

A GUIDE TO FINDING AND WORKING  
WITH FORESTERS IN MASSACHUSETTS

# Foresters and the Care of Your Land



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# Your Land

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Your land provides many personal benefits, including beauty, privacy, recreation, wildlife viewing, a place to live, and income opportunities. It also provides many essential public benefits, such as clean water and air, climate change mitigation, and wildlife habitat. The majority of land in Massachusetts is forested and privately owned. The woods on your land are a unique and complex living ecosystem that is constantly changing. Stewardship of your woods brings opportunities to enhance and diversify the many benefits they provide. At the same time, your woods face an increasing number of threats, including invasive plants and insects, climate change, and forest conversion that may adversely affect these benefits. As a landowner, you have many choices regarding the care of your land. To make the decisions that best meet your needs,

you must know your options and find local professionals who can help you.

No matter what you do with your land, the key to success is making informed decisions by understanding your options and their likely result. A great first step in this is to call a forester.

Foresters can help you understand your options, explore your opportunities, design stewardship strategies that meet your goals, and let you know what new challenges might be on the horizon. By working with a forester, you can achieve multiple objectives, including managing your woods for timber, wildlife, forest resilience, and carbon. A forester can help enhance the existing positive attributes you enjoy while providing guidance for the future.

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# What Is a Forester?

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Forestry as a profession became established in the United States in the late 1800s in response to concern over the health of our nation's forests. Early foresters focused on learning the characteristics of trees species, how forests grew and changed over time, and various methods and opportunities for applying this ecological knowledge to enhance forest benefits. Since then, foresters have used their evolving understanding of forests to continue to ensure the well-being of our forests for the benefit of both landowners and society.

Foresters are natural resource professionals who work with all types of landowners—including individuals; families; conservation organizations; and local, state, and federal governments—to further the goals they have for their land. Forestry is both a science and an art. Foresters have educational and professional training in a broad range of forest-related topics, including forest ecology, wildlife management, silviculture, climate resilience, geographic information systems (GIS), soils, economics, legal issues, and the growing and harvesting of forest products. Many foresters specialize in topics and skills to fit their clients' needs.

In Massachusetts, foresters must be licensed to engage in the profession of forestry. To receive a Massachusetts forester's license, an applicant must have a forestry degree from an accredited college and several years of professional experience. The Massachusetts Forester Licensing Board reviews all applicants. In addition, to maintain their license, foresters in Massachusetts must participate in at least twenty continuing education credits per year to ensure that they stay up to date on current information in order to help you develop an appropriate plan for your woods. Many

foresters go beyond state-level requirements and are active participants in the Society of American Foresters (SAF)—the largest forestry professional organization—and may become certified foresters through SAF.

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## Foresters versus Loggers

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People often confuse the role of a forester with that of a logger. To understand the difference, consider the functions of an architect and a builder. An architect works with clients to design the kind of home they would like. Based on a client's desires, the architect develops a design that incorporates a host of options. The architect's plan is implemented by a builder, who turns it into a reality. The best blueprint is not worth anything if it is not in the hands of a good builder. And if an architect does a poor job drawing up the blueprints, even the best builder in the world will construct a flawed home.

Foresters can serve as woodland architects, helping landowners develop goals and understand available options for their woods. A forester outlines alternatives based on a landowner's goals for the property—timber management for income, wildlife habitat enhancement, climate change mitigation, or a mix of these benefits—and develops plans to achieve those goals. A logger is in the business of cutting down trees, cutting them into logs, removing the logs from the woods to the roadside, and transporting the logs to the sawmill. The logger is like the builder and may be involved with implementing the forester's plan, or blueprint, if timber harvesting is involved.

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# Types of Foresters

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There are several types of foresters, each with a different role:

## STATE SERVICE FORESTER

When considering options for your woods, you may first want to contact a **service forester** who works for the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation's (DCR) Service Forestry Program. Service foresters will visit your land and provide you with on-the-ground advice for no fee. They provide basic information about your woods, its potential for achieving certain benefits and products, specific programs that can reduce your property taxes, and cost-sharing opportunities for implementing stewardship recommendations.

While enlisting the help of a service forester is a great place to start, when it comes time to have a management plan written or to implement stewardship practices, it is time to engage the services of a private forester. There are two general types of private foresters:

## CONSULTING FORESTER

**Consulting foresters** build on what you and the service forester began together. They can provide answers and further clarifications to help you make sound stewardship decisions and help you implement your goals. They generally work independently or in a small firm and are directly paid by the landowner. Finding a forester that you feel comfortable working

with is essential to being satisfied with the long-term outcome of your woods.

Unlike state service foresters, consulting foresters charge for their services but are well worth the investment. They provide sound advice and knowledge of programs and stewardship options to fit the time and resources you can devote to your land.

## INDUSTRIAL FORESTER

**Industrial foresters** are private foresters employed by a sawmill or another wood products industry. Individual landowners can work with an industrial forester; however, since these professionals represent a particular company, their goals may not align with your goals as a landowner. It is always best to discuss your vision up front to make sure the forester can meet your needs and expectations.

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# Services Provided by Private Foresters

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At some point in time, we all may need a little help. Owning and stewarding your woods is no different. Often the only difference between rewarding, enjoyable woodland ownership and poor, even disastrous decision-making is good information from a trustworthy source. By working with you and for you, foresters can



To find the service forester or a private forester working in your town, visit [masswoods.org/professionals](https://masswoods.org/professionals).

provide advice and assistance to help you understand your options, supply information so that you can make informed decisions, and provide some or all of the following services:

### **PROPERTY LOCATION**

A forester can find and mark property boundaries, use GPS and GIS technology to map boundaries and other special features (forest types, trails, streams, habitat location), and check deed records or liens on the property. It is critical to know where your property boundaries are located before starting any form of active stewardship. In addition, it is important to know the context of the land and understand the role your land is playing within your landscape.

### **FOREST INVENTORIES AND APPRAISALS**

Making an informed decision about your forest necessitates knowing what resources are in your woods. An owner (or potential buyer) of a woodland may need to know the volume and quality of the timber on the property, the types of habitats on the land, or the vulnerability of the forest to possible challenges (e.g., invasive insects). A forester can provide this information by doing a timber cruise or forest inventory with a site analysis. A forest inventory is also the foundation of a forest management plan.

### **FOREST MANAGEMENT PLAN**

A forest management plan is a good way for landowners to define and organize their objectives. The plan describes and maps the property's natural resources and defines the stewardship activities for the length of the plan to meet the landowner's goals. Potential components of a management plan include timber harvesting, improving wildlife habitat, recreational use, managing for carbon and climate resilience, scenic beauty, and protection of water quality.

Management plans are a requirement for participation in the Massachusetts Chapter 61 current use tax programs and other landowner



assistance or cost-share programs. Chapter 61 management plans focus primarily on growing high-quality wood products. Suppose your interests in your woods extend beyond wood products. In that case, a Forest Stewardship Program (FSP) management plan may be a better fit. An FSP management plan includes the same elements of the Chapter 61 management plans and includes a discussion of the broader forest ecosystem, such as wildlife, water, carbon, and recreation. There are typically cost-share options available to help landowners hire a forester to develop an FSP management plan.

**For more information, visit [masswoodlands.org](https://masswoodlands.org) and [mass.gov/dcr/stewardship](https://mass.gov/dcr/stewardship).**

### **CHAPTER 61 CURRENT USE TAX PROGRAMS**

Owning and managing land can be expensive. Chapter 61 current use tax programs in Massachusetts provide qualified landowners with a property tax reduction in return for the public benefits their land provides. The Chapter 61 programs require a commitment to growing an increasing quality and quantity of forest products while allowing for other goals. A management plan is a requirement for enrollment in Chapter 61.

**For more information about the Chapter 61 programs, including a calculator to estimate your property taxes under the programs, visit [masswoods.org/landowner-programs/chapter-61-current-use-tax-programs](https://masswoods.org/landowner-programs/chapter-61-current-use-tax-programs).**

## **COST-SHARE PROGRAMS**

Implementing stewardship strategies often costs money. Since your land provides critical public benefits, the government offers funding to landowners for specific stewardship practices. The Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) offers cost-share funding to complete management recommendations from your forest management plan. Foresters are experts in navigating this system and can help you apply for funding through these programs.

**For more information about cost-share opportunities, visit [www.masswoods.org/landowner-programs](http://www.masswoods.org/landowner-programs).**

## **WILDLIFE HABITAT ENHANCEMENT**

Many landowners rank enhancing wildlife habitat and protecting biodiversity as a priority for their woodlands. Foresters can help you identify what plant and animal species your woods are currently providing for and how altering the forest could benefit a specific group of species. Some foresters have additional training in programs such as Foresters for the Birds, which aims to plan and implement bird-friendly strategies.

## **FOREST CARBON**

Forests provide a natural solution to climate change by removing carbon dioxide—a greenhouse gas—from the atmosphere and using energy from the sun to produce sugar that is stored in plants and trees through photosynthesis, which they need to live and grow. The larger process of capturing and storing carbon dioxide is known as carbon sequestration. Once a tree has used the sugar for growing, the carbon is stored in the wood and leaves. In fact, 50 percent of the weight of a tree is carbon. A forester can help develop strategies to help you achieve your goals of maintaining your forest's capacity to sequester and store carbon.

Carbon markets provide revenue to forest owners by selling carbon credits to interested companies and buyers. However, family forest owners typically own properties too small to access these markets. New approaches are in development to offer family forest owners the opportunity to engage in the carbon market. A forester can help you navigate the legal and technical requirements to participate in these emerging carbon opportunities.

**For more information, visit [masswoods.org/carbon](http://masswoods.org/carbon) and [mass.gov/dcr/climateforestry](http://mass.gov/dcr/climateforestry).**

## **Foresters for the Birds**

Foresters for the Birds is a state-run program through the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) to support woodland owners who would like to learn more about bird habitat on their land and how to enhance it in combination with other management goals. Foresters certified within this program can assess your land and perform a Bird Habitat Assessment. Their recommendations can be used to create a new forest stewardship plan or alter an existing one, making a landowner eligible for a cost-share reimbursement.

**For more information, visit [mass.gov/dcr/birds](http://mass.gov/dcr/birds).**



photo courtesy of Darrie Holmes



photos courtesy of (left) MWI/FIT, (right) DCR

## INVASIVE PLANTS AND INSECTS

Invasive plants, pests, and pathogens are all detrimental to your forest's overall health. Having a forester walk your land with you is an important tool to learn what invasives might exist on your property. If any are present, your forester can recommend a strategy to combat these problems.

## FOREST RESILIENCY

As discussed, our forests face many challenges. A forester can provide recommendations for increasing forest resiliency to these challenges by increasing the diversity of your forest. Resilient forests can help ensure the continued production of desirable forest benefits.

For more information, visit [masswoods.org/resiliency](https://masswoods.org/resiliency) and [mass.gov/dcr/climateforestry](https://mass.gov/dcr/climateforestry).

## TIMBER SALES

Most landowners value their woods for recreation, wildlife, and the privacy that they provide. However, at some point you may consider conducting a timber harvest to meet your management goals, or you may be contacted directly by a timber buyer, logger, or forester about "selling your trees." Timber harvesting requires expertise—including knowledge of current price information and familiarity with markets, jargon, contracts, and environmental regulations that apply to the

operation—that most landowners do not have. You may find yourself interacting with a state service forester when selling timber. Instead of offering advice, these foresters make sure that you follow basic rules to protect soil and water quality; however, they are not in charge of the timber harvest. Ignorance of these issues can lead to serious and expensive mistakes. Timber sales involve thousands of dollars. What other decision in your life worth thousands of dollars would you make without doing your homework?

Landowners can avoid these pitfalls by retaining a private forester and benefiting from professional advice. Foresters identify which trees should be harvested to accomplish the landowner's objectives. They determine how much volume will be removed and how much value or income will be received. They can also draft a contract and supervise the harvest to meet the landowner's goals, protect the landowner's interests, and ensure compliance with environmental regulations.

Private foresters differ in their approach to selling your timber. An industrial forester will usually purchase standing timber without charging direct fees. If generating income through a timber harvest is your primary objective, consulting a forester will help you maximize revenue in both the short and the long term. A consulting forester will typically sell timber in one of two ways. If the timber is of good quality, a consulting forester will often sell it on



## Selling Timber?

Several points to remember when selling timber:

- Always start with the involvement of a forester.
- Never sell timber without a written contract.
- Never reach an agreement that results in an unsupervised harvest.

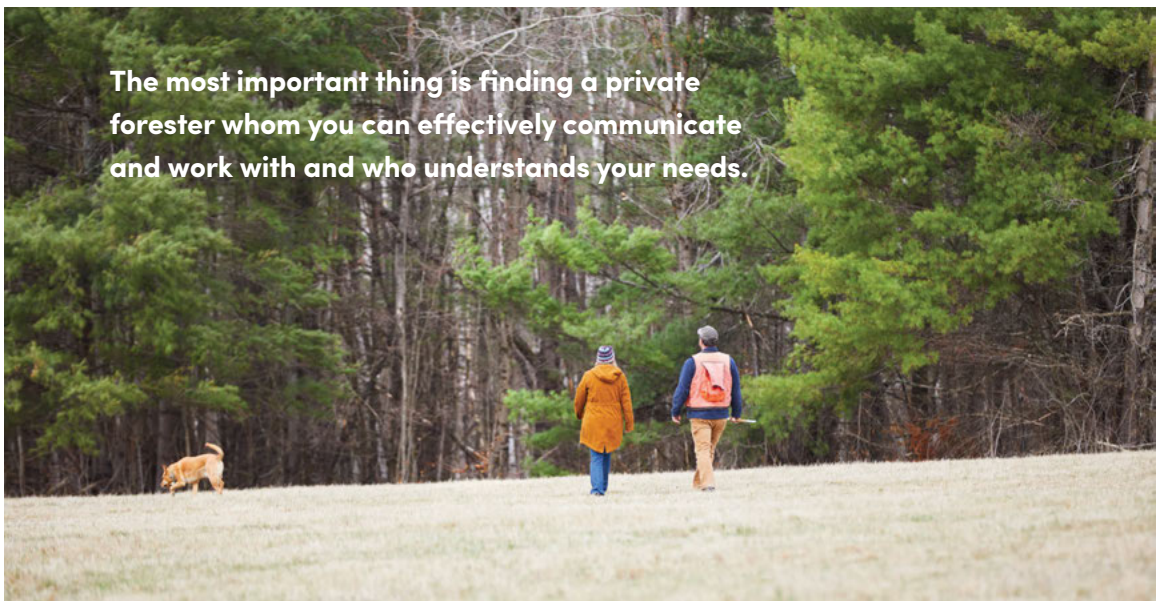
a competitive basis to several different loggers or sawmills to determine the best price. If it is of low quality, a consulting forester will often negotiate the selling price on your behalf with a responsible logger or sawmill. While consulting foresters charge a fee for their services, such as a percentage of the sale or an hourly rate, their services are well worth the money. **Research has shown that landowners make more money in a timber sale by relying on the expertise of a competent consulting forester than by selling timber on their own.**

The supervision provided by a competent private forester during the timber sale ensures that the woods are left in excellent condition, with the landowner's concerns for aesthetics and wildlife habitat taken into consideration, and that the timber sale conforms to environmental regulations.

### TIMBER STAND IMPROVEMENT

Timber stand improvement (TSI) may include any combination of treatments designed to improve the growth and quality of timber. Thinning constitutes most of the TSI work performed in New England forests. However, TSI work may also include pruning and planting.

The most important thing is finding a private forester whom you can effectively communicate and work with and who understands your needs.







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# Finding a Private Forester

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Being a good steward of your property is a lifetime endeavor with serious legal, financial, and environmental implications. Choosing a private forester to assist you is an important process. The most important thing is finding a private forester whom you can effectively communicate and work with and who understands your needs. Foresters have different skills and interests; find one with the skills and talents that match your goals. Remember: It is your property. You must determine your goals and which strategy(ies) will provide you with your desired result.

## Step 1.

Start by contacting your state service forester, who can make a free first visit and discuss your forest management options.

To find the state service forester working in your town, visit [masswoods.org/professionals](https://masswoods.org/professionals).

## Step 2.

Shop around when choosing a private forester to work with, and request opinions from multiple foresters. Talk to friends and neighbors to find out who they work with. Like many other professions, there are a wide variety of capabilities and price structures. Also, ask foresters for references of satisfied clients, and ask if you can visit a prior job site. As in many aspects of life, there are good and bad consulting foresters, industrial foresters, and loggers. In all cases, it pays to get multiple opinions, talk to friends, and check references. Finding a competent forester with whom you can communicate well is essential to your success in stewarding your woods.

To find a private forester working in your town, visit [masswoods.org/professionals](https://masswoods.org/professionals).

## Step 3.

Before fully committing to work with a consulting forester, make sure you have the necessary details. Ask how the forester would like to be paid (per diem or per job), and always have the payment method stated in the service contract. (A service contract states what services the forester will be providing and how the forester will be paid.) There are several ways that consulting foresters charge for their services to set up and supervise a timber sale. Their fees can be based on a percentage of the revenue generated, on the volume of timber marked, on the hours of service, or on some other method. Fees can also be based on the number of acres or set by the mill purchasing the lumber.

## Step 4.

Review the written work order or contract to make sure you feel comfortable with the plan you and your forester have created.



**A forester who knows your land, its ecological value, and your goals can help you find conservation organizations that share similar values.**

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## The Future of Your Land

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Landowners face decisions about more than the management of their land. Escalating real estate values make annual property taxes and potential inheritance taxes a serious financial burden. Landowners often want to keep their land wooded, pass it on to their heirs, or make sure it stays natural, but typically they are not fully aware of their alternatives and options.

Conservation restrictions are one tool that extinguishes all or some of the development rights, thereby ensuring that the land will remain wooded into the future. These development rights can be sold or gifted to a land trust, conservation organization, town, or state conservation agency. Conservation restrictions can be written to allow woodland management and other agricultural uses.

With the development rights on some or all of a property removed, the property's assessed value lowers, thus reducing property and inheritance taxes. The property can still be privately owned and sold or passed on in an estate, and landowners can retain rights to steward the land, hunt, and exclude the public.

Landowners interested in conserving their land should work with a conservation organization whose mission is compatible with their objectives and the conservation value of the land.

**To find a land trust or state conservation agency working in your town, visit [masswoods.org/professionals](https://masswoods.org/professionals).**

A forester who knows your land, its ecological value, and your goals can help you find conservation organizations that share similar values. Your forester can also help facilitate conservation projects by providing information and maps about your land's natural resources.

# Resources

## UMass Extension—Forest Conservation Program

[masswoods.org](https://masswoods.org)

- Find the DCR service forester, private foresters, and land trusts in your town
- Find information on selling timber, including the Forest Cutting Practices Act and the common elements of a contract
- Learn about reducing your property taxes through the Chapter 61 programs
- Learn about landowner assistance programs
- Find information on land protection tools such as conservation restrictions
- Find educational publications, including the following:
  - Forest Carbon: An Essential Natural Solution for Climate Change: [masswoods.org/carbon](https://masswoods.org/carbon)
  - Increasing Forest Resiliency for an Uncertain Future: [masswoods.org/resiliency](https://masswoods.org/resiliency)
  - Protecting Your Legacy: A Massachusetts Landowner’s Guide to Conservation-Based Estate Planning: [masswoods.org/sites/masswoods.org/files/pdf-doc-ppt/Protecting-Your-Legacy.pdf](https://masswoods.org/sites/masswoods.org/files/pdf-doc-ppt/Protecting-Your-Legacy.pdf)

## MA Department of Conservation and Recreation’s Service Forestry Program

[mass.gov/dcr/service-forestry](https://mass.gov/dcr/service-forestry)

- Find landowner guides developed by MA DCR:
  - Caring for Your Woods: A Starting Point: [mass.gov/doc/caring-for-your-woods-a-starting-point-private-lands-forestry/download](https://mass.gov/doc/caring-for-your-woods-a-starting-point-private-lands-forestry/download)
  - Caring for Your Woods: Setting Goals: [mass.gov/doc/caring-for-your-woods-setting-goals/download](https://mass.gov/doc/caring-for-your-woods-setting-goals/download)
  - Caring for Your Woods: Working with Nature: [mass.gov/doc/caring-for-your-woods-working-with-nature-private-lands-forestry/download](https://mass.gov/doc/caring-for-your-woods-working-with-nature-private-lands-forestry/download)
  - Caring for Your Woods: A Valuable Resource: [mass.gov/doc/caring-for-your-woods-a-valuable-resource-private-lands-forestry/download](https://mass.gov/doc/caring-for-your-woods-a-valuable-resource-private-lands-forestry/download)
- Learn more about Foresters for the Birds: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/ba7bd9e3ad2a49f49b0671e22486edd1>
- Learn more about managing forests for carbon benefits: [mass.gov/info-details/managing-our-forests-for-carbon-benefits](https://mass.gov/info-details/managing-our-forests-for-carbon-benefits)

## Massachusetts Woodlands Institute

[masswoodlands.org](https://masswoodlands.org)

- Find information about the Forest Stewardship Program, including cost-share information and how to enroll.
- Learn more about the Woodlands for Wildlife Program.
- Find relevant forest-owner events in your area.

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