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Collins Companies commemorates sesquicentennial

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Forest management? What's that? I think that it is something that The Collins Companies know a little bit about.

Collins has been in the forest management business for quite some time now, 150 years to be exact and they have learned a few things in those years. Locally Collins owns 78,000 acres of land that they manage for the long term. But how do they really do "IT"?

Collins, or Fremont Sawmill which you are more familiar with, has several foresters that are college graduates in Forest Management. All in all, Collins has over 80 years of combined experience in their resource department managing their timber lands.

When a forester goes out to their lands and starts to prepare an area for harvest, he must look at a number of factors even before a tree is cut; wildlife, cultural, biological and aesthetic issues all come into play when figuring out what and how to harvest a piece of land.

There are varied species of critters that live on the Collins land and the foresters try to manage their lands in respect of these creatures. Some of the animals that they have seen and manage for include goshawks, golden mantel ground squirrels, deer, elk, red band trout and cows. For example, small areas are left untouched for deer fawning habitat. By having this habitat for the deer, it allows for a much less stressful time when the doe is having her fawns. It does not affect Collins lands much financially, but the returns are huge in relation to the wildlife aspect or their property. When they are around streams, extra care is given to the shade over the stream that is left. Collins does not push the rules on taking every last bit of timber that they are allowed under the law around streams. They feel that it is important to keep a few more trees by the stream to keep it cool and provide nutrients for the aquatic critter living there.

While the foresters are previewing the area to be managed, another thing that they look for is cultural artifacts such as old homesteads or mill sites and most importantly an Native American sites. IF for example a house pit is discovered on the property, that area will be flagged off and no equipment will be allowed in the area to disturb it.

The most important aspect that the forester looks at is how the stand will look and grow after the harvest is complete. Collins harvests trees based upon the tree's health and vigor.

The first thing that the foresters look at for a tree to be removed is whether or not the tree is showing signs of a decline in health. If they see an unhealthy tree, usually that tree will be harvested and brought to the mill.

Then the foresters will look at the remaining trees. Most of these trees will be quite healthy, but there will be too many trees on the site and the foresters will need to remove some additional trees to make room for the remaining trees.

So when they are all done with an area in the forest, those trees that remain are the best and healthiest. The stands after harvest ensure a viable seed source for future generations, a diversity of sizes and species for aesthetics and biological reasons and most importantly a stand that is both productive and at lower risk from mortality or fire.

It should be noted however, if you drive through some of their forest holdings, there will be an occasional snag or dead tree left in the stand. This leaves habitat for some of the tree dwelling creatures on their site. The foresters affectionately call these trees "critter condos".

What this all boils down to is that the timber stand health and vigor is improved, the future growth is maximized and they receive the benefits of the harvest today. They are really looking to the future by leaving the best trees after they harvest an area. This has been the philosophy of The Collins Companies for over a century, and some people said couldn't be done.

Many changes have helped to make this type of forest management possible; markets, machinery and investments in the sawmill.

First the market for smaller logs has helped make thinning and smaller log operations profitable. In the past, only larger trees were really considered for harvest; the smaller trees were kind of in the way. But now these smaller trees make up the bulk of the material that is harvested off the forest, not the larger trees. This was not an easy task in the past.

Secondly the loggers are using mechanized equipment that makes it possible to safely and efficiently thin this smaller material. In the past, a man with a chain saw would be out in the woods felling the trees; he would usually cut for example 10 tree per acre. Now that same acre might need 200 trees cut. This is a bit hard for a person with a chain saw to do efficiently, but with the new equipment, this is no problem. An acre of trees can be thinned in a few hours where it used to take a day by hand to do. With these stands being much more open and park like, the risk from wildfire is greatly reduced and the tree have more room to grow.

And finally the capital investments that Fremont Sawmill has made in the past few years ensure that these logs can be successfully and profitably manufactured into their final products. Just like it takes a different type of machine in the forest to harvest the trees which are smaller, it takes new equipment in the sawmill to take advantage of the smaller logs.

So in the end, the approach that Collins takes in their forest management results in their timber stands being healthy, growing and aesthetically pleasing while at the same time providing a supply of logs to the mill and providing jobs at the local economy. Check it out, it appears that Collins is on the something that benefits all of us today as well as in the future-even for the next 150 years. Visit their web site www.collinswood.com or give them a call at the mill -947-2018 ext 27.



With a long-standing presence on both a national and local basis, Collins Companies are held in high regard among their industry peers as well as environmental advocates for responsible forestry practices and management.