

# Self-employment in forest management can be a great career choice

by Heidi Riley

**D**an Dupont has created his own employment, and is very happy with his choice. Since May of this year, he has worked with woodlot owners to manage their forests sustainably while making a profit.

“Based on the reception from landowners, the Island could easily support the work of 12 more people doing what I do. “This is the most peaceful way to make a living there is, and it pays the bills very well. I am able to make my own decisions and make my own hours. There is a lot of joy in being in this environment while running my own business.

“In the four months since I started, I have been offered more work than I can get done in my lifetime. I have been approached to manage almost 6,000 acres of woodland.

“Up until now, landowners had only two options: conserve the forest or clear cut. Clear cutting is an overused forest management practice that removes all the biological and economic value at once, and it will not return to what it was for 80 to 100 years.

“I cut down about 30 to 60 percent of the trees, and what is left is a functioning forest that can continue to provide income.” In certain woodlots, when Dan sells the wood he harvests, the landowners get 30 percent as a “stumpage fee.”

Dan manages the forest based on its age, the soil, and the tree species. He cuts out trees that are entering the end of their life cycle and/or are of poor quality. He does not cut down big, longer-lived trees, because they hold more value biologically and as a source of seeds for forest regeneration. The branches are left behind to decompose and build the organic layer in the soil.

“If you work with the forest rather than against it, and harvest the wood in an environmentally sensitive manner, there can be a long-term market for wood here on PEI. This is forestry done properly.”

## More potential for careers in forestry on PEI

Dan is not hiring at present, but he does encourage more people to consider self-employment in this field. “If you are a woody type of person, this is a good way to make a living, financially, mentally, and ecologically. You don’t need to have a degree in forestry. You need a mechanical aptitude, and you need to be willing to work alone and unsupervised.”

## Beginnings

Dan is originally from northern Ontario, and is a fourth generation logger. He started working in the woods with his father when he was 13. Thanks to his parents, he learned English. He went on to earn two diplomas as a forestry technician and technologist and then graduated in 1996 with a BSc in Forestry from Lakehead University in Thunder Bay.

For 25 years, Dan worked for large forestry companies throughout the country. He was working on PEI in 1997 where he met his wife. In 2013, Dan and his wife decided to settle on PEI.

“PEI has one of the best government subsidized forestry management programs I have ever seen in my career,” says Dan.



Using a logging machine made in Finland, Dan Dupont harvests wood sustainably, while making a profit for woodlot owners and a good living for himself.

Last winter, he visited Finland and Sweden to find the best forestry equipment to suit the Island’s needs. He purchased a small, light harvester on rubber tracks built in Finland. The harvester cuts down the trees, strips the branches, and cuts the logs into lengths.

Logging can take place year-round. “Winter is the best time to work, because when the ground is frozen, much less damage is caused to the forest floor. In winter, branches snap off easily, and the machine stays cool. The only time you could take off is a few weeks in spring when the ground has just thawed and is too soft. This is an 11-month per year career.”

## Forestry could be a bigger resource on PEI

The wood he cuts goes for lumber, pulpwood, or firewood. The pulp/chipper wood goes to the Wood4Heating biomass plant in Ten Mile House on PEI, which produces wood chips that heat many government buildings and schools. Some logs are purchased by Koke’s sawmill in Wood Islands, and studs go to Scotsburn Lumber in Nova Scotia.

“It is too bad we can’t keep our wood on PEI. It would be nice to have a facility to supply our own lumber. Every time we export a load of logs to Nova Scotia, we are exporting jobs as well.

“We have an opportunity and a responsibility to manage our forests properly. A lot of income could be derived responsibly and sustainably. If we respect our forest and understand the positive attributes it can give the local economy, we could become self sustaining and independent in supplying our own wood products and heat demands.

“It would be nice if I could play a role in the way we view the forest and how it’s managed on PEI.

“The Acadian Forest, which is our forest, has a unique ecosystem specific to our region. Not only can it provide hundreds of careers for a long time, but performed properly, it can continue to function biologically.

“It’s not a minimum wage job; it’s a good paying career. My father raised us on that career. The work you do in the forest very rarely pays less than \$20 an hour. If you have the work ethic and you don’t mind being alone in the woods, this is a great place to be.”

## Community support

Dan approached **Martina MacDonald**, General Manager of the CBDC **Montague Rural Action Centre (RAC)**, and received a loan to help purchase his logging equipment.

## Some services provided by RAC:

- Business loans and guidance for small & medium-size entrepreneurs
- Government programs for community & business development
- Entrepreneur education & management development to assist business start-ups
- Support for expansion and diversification of existing businesses
- Tourism product development & marketing.

For more information on the Rural Action Centres, visit [www.ruralactioncentres.ca](http://www.ruralactioncentres.ca)

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