

Guidelines For Growing Pole Quality Timber*

A. Management Guidelines

1. Poles are best grown in even-aged, well-stocked stands.
2. Two properly timed thinnings should put the average stand into shape for growing poles.
 - a. Do not concentrate on spacing.
 - b. Remove defective, crooked, and broken top trees.
3. Continued excessive diameter growth in relation to height growth leads to excessive taper.
 - a. Boles of trees on lightly stocked plots (ex. 55 square feet of basal area/acre or less) may enlarge too rapidly for optimum pole development.
 - b. Generally speaking, a higher basal area count translates to more trees/per acre (this is a function of diameter). This may also indicate a higher number of pole quality trees/acre.
4. The rate of growth of knots greater than ½ inch diameter must be taken into consideration.

B. Marketing Guidelines

1. Small poles are the bread and butter of the pole industry.
 - a. There is always a good demand for distribution-line (utility) poles, i.e. 30, 35, 40, & 45foot poles.
 - b. Thirty-year old plantations (Slash, Longleaf, and Loblolly) that have been managed according to the above mentioned guidelines should yield an acceptable crop of poles.
2. Five to six utility poles/acre is an acceptable harvest cut (for thinning); eight to ten poles/acre is the preferred number. Properly managed plantations (considering site index, species, and a minimal history of storm damage, insect and disease damage, and wildfire) are capable of yielding as many as twenty to twenty five or more poles/acre.
3. The Rural Electric Cooperatives, as well as investor owned utilities, provide a strong continuing market for pole growers.

C. Economics Of Growing Pole Timber

1. Historically, pole stumpage has been about twice that of saw log stumpage.
2. The value added by growing and marketing pole quality timber will justify the time and effort required.

3. The market (demand) for pole timber in Southeast Texas & Southwest Louisiana has been very stable over the last 25 years. Stumpage prices for pole timber do not fluctuate in the same manner as sawtimber and pulpwood.

D. A Brief Overview of Pole Specifications

1. Poles are classed according to the minimum circumference acceptable at six feet from the butt and at the top. Example: Class 4/40foot pole must be at least 33.5 inches in circumference six feet from the butt and 21 inches in circumference at the top (after the pole has been peeled). This is roughly equivalent to a 12" DBH 2 ½ log tree.
2. Short crook (a localized deviation from straightness within a 5 foot section) is not allowed. Sweep, or a deviation from straightness that is spread over the length of the pole, is allowed within limits.
3. The average rate of growth (measured on the butt) in the outer 3 inches of poles having a circumference of more than 37.5 inches at 6 feet from the butt, shall be not less than 6 rings per inch or 6 rings per inch in the outer 2 inches in poles having a circumference of 37.5 inches or less.

E. Bottom Line

Grow your pine trees straight and relatively clean boled and they will sell for a premium.

** From the USDA Forest Service Publication "Managing For Poles And Piling, Why And How" By: Hamlin Williston and George Screpetis; and personal observations by Charles Stovall, Forester, Texas Electric Cooperatives,*

Comparative Valuation Of Pole timber & Saw timber

Variables:

12 inch 2 ½ log tree

Approximate weight: 1319 lbs. Or .66 tons

Pole tree equivalent: 40foot class 4

Assumed market values:

Saw timber: \$25.00 per ton

Pole timber: \$50.00 per ton

Value of tree sold as saw timber: \$16.50

Value of tree sold as pole timber: \$33.00