



Using Public Forestlands to Supplement Nontimber Forest Product Supplies for Small Private Forestland-Based Businesses

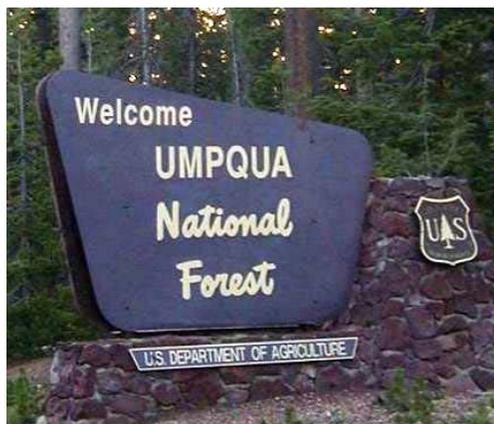
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Overview

Forest landowners with small private holdings probably have many marketable nontimber forest products (NTFPs) on their land. They may have edible wild foods, such as wild mushrooms, berries, nuts, syrups, roots, and greens; wild medicinal plants; decorative floral products, such as boughs for wreath making, pine cones, ferns, and grasses used in floral arrangements; firewood; weaving and craft items; and many other products with commercial value. Few single NTFPs have lucrative markets and entrepreneurs who venture into commercial NTFPs typically harvest and sell multiple products to supplement income from other activities on the land, such as logging and ecosystem services. By managing for, harvesting, and marketing multiple low-value products over many years, a business-savvy landowner can realize steady, diversified income over time from aggregate sales. However, there is a limit to how much of each product the land can sustainably supply. If demand for your product line exceeds what your land can supply and your goal is to expand your business, then you will need to find additional product sources. There are many ways to increase supply of a product. For example, you might buy product from other landowners, independent harvesters, or other NTFP businesses. You might partner with other forest landowners, for example through a limited liability partnership. Or you might join a forest co-operative and create agreements to harvest additional product from partner lands or work with other members to pool resources for larger market shipments.¹ For many landowners in the U.S., another option is accessing nearby public forestlands that allow harvesting. This factsheet provides a brief overview of public forest lands as a resource for commercially marketable nontimber forest products, focusing primarily on federal lands.



Sword fern is one NTFP that is commonly harvested from public lands.



The National Forest System is managed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture for multiple use.

What are Public Forestlands?

Public forestlands include lands owned by federal, state, county, and/or local governments. Most federal wildlands (such as forest, grasslands, and deserts) are managed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture – Forest Service or the U.S. Department of the Interior, which includes the Bureau of Land Management, the National Park Service, and the Fish and Wildlife Service.² National Parks and Monuments, managed by the National Park Service, were established to preserve the natural and cultural values of these lands and are highly protected from extractive activities. Harvesting of NTFPs is sometimes allowed for cultural purposes, such as by Native American Indians with traditional ties to the land. The National Wildlife Refuges were developed to conserve, manage and restore fish, wildlife, and plant populations and

¹ The Oregon Woodland Co-operative is one example (<http://www.orwoodlandco-op.com/>)

² The U.S. Department of Defense also manages some wild lands; however, most of these have restricted entry and are associated with military bases, military testing grounds, or lands managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

habitats; however, some hunting, fishing, and gathering of plant materials is allowed in certain areas. Lands under the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) are mandated by law to be managed as “multiple-use.” Extractive activities such as logging and mining, as well as recreational activities, like ski resorts and hiking trails, have been dominant uses, but most areas have at least limited access for some nontimber forest products. In theory, all activities conducted on these lands must ensure the protection of threatened and endangered species and the long-term sustainable harvest of renewable resources. In practice, however, the more dominant priorities (such as logging and recreation) often have come at a great cost to nontimber forest product biodiversity, habitat, and the harvesters and businesses trying to develop a sustainable supply of products from the land.

Most states have their own lands that may allow harvesting of NTFPs. Counties and cities may also own wildlands that are open to the public, where harvesting of NTFPs is allowed. Check with your local public lands offices, as each agency has different rules and regulations about NTFP harvesting.

Accessing Public Lands for NTFP Harvesting

Most Forest Service and BLM lands allow for commercial harvesting of nontimber forest products through the purchase of harvest permits, exclusive leases over particular sections of land, and/or stewardship contracts and agreements.³ Local offices or Ranger Districts may differ in how they allow access to NTFPs. The rules and process can vary by categories of species (e.g., wild mushrooms, transplants) and by individual species. Although the front desk of an office may provide generic rules, if you are interested in getting regular access and a sustained supply, it is recommended that you make an appointment with the office point person for nontimber forest products. Note that some agencies and local offices may use terms other than NTFP, for example, special forest products.

Harvesting Permits

For personal use harvesting (defined by a maximum volume or weight of product removed), harvesting permits are often free or at minimal cost or there may be no permit required. A personal use permit may be an option when you want to collect a small amount of samples for purposes other than selling them (e.g., showing a potential customer the quality of the product). For commercial use permits, a higher price is often charged. Table 1 provides an example of permit prices for the Gifford Pinchot National Forest in Washington State.⁴

Table 1. Nontimber forest product commercial use permit prices for the Gifford Pinchot National Forest 2012.

<u>Product List</u>	<u>Number of Days a Permit is Valid</u>	<u>Permit Cost</u>	<u>Value of the Product</u>	<u>How Much Product May I Harvest?</u>
<u>Beargrass</u>	5 Days	\$50	\$0.05 / lb	1000 Pounds
<u>Beargrass</u>	30 Days	\$250	\$0.05 / lb	5000 Pounds
<u>Edible Berries (i.e. Huckleberries)</u>	Season	\$75	\$1.00/ Gal	75 Gallon
<u>Mushrooms</u>	2 Days (Weekend)	\$25	\$2.00 / Gal	12.5 Gallons
<u>Mushrooms</u>	Biannual	\$125	\$2.00 / Gal	62.5 Gallons
<u>Salal</u>	30 Days	\$120	\$0.05 / lb	2400 Pounds

³ McClain, R. and E.T. Jones. 2005. Nontimber Forest Products Management on National Forests in the United States. USDA-FS Pacific Northwest Research Station, General Technical Report PNW-GTR-655, October 2005.

⁴ <http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/giffordpinchot/passes-permits/forestproducts/?cid=stelprdb5167185>

Leases

In addition to issuing permits to harvest NTFPs, some local offices grant leases for harvest of a particular product or group of products. Leases are often granted for exclusive harvest of a product in a specified area of land, using a competitive bidding process. Although agencies and local offices will vary, leases tend to be made for larger quantities of products than are generally allowed under the permitting system, may be multi-year, and allow for multiple harvesters under a single contract. Exclusive leases favor larger companies that can afford to bid on large contracts for firewood, boughs, and floral greens (such as salal, bear grass and ferns).

Stewardship Contracts

Stewardship contracts allow private organizations or businesses to manage areas of public land to improve the health of the land by activities such as thinning and brush removal. Although contactors usually receive some payment for this work, they may also be allowed to keep some or all of any material that is cut. Long-term stewardship contracts are currently being developed on some Forest Service and BLM lands for up to 10 years. Contractors will generally have some experience with logging, pre-commercial thinning, and brush removal and carry Logger's Broad Form liability insurance.

In addition to allowing access to NTFPs on public lands, some land management agencies actively manage areas of land for improved production of particular NTFPs, for example by conducting prescribed burning in areas around huckleberry and blueberry patches to stimulate more growth.⁵

Some Potential Barriers

Most public forests in the U.S. have a diversity and abundance of nontimber forest product resources and only a tiny fraction is ever accessed. Two primary reasons for this are (1) the vast size of the forests relative to the population, especially in the western states and (2) the lack of staff to develop and manage NTFPs. The ability to legally access these lands also varies considerably across localities. One Forest Service district can have completely different policies and management approaches than one right next to it. Before the 1990s, many public lands allowed free access and harvest of NTFPs if they didn't interfere with other priorities like road building, fire suppression, and logging. Now, in most places, it may not even be possible to go in and salvage product from public lands before a major disturbance. This change can be attributed to budget and staff cuts for NTFP programs within these agencies, new requirements for environmental impact assessments, and negative perceptions and media publicity about commercial harvesting on public lands. Negative perceptions and publicity may be generated by illegal dumping or unsustainable harvesting by a few individuals. However, it's important to remember that people have been harvesting many kinds of NTFPs commercially in the U.S. for a long time (e.g., the PNW salal industry dates to the 1930s), some even dating back centuries (e.g., ginseng). If you have a chance to talk with a commercial harvester you will probably find that they are decent, hardworking people that love being in nature, care deeply about the land, and are engaged in learning how to steward the resource. They are people with a vested interest in the well-being of the species they harvest and its habitat. You may also

Mushrooms

Permits, Requirements & Fees

- ▶ **Personal Use:** No permit is required for an individual to harvest up to 3 gallons per day of any species of mushroom (and does not intend to sell harvested mushrooms) Commercial Permit: If an individual wishes to harvest more than 3 gallons per day of any species mushroom, or intends to sell harvested mushrooms, a commercial permit is required. Harvest of any Matsutake (Pine) mushrooms requires a commercial use permit
- ▶ **Buyer's Permit:** A permit is required to purchase any species mushrooms on National Forest lands.
- ▶ **Seasons and Fees:** The fee for commercial mushroom harvest April 1 to November 1, is \$5 per consecutive day or \$100 for the season. Consult your local Ranger District office for local restrictions.
- ▶ **Camping:** A camping permit is required if you camp while commercially picking mushrooms.

Example of mushroom-harvesting permit requirements from the Colville National Forest in Washington state.

⁵ Mclain and Jones (2005).

hear from many how they have lost favorite harvesting areas to more powerful, organized stakeholders that influence the management and policy priorities on the forest.

When approaching public land managers about NTFP harvesting, be aware of these potential barriers, but also express a willingness to work through these road blocks. Be sensitive to the challenges they face, but don't be afraid to challenge commercial harvester and business stereotypes. Let them know how you are interested in a mutually beneficial partnership. NTFPs can represent a win-win for everyone—management for biodiversity and ecosystem health, economic diversification for rural communities, opportunities for people to spend time in beautiful natural settings, and more. Only through persistent demand will the system mature into one that is economically, culturally and ecologically resilient and equitable.



Harvester picking wild huckleberries.

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