

Forests as Mirrors

By Cory Creagan - VT/SAF Licensed/Certified Forester, Bennington County Forester

Forests illustrate the drastic impacts we have had on the natural environment. The forests of today reflect centuries of human-wrought impacts. Species composition, structural complexity, age, health, and many other forest conditions - for better or for worse - are the results of past land-uses and ongoing human influence.

Today our forests are managed with an eye towards the future - an understanding that actions will have centuries-long impacts. These actions have new intentions: to promote and enhance forest health, diversity, and resiliency while also producing a supply of responsibly sourced, sustainable forest products.

Merck Forest & Farmland Center uses management techniques designed to restore many ecological attributes that were previously lost. These activities, included in the current Timber Stand Improvement Project, are part of a long-term forest management plan and designed to restore and enhance species diversity, structural complexity, and promote the accrual of conditions that are more typical of an older forest.

This timber stand improvement project is sited just off the McCormick Trail. It is marked and the adjacent trails will be closed during the harvest period this summer.

This project will:

- Create canopy openings of various sizes throughout the forest to encourage the regeneration of a diverse new age class of young trees and promote the development of multiple tree heights, creating more growing space for underrepresented species such as red spruce and black cherry
- Contribute to the accumulation of downed woody material on the forest floor and standing dead trees typical of older forests
- Promote the development of larger, old trees and the identification of legacy trees to remain in the woods for perpetuity,
- Improve overall health, diversity, and resiliency of the forest,
- Produce high-quality, responsibly sourced products at a furniture grade mill ([DCI furniture](#))

Partners and Collaborators on this project include the Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation, Cory Creagan - Vermont Licensed Forester, SAF Certified Forester, Bennington County Forester, and DCI Mill

Rob Terry gives context around activities like the TSI project:

It can be hard to think of a chainsaw as a conservationist's tool. In fact, for many people, the act of cutting down trees is understandably perceived as an affront to nature. When considering Vermont's forests, it is important to remember that these woods suffered a massive trauma in the late 1800s, when over 80% of the state's trees were felled. Even 150 years later, Vermont's forests still bear the scars of this destructive overharvesting. Unlike the primary forests that were felled without consideration for ecological functionality, Vermont's current forests lack the age and canopy height diversity critical for a healthy habitat. Recognizing that old forest characteristics are optimal in various ways—such as carbon storage, forest resilience, and habitat—sustainable harvesting projects can improve forest health. These projects help accelerate the development of these beneficial characteristics for landowners willing to make modest compromises in the number of trees harvested.

