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## Cutting Posts and Poles for Profit

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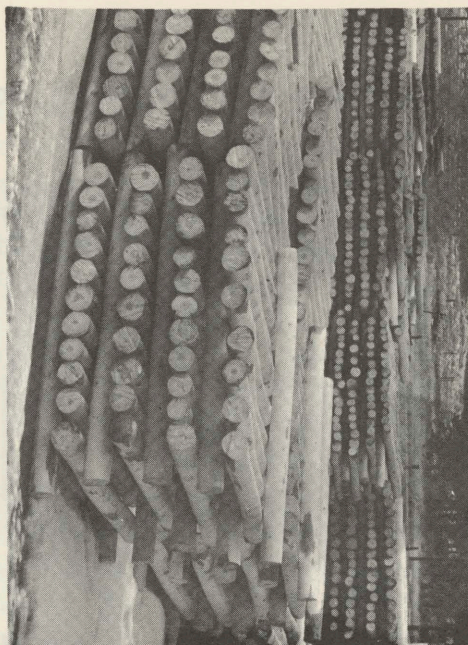
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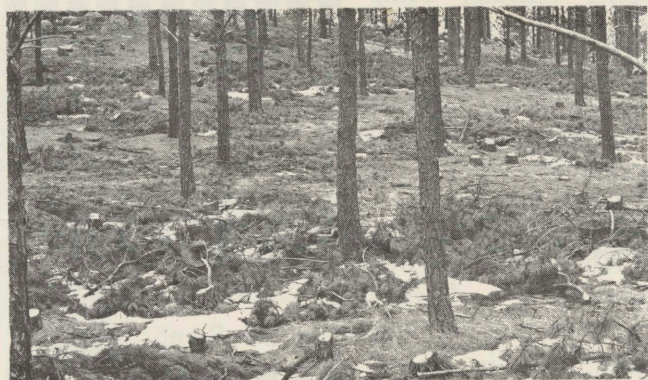
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# cutting posts and poles for profit



## cutting posts and poles

Many landowners fail to recognize the value in their timber-lands. A stand of timber large enough to be cut for sawlogs is readily recognized as a valuable asset. Too often post and pole sized stands are overlooked. In many cases these post and pole stands, when properly harvested, will give the most benefits in the long run.



**Figure 1.** Typical Black Hills post and pole stand after the owner has completed the first post and pole harvest. Note the large number of stumps. These show how thick the stand was before cutting. Low stumps and slash knocked down so it will decay rapidly are good cutting practices. If cut and marketed by the owner, post and pole stands will bring returns ranging from \$20 to \$190 per acre.

By E. K. Ferrell, Extension Forester and James A. Brown, Farm Forester, Department of Game, Fish, and Parks



**Figure 2.** Post and pole stand before cutting.

In addition to cash returns, there are other benefits for the progressive timber owner. Thinning a stand of post and pole sized timber will:

1. Increase grass growth by opening up the stand.
2. Increase timber growth.
3. Increase moisture by allowing rain and snow to reach the forest floor.
4. Make it easier to locate livestock in the woods.
5. Reduce the danger of crown fires.
6. Improve wildlife habitat.

After you look over your timber and decide to harvest it contact your local farm forester, county agent, or post and pole yard operator before you start cutting. They can give you important information on markets, harvesting shortcuts, proper management practices, and other money saving ideas. They can also give you information on the best time of the year to cut in order to reduce damage by insects, disease, and wood staining fungi. **Contacting the local post yard operator before cutting is a must.** He can give you prices, type and size of product needed, volume needed, and the necessary order for the product he wants.

Before you start cutting, look around your farm or ranch. You will likely find plenty of equipment that can be used to make the job easier, faster, and more profitable. A chain saw and truck are the most important tools. Your manure loader or hay sled will come in handy in a pole cutting operation. Poles (10 feet or longer) bring in more return and have a readier market than shorter lengths.

Dimension Chart for Posts and Poles

Post length (feet)	Top diameter inside bark (minimum in inches)
6.5	3.5
7	5.5
8	5.5
10	5.5
12	5.5
14	5.5
16	5.5
Big 8	7.5

The dimension chart gives all of the standard ranges for measurement of posts and poles. While the length is self explanatory, the top diameter is sometimes misunderstood. Top diameter refers to the diameter of the post at the small end. This is measured inside the bark; in other words imagine the bark removed from the top and measure the diameter of the wooden portion only.

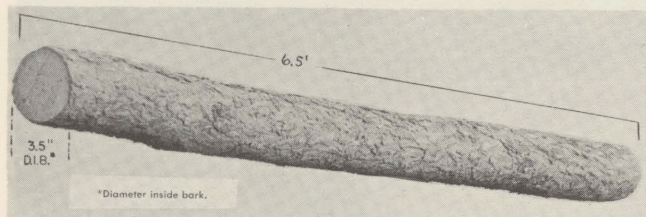


Figure 3. A straight well-limbed post.

## HOW TO CUT AN ACCEPTABLE PRODUCT

After studying the dimensions, lining up the equipment, and checking the stand to determine which trees should be removed, the job of cutting the product starts. The closer the product conforms to the buyer's requirements the easier it is to find a market and obtain a top price. With this in mind, check the requirements for an acceptable post or pole.

A straight post is the first consideration. When cutting, check the ends to make sure they are cut squarely and to the exact lengths.

Limb the post by cutting the limbs off smoothly and flush with the bark. This prevents the possibility of the peeler operator being caught and pulled into the machinery by a limb stub. Proper limbing also makes a tighter load and allows more posts per load.

When cutting the first post from a downed tree, check it for butt swell. This is the enlarged area from 3 inches to 2 feet above the stump. Remove the butt swell first; then measure the first post or pole from this second cut.

Top removed and limbs lopped to promote rapid decay.

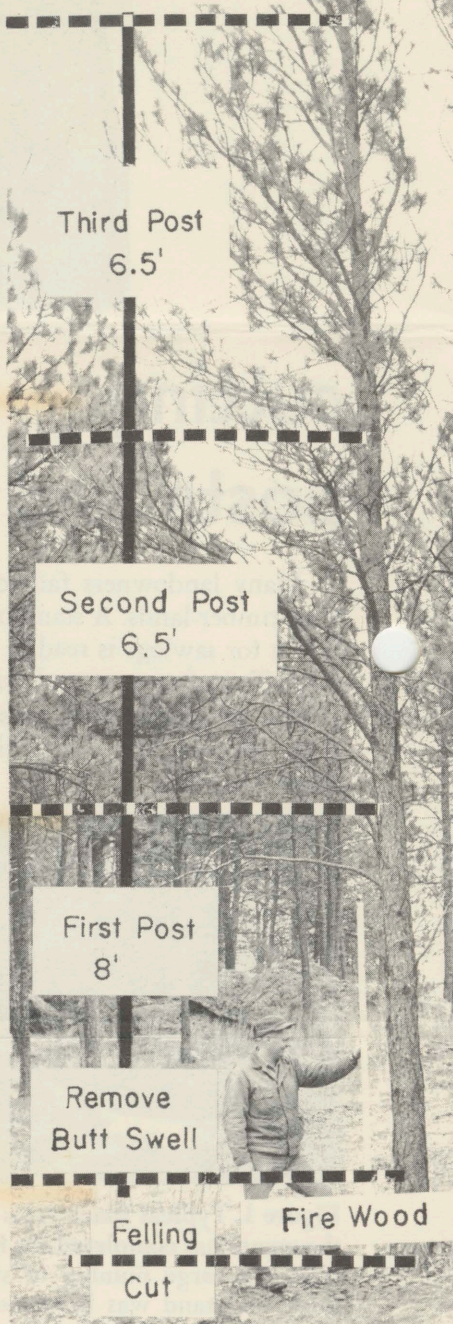


Figure 4. The necessary cuts made to remove posts. This tree was cut to allow a larger one growing room.

Finally, check the post for foreign particles such as nails, staples or barbed wire.



Figure 5. Close-up view of a properly limbed post.

After the posts are cut, stacked, and ready for market, take care to prevent loss of value from fungus and insect damage. This is especially important between the spring thaw and fall freeze-up. During the warm summer months fungus spores (seeds) are active and likely to attack the wood. This results in coloring any wood left longer than a couple of weeks in the timber. The resultant color may give either a blue, black or green hue to the wood. In post yards this is referred to as "blue stain."

While blue stain doesn't affect the strength quality of a post, it does cause a difference in treatability. This difference makes it extremely difficult to treat a charge of posts with a few blue stained posts mixed in.

#### SUMMARY

1. Check with the farm forester for technical assistance.
2. Secure a market for your product before cutting.
3. Cut a straight post to the proper length with square-cut ends.
4. Limb smoothly; prevent blue stain and insect damage.

By following the above suggestions, you can find a ready market for your product and additional income from your land. In the future it will be possible to take a load of posts into the local post yard whenever it is necessary for you to make a trip in that direction. This will bring extra income to you and increase your land value by thinning.

**For additional information about timber harvesting and management contact:**