

# Timber harvesting, sale at West Point

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The first thing you hear is a rumble in the distance as you drive down Range Road 22. As the noise grows louder, you can see the forest open up and the sounds become more distinct — a skidder engine under load, the roar of chainsaws, the hum of log cranes, and the crash of a mature tree falling to the forest floor.

When you reach the landing, you see and smell the result of previous effort — the log pile, 20 feet tall and 50 feet long on both sides of the road. The crane is processing the 60-foot logs while the picker truck is loading before heading back to the mill.

A skidder pulls up and the operator gets out, walks to the chokers, releases the logs, gives you a wave, climbs back into the machine and returns to the woods for another hitch. You park the truck and head in to see the progress the crew is making.

This is a scene on the Reservation lands of West Point as the Natural Resources Branch (NRB) is conducting a 57-acre timber sale.

West Point has a long history of managing the forestland we own. Since 1955, West Point has harvested 7.3 million board feet across 4,900 acres.

For perspective, that means harvesting at West Point has created enough lumber for nearly 300 homes at 2,000-square feet in size. The West Point Forestry Program was instrumental in the origin of the Army Forestry Program.

**Origins and Development of the Army Forestry Program:** During World War I, U.S. forces in Europe required vast quantities of wood products to support the war effort. To fill this need, American Foresters were sent to Europe to aid in local procurement of wood products.

Acknowledging the need for a domestic supply, West Point approached the U.S. Forest Service in 1918 for assistance in managing their forestland. From this outreach, the first Army Forest Management Plan was written. As the Army recognized the success of the forest management program at West Point, and its compatibility with military training, other installations began to follow suit.

The advent of World War II increased demand for forest products and large supplies of U.S. timber were assembled for shipment to Europe. For various reasons, there was an excess of timber, which was sold as surplus property.

The amount and volume of surplus lumber demonstrated that significant supplies of timber existed on U.S. military lands.

Over time the structure and scope of the program evolved. Today, over \$14.5 million is generated annually in revenue from timber sales across the Army. Revenue from forestry operations is consolidated in a reimbursable account to be used in support of forest management.

**The Why Behind Timber Harvests:** There are various reasons to conduct a timber



A view of the landing from the 2021 Eastern Burke Harvest at West Point.

harvest depending on landowner objectives. At U.S. Army Garrison West Point, the objectives are to maintain and encourage a diverse, resilient, ecologically robust and productive forestland that supports military training.

The forestland at West Point can generally be described as even-aged stands of 100-plus-year-old hardwoods. A structure of this kind means the forest is increasing in vulnerability to forest pests and diseases such as gypsy moth and Armillaria root rot.

A major mortality event from these or other sources would render the land unusable. To prevent this, we conduct regular harvests to provide a diversity of age-classes. This increases resiliency of the ecosystem and its ability to support training in the long term.

In the short term, upon completion, timber sale areas are used extensively during training as the residual structure of the forest provides unique opportunities — skid trails provide ease of access, log landings provide bivouac sites and parking areas, and slash provides cover and concealment.

Wildlife benefits of harvesting vary but in general include an increase in forage base and coarse woody debris, the creation of nesting,

perch and den sites, and an increase in young forest on the landscape.

**Current Project:** As explained above, this project supports forest ecology, wildlife and military training. Site selection was driven by stand composition and proximity of areas.

These stands contain a high density of mature to over-mature stems with pockets of regeneration from areas harvested in 2005. The prescription for the sale area entails a mixture of intermediate and regenerative harvests.

Intermediate harvests involve thinning the forest to promote the growth, development and resiliency of residual stems. A regenerative harvest involves the removal of existing trees to provide light, nutrients and space for new trees to grow.

During the harvest, a mixture of saw logs and pallet wood will be removed. Species include oak, maple, tulip poplar, birch, hickory and beech.

Saw logs are sent to the purchasing mill, Greene Lumber, of Davenport, New York.

Pallet wood is sent to Canada. Unsaleable products are left to decompose in the forest, providing soil stabilization and nutrients to the

future forest. The crew completing the work contains four men, two skidders and a yard crane.

Trees are felled via chainsaw, bucked and cut to total merchantable length. The logs are then skidded to the landing where they are cut to product length and stacked for pick-up by trucks.

**Looking Forward:** Once logging operations are complete, the Natural Resources Branch will monitor and treat the site to ensure project success.

Efforts by the West Point NRB include seeding log landings, removing unacceptable growing stock, treating invasive species and quantifying regeneration.

The regeneration harvests will enter in a stage of stand initiation for 10-20 years during which time saplings will grow and develop, providing the foundation for the next forest. Immediately after the harvest, the land is open to military training.

As this project comes to a close, the NRB staff is working on planning for the next harvest — to support the forest, the ecosystem and the Corps of Cadets.