

Points to Consider When Approaching Timber Companies and Foresters

In the past we covered the need for local clubs and individuals to seek out opportunities to establish trails in their local area as the situation allows.

Part of trying to develop a trail opportunity is gaining a perspective that allows us to understand the viewpoint of those we may seek to work with.

A representative of a timber company made a presentation to a group of us at a recent meeting that provided some insight into working with them. Much of this will apply to working with government foresters or other officials as well.

Timber companies undergo evaluations of how they manage their properties. In most respects, they need to keep their eye on the ball with regard to their principal mission - sustainably growing forests.

Timber companies get significant tax incentives for allowing certain types of recreation on their land. These are generally hunting, fishing, trapping, skiing, and some other silent sports.

Some timber companies allow responsible motorized recreation on their land. They want organized trails established under agreements with counties. These signed agreements allow for monitored and regulated use. "Abuse leads to no use."

Some points of advice when working with timber companies include the following:

1. Do your research. Learn about the companies, their interests, and their properties. Find out who the relevant players are.
2. Develop relationships. Don't send letters, meet in person. These guys have other jobs to do and they won't spend a lot of time sorting through letters. A personal connection can go a long way.
3. Have a plan. When you come in with a proposal, don't expect that they are going to do much to develop it.
4. Make it easy. These guys grow trees and manage property. The easier you can make it for them to deal with your issue or project the more likely the success.
5. Offer up something. Perhaps their property has a problem with people dumping trash on their land. Something useful to them if they accommodate your project might be for your club to offer to do a trash clean -up day each year.
6. Be respectful, but be persistent. It might take you several attempts to get someone to take the time to work with you on a proposal. Don't take no for an answer right away, although sometimes no really does mean no in the end.
7. Don't give up too easily. Sometimes supervisors change or sometimes you can find a way to swing their opinion to one more favorable to your interests.
8. Keep your word. If you agree to something follow through.
9. Do no harm.

Some timber companies have headquarters in other states and don't have company personnel here in Wisconsin. They may hire a consulting firm to do their business here. It can be more difficult to engage these companies, but there is a way. They own land here and have an impact on our lives so there is a way of getting their attention.

Don't expect the timber companies to do any significant work to facilitate your project. They grow trees and manage property.

Sometimes timber companies will trade or sell land or sell a recreational easement on their land. There will also be money available for a landowner incentive program to compensate a landowner for allowing a trail on their property.

Long term agreements and trails on timber company property create an encumbrance for the property than can decrease the value of the land. Naturally timber companies would need to be satisfied that they are getting something of value for allowing something like trails.

It is difficult to develop a solid proposal for a trail without being able to explore the property. As you make initial contacts and develop a positive relationship, the timber company can give you a signed permit that allows you to explore the property via ATV or OHV. This generally covers their liability.

Some timber companies offer grants to non-profit or government organizations. If you develop a project, an additional source of funds for implementing it might be a grant from a timber company. One company offers about \$16K per quarter in grants.

This isn't to say that all timber companies are willing to become involved with some of our interests. Nonetheless, some are. These notes are based on a timber company official's presentation, so it is clear that at least in some cases, timber companies are willing to work with us.

If you wish to discuss a trail development opportunity, feel free to contact me at bryan.much@charter.net and we can discuss more details about this information. If you e-mail a phone number I will be happy to contact you.