

Hidden Mountain Tree Plantation: Stewardship of Land, Wildlife and the Environment

Timber investment is an investment in the future. Federal tax laws favor this concept by offering the capital gains method of taxing the income received from this pursuit. Most large tracts of land in Vermont have some marketable timber but the fast growing trees – spruce and fir – grow at the most prolific rates in “fir belts” such as Vermont’s Northeast Kingdom. A mix of sugar maple is also prevalent in the same areas because they too prosper in well drained soils and the mountain climate.

Hidden Mountain tree plantation falls into this category because it is located in the heart of a fir belt in the mountains with an elevation of plus or minus 1800 feet. Selective cutting has been implemented over the years. Currently there are good stands of hardwood and softwood and some in re-growth. Approximately 90 acres are planted with 70,000 balsam and Fraser fir that are currently being grown as Christmas trees for the wholesale market. There is also an approximately 15 acre stand of sugar maples ready for use as a “sugar bush” to support a modest sugaring operation of 500 to 1000 taps. Although not currently active, this sugar bush could likely yield a quart of finished maple syrup per tap.

Timber harvesting of the woodlands is usually performed by expert loggers who work within the specifications of a Forest Management Plan and under the supervision of the professional forester who developed the plan. The Forest Management Plan not only provides a long-range management direction for the plantation but also gives the farm a preferred property tax position under Vermont’s current use program.

Growing Christmas trees requires more annual maintenance and expense than the woodlands but is more rewarding financially because it accelerates the timber investment cycle by a magnitude of 3 to 5 times and with less risk. During the 65 years required to produce a prime spruce or fir saw log, 5 cycles of Christmas trees can be planted and harvested.

The Hidden Mountain tree plantation consists of approximately 180 acres of woodlands and 90 acres of cultured fir trees with the homestead encompassing an additional 5 acres for a total of 275 acres. With selective cutting the woodlands largely care for themselves. The patchwork of woodlands and cultured firs provide the sunny openings, deep woods and “fringe” between the two on which most wildlife species thrive. The existing service roads through the farm become nature trails in their off hours.

Most managers of Christmas trees, unlike the professional forester, are self taught. The skills are not hard to learn and the Christmas tree farmer can choose which days to work outside. If an owner of this farm doesn’t care to manage the trees, they can be sold at any stage of growth to another Christmas tree producer. With demand for Christmas trees high and supplies tight, as they are now, many producers are searching for sources of supply. One option would be to lease the trees to a Christmas tree producer who would culture and harvest the trees over an 8 to 10 year period. Another way would be to cut selected Christmas trees as a thinning operation for a time and let the rest grow for timber.

This description provided as an information supplement to Hidden Mountain Estate in Stannard, Vermont offered for sale at \$3,200,000 and listed with Preston Bristow of Woodstock Properties.

(802) 457-1322 ◇ www.FarmsInVermont.com ◇ prestonbristow@woodstockproperties.com