



Choosing a Forestry Contractor and Consultant

If you are one of the more than 186,000 forest landowners in Colorado, you are acutely aware of the challenges ahead for Colorado's forests. Private forests comprise approximately 7.1 million acres of Colorado's 24.4 million total acres of forest land. The Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS) recently completed a statewide forest resource assessment and strategy that identified threats to our forest resources. Many of these threats, including declining forest health, fragmentation of ownership and wildfire risk, can be addressed through forest management.

As a forest landowner, you might want to consider hiring a forestry contractor or consultant in the near future to provide professional guidance to help you manage your forest. Examples of professional forestry services include insect-infested tree removal, creation of a defensible space around structures and development of a management plan for your forested land. Following are some important considerations when selecting a contractor or consultant. Choosing a reputable contractor or consultant will help ensure a productive business relationship that offers some legal protection and safety while protecting natural resources. It also will help preserve aesthetic and property value.

References: Request and check at least three references from past customers. It is advisable to obtain references for work conducted over the last one to three years in order to ensure company stability and good hiring and work practices. It also is a good idea to request references for work that is similar to the work being proposed for your property. Check the CSFS website <http://csfs.colostate.edu> for contractor and consultant lists for specific districts, or contact your local CSFS district office for lists and other educational resources. Some counties also maintain contractor and consultant lists for forestry services. Be informed, remember that agencies cannot make recommendations, and be aware that not all contractors and consultants are insured.



Crew working on defensible space.

Factors to remember when selecting a contractor:

- *References*
- *Insurance*
- *Credentials*
- *Quotations*
- *Contract*



Insurance: Make sure the contractor is fully insured and in compliance with local, state and federal laws. At a minimum, contractors should have automotive liability, commercial general liability and comply with workers' compensation laws. Consultants should carry Errors and Omissions (professional liability) insurance. For large, long-term projects, it may be advantageous to consult a lawyer regarding specific insurance concerns.



Timber sale near Salida.

Colorado state law requires employers who employ one or more persons to carry workers' compensation insurance. Statutory limits for coverage and general guidelines for insurance carriers are established by the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment—Division of Workers' Compensation. Hiring a contractor and/or subcontractor without insurance could mean you will be held personally liable for an accident and/or loss on your property, a risk that many landowners may not be able to take.

Credentials: Check on the contractor's certifications. Is the contractor a Certified Arborist, Certified Forester or Master Logger, etc.? In some areas of Colorado, specific licenses are required to perform certain types of forestry work. Does the contractor have a business license? If you have trees sprayed or use pheromones, the contractor should have a Commercial Pesticide Applicator's License. Does the company have a profile and/or website that you can peruse?



Creation of defensible space.

Are the contractors you're considering members of organizations such as the Association of Consulting Foresters, Better Business Bureau (BBB), local Chamber of Commerce, Colorado Timber Industry Association, International Society of Arboriculture or the Society of American Foresters? Some of these organizations require members to follow a code of ethics or membership guidelines. The BBB allows you to check a company's background on its website at www.bbb.org. The Colorado Secretary of State's website, www.sos.state.co.us, also allows you to check a company's "Certificate of Good Standing."

As you are researching your candidate contractors' credentials, you will develop an overall profile and "feel" for each company. Pay particular attention to the condition and type of equipment/technology that the contractor advertises and uses. The contractor's equipment will affect operating costs, efficiency, production and, ultimately, the resource impacts on your land. A reference check should help you determine each operator's level of experience.

Quotations: Get at least three written estimates. Make sure you provide all contractors with the same information so they can estimate costs. Be as specific as possible in the scope of the work. To save time, try to arrange for all contractors to meet together at the project area so everyone receives identical information.

Remember, this is only one aspect of the contractor selection process. One of the biggest mistakes is to settle for the “bottom line” (i.e. take the lowest quote). At this point, your research on references, insurance and credentials should be considered. Sometimes, a higher quote may reflect that a contractor pays higher wages and benefits in order to retain a more stable, quality workforce, or perhaps the contractor uses higher-cost, lower-impact equipment to provide a better end result with less environmental damage or impact. In some cases, operating costs may be high simply due to the fact that one contractor’s equipment is newer.

Contract: Get everything in writing before signing any written agreement or contract. The contract does not need to be detailed; it will depend on the scope of the project. The size of the contract can range from a one-page project estimate to a multi-page timber sale agreement. If you are not comfortable with any aspect of the contract, seek legal counsel or speak with a consulting or CSFS forestry professional familiar with forest operations.

When you consider each of these points in the contractor/consultant selection process, you will know what to expect. In turn, your contractor will understand what you, the customer, expect, which will achieve the desired outcome.



Loading logs after thinning.



Crews masticating forest biomass.

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