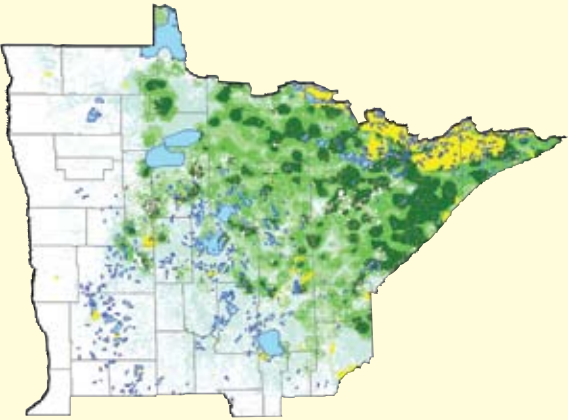


WHERE ARE MINNESOTA'S BALSAM BOUGHS?



- No balsam
- Low
- Medium
- High
- Parks and wilderness areas
- Lakes
- Nonforest land

Equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from programs of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources is available to all individuals regardless of race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, marital status, status with regard to public assistance, age, sexual orientation, membership or activity in a local commission, or disability. Discrimination inquiries should be sent to: MNDNR, 500 Lafayette Road, St. Paul, MN 55155-4031; or the Equal Opportunity Office, Department of the Interior, Washington, DC 20240.

TAKING A Bough MINNESOTA'S BALSAM BOUGH INDUSTRY



WHY BALSAM FIR?



Joseph O'Brien, UDSA Forest Service, Bugwood.org

Balsam fir (*Abies balsamea*) has flat, fragrant needles that make attractive wreaths. It grows in the forested regions of Minnesota, northern portions of Wisconsin and Michigan, and throughout Canada. Boughs harvested from this tree species are used in 98 percent of the decorative wreaths manufactured in Minnesota and distributed nationwide for the holiday season.

In Minnesota, the balsam bough harvesting season begins in early October, after two or more hard frosts have "set" the needles on the branches. It continues until early December.



WHAT IS THE LAW?

State law requires a permit, written consent, or a bill of sale to be carried by a permittee whenever cutting, removing, or transporting boughs. This applies whether the land is publicly or privately owned.

Permits are required for harvesting balsam boughs from public lands in Minnesota. Permits can be obtained from Chippewa and Superior National Forest offices, tribal headquarters on reservation land, Department of Natural Resources-Forestry offices, and county land management offices. If you wish to harvest on private lands, you need the landowner's written permission.

With the exception of the Leech Lake Reservation Division of Natural Resources, which offers free permits to tribal members, there is a fee to obtain a permit. The cost and quantity allowed to be picked vary by agency. Check with local forestry offices for detailed information on permits. All permittees are given a brightly colored poster to be placed on the dashboard during bough collection.

Bough buyers are responsible for ensuring that the people they buy from have a valid permit in their possession.



HOW IS PROPER AND SUSTAINABLE BOUGH HARVEST DONE?



- Harvest boughs from trees that are greater than 7 feet high.
- Harvest boughs from the bottom third of the tree. The wreath industry prefers the flat or semi-round boughs that are typically found at the bottom of balsam trees. The round, rough-looking boughs of the upper part of older trees are not suitable for use in the wreath industry.
- Boughs up to 36 inches in length are acceptable; they fit the guidelines of sustainability. Harvesting guidelines call for only clipping the ends of the branches. It's recommended that a balsam harvested of its lower branches not be harvested again for five to six years.

- When harvesting branches from the bottom of the tree, leave a portion of each pruned branch for regeneration. This will ensure balsam boughs for the future.
- When harvesting from smaller trees, leave at least 60 percent of the balsam tree's limbs intact in the upper portions of the tree.
- Harvested branches should have ends no larger in diameter than a fat pencil. As you harvest along the branch, leave some greenery and buds on the branch for future years' growth.
- Choose trees to trim that stand beyond 50 feet of public roads so the aesthetic value of balsam trees can still be enjoyed by passersby.



Paul Wray, Iowa State University, Bugwood.org

THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW:

Scout your harvesting sites before the beginning of the season. It will be helpful to obtain a copy of a current "plat book" to determine who owns each harvesting site you choose.

- After determining your "preferred sites," obtain permission to harvest on those properties from the property owner(s).
- Each governmental agency has a set "stumpage fee" for the boughs harvested on public properties.
- You must obtain a permission slip before beginning to harvest on private property.
- The bough buyer you sell your harvest to will require you to display your permit/permission slip each time you sell your boughs to him/her.
- In addition to cutting boughs no longer than 30 inches - 36 inches, your bough bundles should weigh no more than 35 pounds - 50 pounds.
- After boughs are sold to a buyer, they will be handled many more times until

they are used to make a wreath. Be certain your boughs are securely tied with strong twine in two different directions. (Most bough buyers will supply twine to their steady harvesters.)

- Sell the boughs you harvest at the end of each day so your bough buyer can store them in a shady area out of the wind. Boughs dry out rapidly (and lose weight) when transported long distances in an open truck.
- Well-cut, high-quality boughs will bring in more money than poor-quality boughs that are cut improperly. Taking the time to cut boughs correctly not only brings the harvester more money, but makes life easier for the bough buyers and wreath makers. Even more important, proper harvest extends the life of the tree.