
Timber Theft - a Midwest Problem

Timber theft has become a serious problem in parts of the Midwest. The value of timber, especially high-quality trees, may be much higher than the landowner realizes. For example, the value a large, veneer-quality black walnut tree can be several thousand dollars.

Thieves have grown bolder, taking trees from home lawns, cutting fences, driving across fields and sometimes working at night to steal high-value trees. Thieves are often well-equipped with muffled chainsaws or special loading and hauling equipment.

Logs are hard to identify and trace when removed from the site. Stolen logs may be hauled several hundred miles or resold through several buyers before being processed. Often, the landowner does not discover the timber theft for several days, or longer, which hampers recovery activities.

To help prevent timber theft, here are some ideas from Dennis Adams, Nebraska Forester.

Be vigilant. Clearly mark property lines. Patrol your woodlands regularly, particularly if they are isolated. Also, be informed of legitimate timber sale activity in the area.

Inventory and maintain a record of tree resources, particularly for high-value trees. The record of high-value trees should document species, location (possibly GIS), diameter at 4.5 feet above the ground and height to the first limb. Also, consider marking individual high-value trees with a number or stripe of highly visible paint.

Cooperate with neighbors in a timber protection effort. Neighbors can monitor each other's property, particularly when one is away on vacation or in the case of absentee landowners.

If suspicious activity is observed, record pertinent information that could help with possible criminal investigations, such as license plate numbers, vehicle descriptions and descriptions of suspects. Also, notify local authorities immediately.

If or when a timber theft occurs, document the date, time, location and other pertinent information to help authorities with the investigation.

Use proper procedures to value and mark timber for sale. Sometimes people approaching you to harvest timber will under value it and also may take more of different trees than you want if allowed access to the property, or worse yet take neighbors trees. First contact Steve Karloff our Nebraska Forester for Southeast Nebraska. He will appraise, mark trees to be harvested, help you in securing several bids, and advertising the trees to be cut. His phone number is 402-472-3645. By having Steve assist you, and he currently charges no fee for this service, you ensure a better price and a harvest of marketable trees protecting younger trees in the wooded area.

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