

LOCAL PERSPECTIVE



Forest Views

Mark Jacobs is a retired Aitkin County Land Commissioner and is now an Associate with Dovetail Partners, Inc., whose mission is to provide authoritative information about the impacts and trade-offs of environmental decisions.



**Mark
Jacobs**
Forest
Views

Between Fern Gully & Fiber Farms

There has been an ongoing concern regarding the over harvesting of timber in Minnesota since the 1980's when wood mill expansions were being proposed around the state. In response, in the early 1990's MN initiated a study called the Generic Environmental Impact Statement (GEIS) on timber harvesting. The study involved analysis of several potential annual harvest levels ranging from the baseline scenario of 4 million cords to the high scenario of 7 million cords, and their potential impacts on the environment.

In the end it was determined that about 5.5 million cords per year would be the maximum sustainable timber harvest level, albeit with implementing numerous mitigation strategies to reduce potential environmental impacts (https://mn.gov/frc-stat/docs/GEIS_full_report.pdf).

During the period 1990-2006 the annual harvest was between 3.5 and 4 million cords, then the housing market crashed resulting in several Oriented Strand Board (OSB) mills closing. Since that time the annual timber harvest has dropped to between 2.5 and 3 million cords.

Even though timber harvesting has declined from 20 years ago, the over harvesting concerns persist as is evident by the push back against the results of the recent MN DNR Sustainable Timber Harvest Analysis (STHA) and a proposed OSB plant in Cohasset, MN.

Based on the latest forest inventory data, we currently have over 245 million cords of wood standing in MN forests; that is the forest "principal". Each year the forest grows by about 10 million

cords; that is the forest "interest". Roughly 4 million cords of trees die from natural causes: leaving a net growth of around 6 million cords. The annual timber harvest in the past decade has been about 2.7 million cords; and the balance of more than 3 million cords is added to the "forest ledger" each year.

In my view, it seems that most of the attention is given to the most vocal interests that advocate for either no harvesting or maximum harvesting. There is a big middle ground between "Fern Gully" and "Fiber Farms" but that is rarely discussed in the public domain. Growing significantly more wood volume than is harvested each year is certainly not an indication of over harvesting. We annually add more wood fiber and store additional carbon in our forests, which is positive from several perspectives.

But I've never felt that evaluating wood volume tells the whole story on how a forest is being managed for multiple benefits (beyond timber supply). The acres of forest impacted by harvesting and how that harvesting is accomplished on-the-ground better illustrates forest sustainability. We'll explore that in a future installment.



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