

POSITION STATEMENT
NEW YORK FOREST OWNERS ASSOCIATION

High-Grading and Diameter-Limit Cutting

The Situation

High-grading is timber harvesting that removes high value timber and leaves the low value, decayed, or poorly formed trees. Diameter-limit cutting is often like high-grading. It removes all the valuable trees greater than some specified diameter from a woodlot. High-grading and diameter-limit cutting both maximize short term revenue without consideration for future productivity and at the expense of tree and forest resilience.

Most woodlots in New York State have a diverse mix of trees – different species, different sizes, and different conditions of health and form. The valuable trees for timber are of a commercially desired species and basically sound. Other trees may be useful for firewood and may contribute to wildlife habitat and other forest values but have little or no sale value. Some woodlots have trees of different ages (uneven-aged) while others may have trees of a common age (even-aged). Both kinds of woodlots often have trees of several different sizes. In uneven-aged stands, the small trees are young. They usually grow well when released by partial stand cutting that releases trees in all size classes. In even-aged woodlots, the small and large trees have similar ages. The small trees grew poorly in the past and do not respond well when released from competition. If left after a diameter-limit cutting, these small trees continue to grow slowly, with little improvement in quality. Cutting the big trees may not help the small ones to grow better. A knowledgeable forester can recognize if a woodlot is even- or uneven-aged and judge the growth potential of the small trees in it.

Sustainable forest management, the opposite of these exploitive practices, means leaving some valuable trees after a timber harvest, and removing at least some low value trees during cutting. These remaining valuable trees are an investment in the future productivity of the woodlot and become the parents of future trees as well. Furthermore, species diversity is maintained. A high-graded woodlot may appear green and healthy from a distance, but the growth of useful timber is only a fraction of the potential and it may be a more fragile ecosystem.

Our Position

- 1) Forests should be sustainably managed for the long term to maintain the wide array of benefits they can produce. High-grading and diameter-limit cutting impair long term timber productivity and can, in some cases, diminish many other important future forest benefits.
- 2) To avoid high-grading and diameter-limit cutting, a landowner should work with a forester who is supportive of maintaining the woodlot in a condition that will continue to provide many benefits for the future.

New York Forests

The woods, forests, and open spaces across New York State that cover almost 65 percent of the land in the State (19 million acres). Over 200,000 private owners hold 75 percent of New York's forests. An additional 500,000 private owners have very small patches of woods ranging in size from 1 to 10

acres. All areas contribute greatly to the economy and healthy environment that all New Yorkers enjoy and provide essential needs: wood products, food supplies, wildlife habitat, watershed retention values, carbon sequestration, and others. The forests and woods across New York State are also essential to creating a renewable carbon-neutral energy supply through biofuel production, and a welcome natural area free from the hustle and bustle of urban living. The future of our woods and forests rests with the private owners and the thousands of other people and firms that sustainably help to manage the forests of New York and bring the many forest values to all New Yorkers. New York forests produce \$10 billion of wood products (for the year 2016), provide safe water supply for 16 million people, support an outdoor recreation economy of \$3.8 billion, contain essential wildlife habitat, biodiversity and vital oxygen-producing and carbon sink areas to ameliorate climate change.

The New York Forest Owners Association

The New York Forest Owners Association (NYFOA) promotes sustainable forestry practices and improved stewardship on privately owned woodlands in New York State. Through local chapter and statewide activities such as woods walks and tours, the bi-monthly New York Forest Owner magazine, and affiliation with other organizations with similar objectives, NYFOA helps woodland owners to achieve their management objectives for their properties and encourages the appreciation of the qualities and importance of New York's forests.

Original Position Statement Adopted February 28, 2009

Revised Position Statement Adopted April 6, 2020