyday conversation. Improving even your basic understanding of common forestry terms and abbreviations should allow you to better communicate with professionals. Here are a few bits of common knowledge that should help you next time you need to talk with someone in the field.

After a professional inspects your forestland, he or she may report back to you that you have mostly "even-aged" or "uneven-aged" stands (management units). By referring to your trees as even-aged, they mean that all or nearly all of the trees in one area are of the same general age. This type of forest arises from disturbances such as fire damage or a clearcut. In this situation, the bigger trees in these stands are not actually older than the smaller trees. Age cannot be determined simply by observing diameter. Trees compete with one another for the duration of their lives, and even trees of the same age

can have different growth rates. An uneven-aged stand is simply a group of different aged trees growing together on the same site. Here age can be estimated by diameter. Some management strategies are more appropriate for one type of forest over another, so be sure you understand the general classification of your forest.

In terms of removing trees, a common confusion is made between "selection cutting" and "selective cutting"—even among people in the profession. You need to know the difference, because selective cutting could put your forest in trouble. Selection cutting is a method of manipulating an uneven-aged stand for regrowth—basically to keep it uneven-aged. Here single trees or very small groups of trees from all age classes are selected and designated for removal. Trees of all diameters and ages should be removed, especially trees of lesser quality for timber or wildlife. This means a well-designed selection cut will include removing mature timber trees in addition to pole-sized trees. Someone enticing you to sell to make a hefty profit probably will not use the term "high-grade," but be sure to demand explicit and detailed information about their proposed plans for your property.

There is a big difference between selection cutting and selective cutting. Selective cutting is generally a form of high-grading, in which a specific diameter is selected and everything above that diameter is removed. This form of high-grading may also be called "diameter limit cutting." Whatever you choose to call it, this forestry malpractice should be avoided. When trees are removed in this manner, little regard is given for the quality, quantity, or distribution of trees that are not removed—the trees of the future forest. Certainly their role is imperative to the health of future forests, so their quality should not be compromised.

If you happen to be managing your forest for wildlife, you have probably heard the term "mast" being used by other forest owners or foresters. Mast refers to the wildlife foods produced by vegetation in your forest. Hard mast includes acorns from oak trees, hickory nuts, beechnuts, and seeds. Soft mast refers to fleshy fruits like berries and cherries from trees like serviceberry, dogwood, sassafras, and black cherry. Depending on your area of New York State, your forest may offer a variety of mast for wildlife. Whether hard or soft mast, both are obviously important for wildlife on your property. Certain wildlife species prefer different mast, and you can manage your trees to produce good supplies of hard, soft, or both to meet wildlife needs.

Timber stand improvement is another common practice in forestry—but it's almost always referred to as simply "TSI." This includes a combination of activities designed to improve the growth and composition of a stand in your forest. A "residual stand" or simply "residuals" are trees remaining after some sort of cutting. Unless you are removing all of the trees in a stand, as for a clearcut, you need to consider the hidden cost of damaging residual trees. For example, suppose you choose to remove only the northern red oak in a stand with both oak and sugar maple. This procedure must be done deliberately and carefully. If you damage the sugar maple while removing the red oak, the value of the remaining maples, the residual maple, can decrease significantly—both to you and to wildlife.

The term "crop tree" is traditionally reserved to describe a particularly desirable tree of with features important to the landowner's objectives. Just like in a vegetable garden, crop trees in your forest are those plants with the potential to grow straight, tall and vigorously. Although the label is commonly applied to trees being grown for timber, a crop tree can be designated for non-timber purposes. These will vary depending on your landowner objectives, especially if you hope to increase habitat and food source opportunities for wildlife.

These are just a few common terms to get you started on your path to learning the forestry language. As in any profession, terms and classifications are meaningful and significantly important to you and the professional. Make it your personal aim to learn a few common forestry terms, as well as how they may be applied, and you will benefit from a safer, more respected relationship with professionals who visit your private forestland.

For additional information on forestland activities that will benefit your objectives, visit Cornell's forestry website at www.ForestConnect.info, contact your local office of Cornell University Cooperative Extension, or join the New York Forest Owners Association through their website at www.nyfoa.org

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Editors note: This article is the second in a 15 part series that is provided through a joint initiative of Cornell University Cooperative Extension and the New York Forest Owners Association as an educational service that helps the citizen of New York enjoy, use, and sustain private rural lands. For more information on these and other topics, please contact your local office of Cornell Cooperative Extension or visit www.ForestConnect.info or www.NYFOA.org