



## Managing for Forest Health

Forest health issues often throw a monkey wrench into the plans of many landowners. They often look out over their forests and think everything is just fine because they see lots of green leaves. Visions of big money timber sales dance in their heads. However, after the findings of a detailed forest inventory are presented to them they are shocked to find out just how unhealthy their forests are. Many landowners have bought land that has been high graded in the past, sometimes repeatedly. High grading occurs when only the best lumber quality trees are cut and the lower quality lumber trees are left. When done repeatedly the forest can be dominated by unhealthy trees. Some landowners have bought land that has not been cut in 50 or 60 years. These forests can also have lots of unhealthy trees present. Many of these forests are dominated by trees of the red oak group (scarlet and black oaks). Trees in the red oak group are susceptible to a complex of insect, disease, and environmental problems collectively called oak decline. Oak decline occurs most often on ridge tops and areas that face south or west. These sites are usually drier and have thinner soil. They are better suited for white oaks and shortleaf pine. Combine high grading with oak decline and you have a recipe for trouble.

So, how do we begin to correct this problem? First we start with a detailed inventory of the forest. Among other things this inventory will tell us what tree species we have, their age, how many trees per acre, and what condition the trees are in. This information is combined with the landowner's objectives to develop an action

plan for the forest. Many landowners have an objective of growing high quality timber trees, but they have a forest that is dominated by low quality trees. This problem will take a long time to correct and it starts with a timber sale.

In this situation we will mark a timber sale that removes as many unhealthy trees as possible. Think of it as a pre-emptive strike where we are removing the unhealthy trees before they are attacked by an insect or disease problem. In a normal selection sale we will leave a certain number of trees per acre. In a forest health sale we leave fewer trees than we normally would. On the drier areas mentioned earlier we leave as many white oak and shortleaf pines as possible. These sale areas re-sprout with a large number of seedlings. By applying proper management to these seedlings we can develop them into a future forest of high quality trees.

Article by: Matt Jones is a Resource Forester with the Missouri Department of Conservation stationed in Ironton.

Submitted by Peter Maki, Forestry Communication Specialist, Top of the Ozarks RC&D

