

EVALUATION OF TREES IN WOODED AREAS¹

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Abstract. The appraisal of tree values in woodland or woodlot settings can be a difficult task, but with some logic, plus a sensible procedure, it can be done. The purpose of this paper is to outline a step-by-step procedure the tree consultant must take in establishing values for such trees. We do not consider land values a part of our work. When a tree appraisal is involved in a court case, a real estate appraisal by an outside source is coupled with the tree value figures. The species and size of trees play the important role in the appraisal. Exact species determinations and accurate measurements are essential. In addition, a number of other factors are considered in developing the appraisal. These include tree health, location, sun scald, wind damage, etc. The final appraisal also must include restoration costs such as clean-up of resulting wood and brush, stump removal, grading, seeding, replanting of ground cover, and vandalism protection.

Many factors are considered when we appraise trees in areas that are not residential. Even when we lose a tree in a heavily wooded area, we have lost a tangible item that is worth something. It may only be \$5 worth of fire wood, or \$2 worth of CO₂ absorbed.

An example

Recently a logger strayed from a given area and removed twenty beech and sugar maple trees by mistake. A lawyer called me to discuss this situation. The lawyer determined that there were collectible assets so we proceeded. My report was to be coupled with a real estate appraisal. My fees were established at \$55 per hour, plus expenses. My court fees are \$300 per day, plus expenses. Minimum of \$150 in any case.

An examination of the area revealed that the logger missed the property line, encroached upon Medical Center land, removed certain trees, left all the debris, rutted the area, ruined wild flowers and ground cover, and damaged existing large and small trees. Neat and accurate field notes were taken. They are of vital importance. The field form is redone more carefully in the office. This gives me a chance to re-check the figures, clean up the field work, and add additional information that comes to mind.

Be exact on your species determination. The measurements should conform to accepted American Association of Nurserymen standards: trees up to 4" caliper are measured 6" from the ground; trees to 12" caliper at 12" from the ground; and trees over 12" at dbh (4½" from the ground). Pay particular attention to the amount of damage done to the forest floor. Wild flowers in this case were important to the owners. Measure a nearby area and determine how many flowers are there, then cross-reference this area to the disturbed area.

Look for potential sunscald on thin-barked trees. You should be able to determine a percentage of bark likely to be lost and then place a damage value on each stem. How much time will it take a crew to repair this damage; to trace the bark and treat the wounds; to prune off limbs, to remove badly mangled smaller trees? The regrading of logging ruts, the adding of good forest soil, final grading, possibly seeding or adding ground cover, all are considered in estimating cost of the restoration process.

In this instance, the value of the trees was similar to the restoration costs. Even if a court had thrown out the tree values, and I had done a creditable job of placing accurate figures on restoration, the court may have settled on this. The final appraisal presentation should be in a legal type folder. The folder also should contain your certification of background and training. This will include the number of years in business; your college training; your knowledge of the local tree and landscape costs; pricing; and finally, your membership in supportive organizations.

Remember, every tree has a value, whether in a residential area, a woodlot, or a cemetery.

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¹Presented to 54th Annual Conference, International Society of Arboriculture, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.