



Timbering in the Upper Delaware

Timbering practices can adversely impact the water quality of streams and rivers if not managed properly. Every aspect of nature is interrelated. Trees not only provide useful lumber and other wood products for today's modern society, but more importantly they are a necessity to the surrounding ecosystem. Forests provide food and cover to wildlife, purify waters, improve air quality, and help prevent soil erosion.

The Upper Delaware River area has vast areas of forested land which must be managed correctly to ensure that both industrial society and environment can both benefit.

Timber harvesting in some areas over the last ten years has increased as much as 150%. In PA, the forest industry produces more than 1 billion feet of hardwood lumber a year and 780,000 tons of paper. The PA and NY economies are literally endangering the forests. Loss of forested uplands can have a devastating effect on the water quality of the Delaware River, causing problems for aquatic life, wildlife and vegetation.

Who is doing the Lumbering?

Today, the major loss of forestland in the Upper Delaware is caused by construction activities; it is not the result of harvesting.

In NY state, the Forest Reserve said only 5-15% of the forestland is state owned, whereas 85% is privately owned. Of the small percentage of land that the state of NY owns there is 43,000 acres of land the Forest Reserve can not harvest and only 540 acres a year they try to harvest.

In PA, 78% of the forestland is privately owned, and 22% is public forestland. A fraction of what is available to harvest in PA is being harvested. PA is also one of the only states that does not have a forestry tax law, where the private landowners get a tax break for forestland. Therefore, many look forward to timbering for an economic boost. But the majority of private landowners do not know the right way to manage their forestlands.

While, in the Upper Delaware there are statewide protection laws for forestlands owned by private landowners, the regulations vary from township to township.

What Should be Protected?

Within the wilderness areas of publicly owned forestland the wilderness area that should be protected is claimed by the size-maximum remoteness, and minimum intensity of human recreational uses. There is also a concern for the the much publicly debated issue of first growth forests not being lumbered for their historic and biological importance in the forest ecosystem. This first growth forest is protected in the state reserves but are still threatened by being adjacent to an area which is intensive use in classification.

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Another threat is that the forests may be privately owned. People have the misconception of the appearance of first growth as large massive trees with large amounts of foliage. Many old growth forest though are smaller stands that are twisted and odd.

A landowner more importantly has to realize that most riparian zones are located on private property. Construction or lumbering too close to determined buffer zones will negatively affect the water quality of the rivers, streams, and lakes in the surrounding area. The rule of thumb for tree buffers is the higher the slope, the wider the buffer. Within 15 feet tree removal should not be permitted. Also there should be no excess use of fertilizer, pesticides, vehicular or excessive pedestrian traffic, and no removal or disturbance of vegetation and litter.

Since regulations vary from township to township, as stated earlier, here is an example of some regulations required in a Model Ordinance:

1. Existing buffers should be maintained, and reforestation required if none exists.
2. Should extend 75 ft. buffer; width determined by various factors.
3. Recreation should not impact natural features.
4. Measures should be taken if construction activity occurs- in conjunction with existing land management systems.
5. No new developments or construction activity can occur, unless offset by accompanying corridor improvements.
6. Storage of materials which could degrade or pollute waterways or soil is not authorized.

Reasons for Tree Buffers

1. Roots metabolize nitrogen and phosphorus from soil. Excessive amounts can cause algae blooms which deplete oxygen levels, and reduce light penetration.
2. Roots transform ammonia and other toxic substance to nontoxic substances.
3. Roots prevent soil erosion, therefore reducing sedimentation in the river. Sedimentation blocks the sunlight, thus affecting growth of aquatic plants, interfering with fish and aquatic insects feeding and reproduction.
4. Trees provide shading of the river which helps regulate water temperatures which is essential for fish populations.
5. Roots filter out pesticides, and other nonpoint source pollution.

What Private Landowners can do?

Because so much of the forestland in the Upper Delaware is privately owned, the responsibility for good stewardship in this section of the watershed is on the private landowners.

Both construction and lumbering on your property unless done properly can cause many harmful effects on the surrounding environment. People first have to realize the acres of land they own is home to many other important species besides themselves. Forests are necessary to maintain good air, soil, and water quality. Besides maintaining at least a 15 foot buffer zone if located on a river or stream, other good stewardship practices are necessary to maintain a forest in good health.

Individuals can find assistance through many programs. To receive information on cost-assistance an individual can contact the State Bureau of Forestry or Conservation Service. There is also a National Tree Farm Program in operation in all states, and the Stewardship Incentive Program which can aid a person in implementing good stewardship practices.