



View from logger Mike and Joyce Babits' front porch in Wardsboro: "Sage Pasture".

Photo by Robbo Holleran

2017: Forest Update

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Providing a complete forest management service since 1982

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Year in Review 2017

This year, we celebrate 35 years in business, and I thank you all for your support. Your business supports me and my family, along with my assistant Ben Vicere and his family, and our part-time fellow, Nick Haskell. We are all licensed to practice forestry, which is new in Vermont this year. It has been a tough year with declining pulp markets (see the Market Report) but we have had over 30 successful projects, with a high percent of low-grade removed from the forest. We take some pride in that. I was honored (along with Steve Hardy) with the Forestry Leadership award from the Vermont Forest Products Association.

Forestry is described as both science and art. Tree biology, forest ecology, soils, wildlife, insects and diseases are part of the science. The art involves the palette of the landscape, natural variations even within a stand, discerning and creating the desired “look”, and dealing with all the people involved. The economics add another feature, which seems like both art and science.

I remember the day that forestry jumped out at me, as a career. I played in the woods, hunting, fishing and camping, and was enrolled at University of Maine at Orono as a Wildlife Major. I was in my second year in college, and I began to see the limitations of a wildlife degree. One forestry field trip made all the difference.

We rode a bus into the UMO forest to a couple of sites of young, post-clearcut forest. The second site, 15 years older, showed a dramatic change: what the first site could look like with intensive management. Instead of the “control” blocks of dense mixed regeneration dominated by poplar and red maple, we found neat blocks of white pine, hardwoods, and spruce which had been released from the competition and showed vigorous growth. The crop trees had been hiding in the thicket. Walking back, the initial “control” block was a disappointment. So much lost opportunity. Worse yet, there were a million acres of this! Someone had to do this. It might as well be me. So I changed my major to forestry.

We manage your forests for a wide range of ecological and social benefits. I am still very interested in wildlife, as are my employees, and many of you have that as a primary goal. We have learned a lot about food plots and deer management this year. We also manage for wood products, clean water and recreation areas, access and land improvements, and whatever your goals are.

A large part of our forestry service is planning and controlling your timber harvests, to achieve these goals, also acting as your agent in marketing forest products. We also provide other services, including layout and construction of roads, bridges and trails. We provide environmental compliance and expert witness services. We will continue to control invasive weeds, do pre-commercial thinning in immature stands, plant trees and re-mark boundaries. I hope that you will consider me as your information source for all aspects of your forestland. Call me if you need lumber or firewood.

We can calculate a timber basis for Capital Gains taxation, and assist with longer term planning than the normal ten-year plans, including some guidance on how to get your land to the next generation. We deal with all aspects of Current Use, including some very complicated situations involving withdrawals, transfers, and dividing among families.

We work with great contractors and are proud to be associated with them. Matching the right crew to your project is one key to success. The size of the job, location, terrain, type of silviculture, species and product mix – especially the proportion of low-grade wood – are best matched to particular systems and often, individual contractors. Harvesting trees is not just about making lumber. Wood is the best raw material, from an environmental standpoint: renewable, recyclable, biodegradable, usually organically grown, and the growing forest provide all sorts of ecological services.

There are many reasons to harvest, including recovering income from your forest investment:

- *Reduce crowding to improve health and growth
- *Change species composition
- *Improve access with roads and trails
- *Increase diversity of species and forest structure
- *Increase the future value of the forest
- *Create new growth for the future or wildlife food
- *Improve wildlife habitat and nut production
- *Enhance local economic activity
- *Maintain your “Current Use” status

We hope you find our newsletter and website educational and entertaining.

**I am blessed to be a forester.
Forestry is a verb.**

Our Website can be found at <https://robboholleranforester.org>

We started a website a few years ago and have built the content fairly well. Many clients have enjoyed this and benefitted by the information. There are new articles added every few months to the 'Forestry 201+' page.

I enjoy writing, but a forestry book for landowners does not make sense. The website is more fun and easier for you to find and use. On that note, I have been writing a novel, but it is really not about forestry. I hope to publish this spring. I am thinking of writing a college level textbook for a class on becoming a consulting forester. And our website now includes a link to the new **Silvicultural Guide for Northern Hardwoods**, which I helped revise.

"**Forestry 101**" includes some important basics for all woodland owners: **The Tree Cookie Story** is foundational to understand how trees in forests survive and grow. **Vermont's Forest History** looks at the long term changes in agriculture and forestry that give us the forests we have today. "**The day I became a forester**" is a personal essay on the beginning of my vision for forestry.

"**Forestry 201+**" has the bulk of the articles. I have been writing for "**Sawmill and Woodlot Magazine**", and I recommend this publication especially for the owners who work their land personally. Many of these articles are found in their .pdf format in this section, with pictures. There several series with a wide range of issues.

"**It's not all about the money**" is a fascinating look at the balance of financial and other goals in land management, and understanding the costs involved with various choices. I have finally populated the Current Use sections with link to state sites in VT, NH, MA and NY.

There are now articles on **Food Plots, Forest Succession, Invasive Weeds, Forest Rehabilitation, Soils**, and a new series coming on **Philosophy and Goals**.

I still like sending the newsletter, since it goes into your hand, and reminds you of some issues of long-term stewardship. So this four-page newsletter is your invitation to over a hundred pages of material on the web. I have been able to use it as envisioned: I can send you to articles, many with photos, to give greater explanation. For example, if we are between recommendations for a shelterwood or group selection method in one forest stand, it is far easier for you to make an informed choice with these articles and pictures.

I hope to add more articles and links so that you can use this for your forest information source.

Market update:

The forest products marketplace is a fascinating example of mostly-free market economics. Supply and demand oscillate with all sorts of factors, and prices are cyclical. Consumer tastes change for species like oak, ash and maple in their furniture and cabinets. New technologies create substitutes like plasticized wood decking material and vinyl siding, but also pellets and biomass chips for wood burning. International trade makes it possible to buy paper from Brazil, and to send lumber to China, that might come back to Vermont as bookshelves.

In 35 years, I have seen maple overtake oak as our "premium hardwood", though ash, cherry and birch have had market peaks also. We used to harvest three loads of pulp to a load of logs as an "improvement cut", and have recently done 30 loads of pulp and chips to a load of logs. Current changes should be no surprise, but they hit us pretty hard.

Five pulp mills in central Maine have closed in the last few years. Maine has struggled with old mills that have not been invested into, high costs for labor, electricity, and wood. The price of paper products is determined globally, but the costs depend on local conditions, with US demand dropping. Remaining mills now have more local wood available and don't really need ours. Lower pulp prices are crippling to the entire land-management industry. I know loggers who are downsizing, or getting out of it entirely.

I have made my career out of improvement cutting. As many of you know, our forests are mostly 'pasture origin', with a mix-and-match of good and bad trees. Extractive logging over the past century has left us with many degraded stands, overcrowding, or mature stands in need of regeneration cutting. Harvesting of a high percent of low-grade material is the best way to restore these to productivity. High pulp prices have allowed us to make great progress, but these changes force us to change our strategy. We will need to be more tuned to keeping our good loggers profitable during this time, while still accomplishing great forestry. On the good-news side, several pulp mills are investing in improvements, and sawlog prices are generally good for most species. I have always said that you make you timber dollars from the high-grade wood.

humor *yu' mah* (n) *downeast.* Rural stories tendin' toward wicked funny.

An unemployed logger decided to open a medical clinic. He put a sign outside the new office: "A cure for your ailment guaranteed at \$500; we'll pay you \$1,000 if we fail."

A Doctor thinks this is a good opportunity to earn \$1,000 and goes to the clinic.

Doctor: "I have lost my sense of taste."

Logger: "Nurse, please bring the medicine from the red can in my truck and put 3 drops in the patient's mouth."

Doctor: "This is Gasoline!"

Logger: "Congratulations! You've got your taste back. That will be \$500."

The Doctor gets annoyed and goes back after a couple of days later to recover his money.

Doctor: "I have lost my memory, I cannot remember anything."

Logger: "Nurse, please bring the medicine from the red can and put 3 drops in the patient's mouth."

Doctor: "But that is Gasoline!"

Logger: "Congratulations! You've got your memory back. That will be \$500."

The Doctor leaves angrily and comes back after several days, more determined than ever to make his money back.

Doctor: "My eyesight has become weak."

Logger: "Well, I don't have any medicine for this. Take this \$1,000," passing the doctor ten \$10 bills.

Doctor: "But this is only \$100..."

Logger: "Congratulations! You've got your vision back! That will be \$500."

Calvin Coolidge:

"Nothing in this world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not: nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not: the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent."

"We do not need more intellectual power, we need more spiritual power. We do not need more of the things that are seen, we need more of the things that are unseen."

The Half-Wit

A man owned a small farm in Vermont. The Vermont State Wage & Hour Department claimed he was not paying proper wages to his help and sent an agent out to interview him.

"I need a list of your employees and how much you pay them," demanded the agent.

"Well," replied the farmer, "there's my farm hand who's been with me for 3 years. I pay him \$200 a week plus room and board. The cook has been here for 18 months, and I pay her \$150 per week plus room and board. Then there's the half-wit who works about 18 hours every day and does about 90% of all the work around here. He makes about \$10 per week, pays his own room and board, and I buy him a bottle of bourbon every Saturday night. He also sleeps with my wife occasionally."

"That's the guy I want to talk to - the half-wit," says the agent.

"That would be me," replied the farmer.

When the agent asked his wife, she said he graduated 5th in his class. Out of six.

F: "Hey, buddy! Does this road go to Montpelier?"

V: "Nope. Stays right here."

F: "No, I mean can I take this road to Montpelier?"

V: "Don't think you can get it in your car."

F: "Well, if I drive down this road, will I get to Montpelier?"

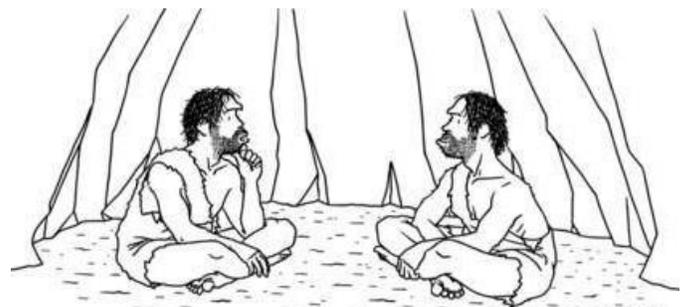
V: "Don't know how good a driver you are."

F: "You don't know anything, do you?"

V: "I know I ain't lost."

F: "There's not much between you and an idiot, is there?"

V: "Just this yard and that fence."



"Something's just not right—our air is clean, our water is pure, we all get plenty of exercise, everything we eat is organic and free-range, and yet nobody lives past thirty."

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