

CLASSIFYING YOUR HARDWOOD TIMBER

WHEN PLANNING A PARTIAL HARVEST

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As hardwood forests develop, growth progresses through various stages. In a broad sense, this includes: stand initialization, stand development, and stand maturity. Timber harvesting often begins during the middle (stand development) stage, for three reasons: 1) timber is large enough to interest the wood industry, 2) timber has value, and 3) timber hasn't gone 'too far' and begun losing value.

Timber harvesting typically occurs either to thin premature stands (often called a partial harvest) or to regenerate mature stands (usually called a clearcut harvest). This article focuses on partial harvesting, specifically how to determine which timber to liquidate and which to hold for the future.

Sometime ago Putnam et al. (1960) developed four 'classes' of growing stock to aid foresters and landowners with the decision of identifying timber either for harvest, or for retention. These timber classes were developed with timber production as the primary goal, although the categories could be modified to suit wildlife, aesthetic, or other goals.

Some of the classes that follow use the phrase 'growing stock.' Think of growing stock as timber found in the forest that is not to be harvested at the moment, but is being held over either for future harvest, or to protect and enhance other timber that is intended for future harvest.

The process of classifying hardwood timber for partial cutting is involved, and landowners should embrace professional foresters for assistance. The consequences of handling partial cutting incorrectly are lasting.



PREFERRED GROWING STOCK:

Timber that is not yet chosen for harvest, but has very good potential for future harvest. Such trees are healthy and vigorous, are of desirable species with good form and grade, and have strong crown position (receiving adequate sunlight).

RESERVE GROWING STOCK:

Includes timber that is not to be harvested right now, is generally in good condition, but for various reasons does not meet landowner objectives. These trees may have a lower market value due to species or quality. Their retention is needed to maintain proper stocking for continued development of the preferred growing stock.



CUTTING STOCK:

Timber that is ready for harvest. Such trees are not likely to increase in value and may even decline if retained for future harvest. Meadow and Goelz (1999) summarize cutting stock as trees that “. . . may be in poor condition, may pose a significant risk of mortality or degrade in merchantability, or may be of a species that is unsuitable for the site or for management objectives. This class includes trees that are over-mature, damaged, diseased, poorly formed, or otherwise undesirable. They are likely to die or to suffer significant decay or degrade in the near future and are, therefore, expected to decrease in value if left after partial cutting.”

CULL STOCK:

Timber that has declined to the point that it cannot meet management goals. Sound cull stock can have some usable wood, and therefore may be harvested for lower value wood products. Unsound culls have no value for wood production. When cull stock cannot be salvaged, often the decision is either to deaden it (in a timber stand improvement project) or, if not too abundant, retain it for wildlife benefit. ♣

