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**Feature Article**

**Raking in the Profits**

By John Willis, Extension Specialist

Times are tough in the pine tree growing business. Sawtimber prices have declined sharply over the past decade, while the supply of sawtimber has steadily increased. This unfortunate combination of factors has left many landowners looking for alternative sources of income.

Harvesting the freshly fallen pine needles of pine trees may be an excellent opportunity to generate additional income. Since the 1980s, landscaping companies have increasingly used pine straw as mulch. Pine straw has become desirable because of its longevity, attractive appearance, lightness of weight, positive influence on soil moisture and fertility, and its ability to suppress weeds.

Several factors contribute to the price of pine straw. Straw rakers will often offer premium prices for longleaf straw compared to loblolly or slash. Straw cleanliness is also a major factor. Lower prices are offered for straw containing twigs, branches, herbaceous vegetation, or hardwood litter. Topography is another factor that can influence price. As a general rule, the less slope a stand has, the more likely a straw raker will want to harvest needles in the stand. Stands located near large cities also typically receive higher bids for their straw because transportation costs between stands and markets are lower than straw harvested in rural places.

For pine tree owners, another desirable aspect of straw management is its compatibility with timber management. Due to their uniform spacing, pine plantations make deal straw production sites. Peak straw production occurs between crown closure and the first thinning. Stands will

typically produce between 120 to 180 bales (26 inch x 13 inch x 14 inch dry bale) of straw per acre. Higher quality sites will produce more straw and can be raked more often.

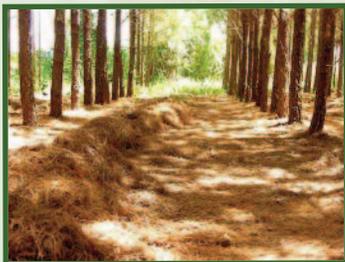
Raking straw does, however, have some potential drawbacks. For example, harvesting pine straw causes the stand to lose key nutrients. To mitigate nutrient losses, landowners can replenish nutrient supplies by periodically applying fertilizer. Harvesting every third year or harvesting early in the peak needle-fall season (September-November) are other options for mitigating nutrient loss. Intense vegetation management is another drawback. Plantation understories must be kept clear of hardwoods, shrubs, and herbaceous vegetation to produce clean straw. This activity requires frequent use of herbicides and prescribed fire to prevent the development of unwanted vegetation. Such intensive management requires investment of time and money.

Pine straw raking has become an increasingly important forest product in the South. Whether pine straw raking is right for you depends on your stand characteristics and your ownership objectives. For more information on pine straw management please contact Mississippi State University Forestry Extension or your County Extension office.

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and friend/follow us on Facebook & Twitter  
<https://www.facebook.com/MississippiStateUniversityExtensionForestry>  
<https://twitter.com/MSUExtForestry>  
**NEW!** See our blog at: [www.blogs.msucare.com/forestry](http://www.blogs.msucare.com/forestry)

*"When one tugs at a single thing in nature, he finds it attached to the rest of the world."*

— John Muir



**Pine Straw Raking - New Important Alternative**

(Photo: eessmextension.tamu.edu)



**Round Bales of Pine Straw Ready for Loading**

(Photo: aces.edu)



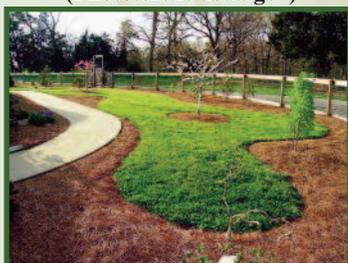
**Higher Dollar Value for Longleaf Straw**

(Photo: pjwetzl.com)



**Baling Pine Straw Long Leaf Silvopasture**

(Photo: srs.fs.usda.gov)



**Final Destination: Landscaping**

(Photo: pic2fly.com)

## The Overstory

### “Southern Pine Beetle Myth or Reality”

By Cody Rainer, Extension Associate

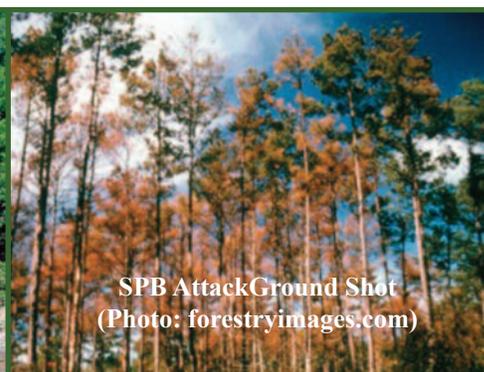
The lack of Southern Pine Beetle (SPB) activity on private land over the past 15 years in Mississippi has potentially led to a false sense of security. Combined with low prices for pine pulpwood, it has led some individuals to make poor decisions regarding the timing of pine stand thinning. Landowners and foresters continue to push the first thinning farther along in the rotation with the hope that the market will improve, or they overlook the fact that delayed thinning creates desirable habitat for SPB.

Even after 100 years of trapping and monitoring populations, scientists have trouble predicting SPB epidemics. The earliest known SPB outbreak was documented in 1842, and outbreaks have occurred at 6 to 10 year intervals ever since. If you talk to anyone who has been around forestry for any length of time in Mississippi, they may reminisce about troubled times of SPB damage and the multitude of acres of timber loss. However, many good, healthy years have led to a kind of complacency. Yet SPB is a native insect and is still out in those woods. For example, in 2013, 107 spots were reported in the Tombigbee National Forest. SPB was also captured in more counties in 2015 than in previous years, but only 463 beetles were actually captured within the state traps. The threat is real, and managers should make decisions accordingly. (See MFC Forest Health Note Technical Bulletins for specific population parameters).

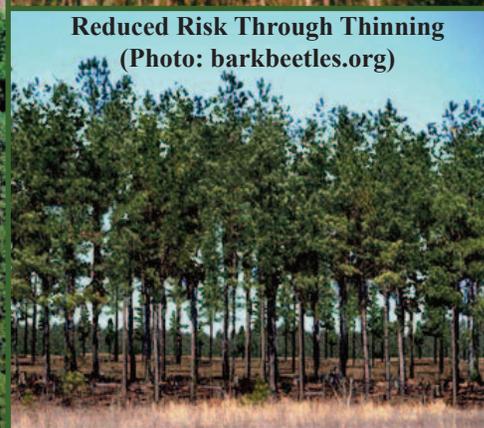
Landowners should take advantage of the currently low SPB populations to thin their timber stand if needed. Mississippi State University in collaboration with the Mississippi Forestry Commission has developed a Southern Pine Beetle Prevention Program. This program is a cost share program that provides landowners with a monetary incentive to conduct first thinning. If you are interested in the program or just want to learn more, please contact 662-226-6000.



**Harvested SPB Spot Aerial Shot**  
Photo: Cody Rainer



**SPB Attack Ground Shot**  
(Photo: forestryimages.com)



**Reduced Risk Through Thinning**  
(Photo: barkbeetles.org)



# Mississippi Timber Price Report



4th Quarter 2015

The Mississippi Timber Price Report (MTPR) is a quarterly survey of stumpage timber prices in Mississippi. It is developed to provide a picture of timber market activity. The state average prices for common forest products are listed. Values given are offered as a guide to help individuals assess the fair market value of their timber. The average price should not be applied as the exact value for a particular tract. This report is updated quarterly and available at [MSUCares.com/forestry](http://MSUCares.com/forestry), or by contacting your local county Extension office.

## QUARTER'S PRICES: 4th Quarter 2015 Stumpage Prices/Ton (Source: Timber-Mart South)

Pine Sawtimber - \$25, Pine Chip-N-Saw - \$15, Pine Pulpwood - \$8,  
Mixed Hardwood Sawtimber - \$35, Hardwood Pulpwood - \$9

**NOTE: Prices vary widely across the State; thus, average prices presented here may not reflect your local market.**

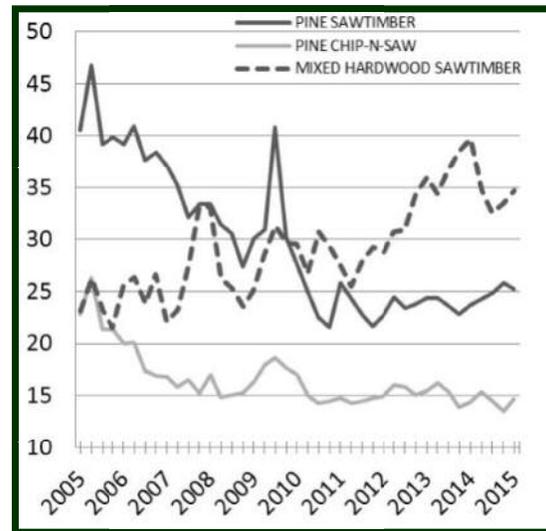
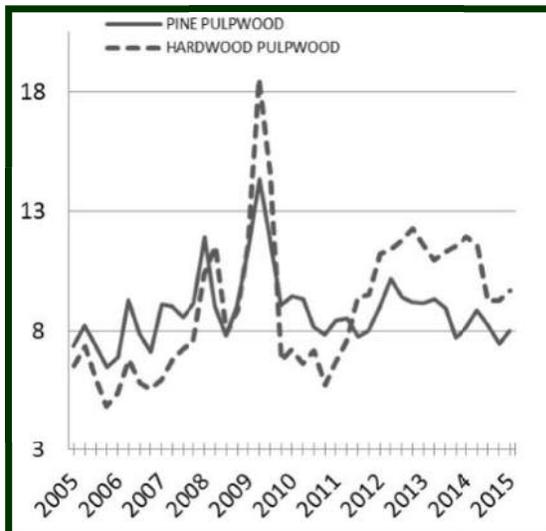
## WHAT'S MOVING PRICES - TRENDS:

Prices for all products increased during the 4th quarter with the exception of pine sawtimber which decreased slightly.

Stumpage prices for pine sawtimber decreased by 2.4%, pine chip-n-saw increased by 8.7%, and pine pulpwood increased by 8.2% from the previous quarter. Stumpage prices for mixed hardwood sawtimber increased by 3.7% and hardwood pulpwood increased by 4.9% from the previous quarter.

## TIME SERIES:

**Average Mississippi Pine and Hardwood Stumpage Prices  
4th Quarter 2005 through 4th Quarter 2015  
(All prices in \$/TON)**



Timber-Mart South (TMS), Inc. has more detailed data available by subscription that contains values for other timber products not included in this report. TMS is compiled and produced at the Center for Forest Business, Warnell School of Forest Resources, University of Georgia, under contract with the Frank w. Norris Foundation, a non-profit corporation serving the forest products industry. See <http://WWW.TMART-SOUTH.COM/> for information on subscriptions.

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**Delta Hardwood Notes**

By Brady Self, Extension Specialist

**Problems with Management of Hardwood Plantations (Part 3)**

In the last two editions of Delta Hardwood Notes, we discussed how early planting practices have resulted in low quality stems in hardwood plantations currently growing across the state. However, I did not discuss the predominance of Nuttall oak in these plantations and the increased frequency of long-lasting, defect-causing branches inherent to the species.

Oaks in hardwood plantations usually outgrow their naturally regenerated counterparts due to the low planting densities utilized in establishment. This factor will present a new scenario for timber buyers, sawmills, and lumber graders in the future. Increased early growth of oak stems with persistent limbs results in a much larger inner core with correspondingly higher frequencies of limb defects. We do not know the severity the impact of this increase will be on future wood value; however, based on current lumber grading rules, and subsequent pricing, owners of hardwood plantations are likely to see vast reductions in stumpage value resulting from lower log grades.

When discussing hardwood plantations, silviculturists have expressed a variety of ideas regarding the length of time it would take for trees in these plantations to self-prune. Outside of obvious species differences in pruning patterns (e.g. cherrybark oak possess smaller branches with a more favorable branch angle and self-prunes much more quickly than Nuttall oak), the general consensus is that lower branches on many stems in these plantations would persist for several decades, resulting in logs that would probably never reach grades greater than pulpwood. However, as these stands reach canopy closure, some are exceeding self-pruning expectations and are likely to reach lower-grade sawlog status before the end of rotation. Make sure to check the next installment of The Overstory for the conclusion of this series.



**19-year-old Nuttall oak exhibiting persistent branches**



**21-year-old Nuttall oak undergoing significant amounts of self pruning. Note shed branches around the base of trunk**



**46-year-old cherrybark oak plantation that has self-pruned**

**Photos: Brady Self**

## UPCOMING EVENTS - APRIL & MAY 2016

- 04/02/2016: 2016 Mississippi Bioblitz, Jackson, MS** Mississippi Museum of Natural Science 2148 Riverside Drive Jackson, MS --- Click [HERE](#) for brochure
- 04/07/2016: Forest Growth & Yield/ Financial Analysis, Short Course, 4/7/16**  
Itawamba Community College, Fulton, MS--- Click [HERE](#) for brochure
- 04/14/2016: Workshop: Are My Pine Trees Ready to Thin Again, Ripley, MS, 4/14/16**  
Click [HERE](#) for brochure
- 04/16/2016: 2016 Mississippi BioBlitz, Tupelo, MS, 4/16/16**  
Natchez Trace Parkway Visitor Center --- Click [HERE](#) for brochure
- 05/03/2016: Workshop: Tree Identification, New Albany, MS, 5/3/16, 8:30 AM – 1 PM**  
Union County Extension Office --- Click [HERE](#) for brochure
- 05/05/2016: Workshop: Tree Identification, Iuka, MS, 5/5/16, 8:30 AM – 1 PM**  
Tishomingo County Extension Office --- Click [HERE](#) for brochure
- 05/17/2016: Workshop: Understanding Global Positioning System (GPS), Batesville, MS,**  
Cliff Finch Office Building --- Click [HERE](#) for brochure

**NOTE: While MSU Extension is in the process of implementing a new website, there may be some connection problems with links to the brochures above and on MSUCares --- be patient, and try again a little later.**

### Other Locations for Forestry Extension Information

MSUCares.com (Forestry-Forest Products/events)  
[www.facebook.com/MississippiStateUniversityExtensionForestry](http://www.facebook.com/MississippiStateUniversityExtensionForestry)  
[www.blogs.msucares.com/forestry](http://www.blogs.msucares.com/forestry), OR, ..... [twitter.com/MSUExtForestry](https://twitter.com/MSUExtForestry)

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**MSU-ES Region Map**

