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The profitability of forestry is often called into question. My friend, Paul Bader, when speaking with landowners used to say “There is a lot of money in forestry,” and then he would derisively chuckle and say “Yeah right.” But then we would talk with the landowner about the monetary benefits of timber harvesting, not only for the landowner but through the whole production process. When we do that, the overall economic picture of forestry stands out better than most resource uses. A quick overview of the process proves the point.

First, we start with the trees. The process of photosynthesis used by trees is a very efficient use of sunlight, water, and carbon dioxide. The landowner provides very few inputs with natural regeneration - except maybe a few extra trees planted to ensure preferred regeneration. One-time inputs are needed in artificial regeneration of old fields – trees, herbicides for grass competition, and some type of deer abatement. Once the trees have beaten out their vegetative competition and grown past the point of animal damage they are self-sufficient. The trees benefit if they are released from competition around 15-20 years old. If the trees are growing on flat ground this treatment can be done at a net economic gain to the landowner, otherwise this can also be a cost.

Now we can start the economic engine. The landowners are the first to receive money, and though their portion of the take is small, they do make money over a rotation of a timber stand with the aforementioned minimal inputs. The financial dividends of owning forested land will be yielded every 15-20 years if proper forestry science is employed. Hopefully, the landowner chooses to work with a forester making resource sustainability the highest priority. Forester jobs are professional positions and provide livable salaries. Next up in the production line are the loggers who get paid for cutting trees down and skidding them to a landing. The logger’s take is normally also small, like the landowner’s, and their work is highly dangerous. Up next is a trucker who will load and drive the logs to a sawmill and unload them there. After that we have a highly skilled sawyer who needs to maximize grade and yield of the logs while sawing. Next in line is a board grader whose keen eye can financially make or break a sawmill. Once lumber is graded it will sometimes be shipped to a kiln where it can be properly dried. Another trucker in between these locations is needed. The kiln operator better be well paid and professional otherwise he or she could ruin product that has already has a lot of money invested in it. The dried lumber is graded once more and then is sent to a secondary producer who will manufacture it into a finished product. These producers can sell the product out their front door or they can wholesale it to retailers who are able to reach a larger market. People

can buy the material (cabinetry, flooring, siding, etc) at this time or contractors can purchase this material and bring it into peoples' homes where they will install it.

Not every step mentioned in the previous paragraphs is always a part of the process, but if they are, we had: landowner, forester, logger, trucker, sawyer, grader, trucker, kiln operator, grader, trucker, secondary manufacturer, trucker, retailer, contractor, final user all receiving some benefit from trees. Wow! Those trees produced a lot of economic activity and we can do that renewably.

Tourism touts its economic benefits but it cannot match forestry. And if communities have to change their characteristic to cater to fickle tourists, who reduce their tourism activities in tough economic times, tourism cannot claim it is non-consumptive/invasive. Agriculture definitely has more regular outputs than forestry but requires many more inputs and government subsidies to carry on in its present form. And when the conservation benefits of forestry (clean air, clean water, water retention, animal habitat) are taken into account, forestry surpasses agriculture easily. This is not to say that we should be anti-tourism or anti-agriculture but it does mean that forest landowners, foresters, and the forest industry should realize the true economics of forestry and never shy away from an honest discussion about those economic benefits to all of society.