

The Benefits of “Releasing” Seedlings

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Why do we, as landowners/land managers, consider the release of seedlings? There are two main reasons. The first is to let the seedlings outgrow any competing vegetation. The second is to lessen competition between trees of the desired species.

Why don't we just release all seedlings that we plant? The reason to release in the first place is to make the stand more profitable. All the “up front” money spent just makes it take longer to pay off the investment. So, you should weigh the return versus the expenditure. If you spend \$25 per acre to make a return of \$15 per acre, release does not make good financial sense. If you are releasing to make sure you have a well stocked stand, then it does make good sense. If you are releasing to add three additional cords per acre at the first thinning, you need to assess the cost versus return.

What is release? It can be something as simple as mowing between the rows of a plantation, or something as sophisticated as a helicopter-applied tank mix to release natural seedlings.

The most often used method of release is herbaceous weed control used when planting pine seedlings. This is a proven method for improving return on investment and increasing survival numbers. When looking for adequate stocking, the expenditure is warranted and pays its own way.

Many times the question of release comes up when the stand has competing hardwoods. There are several chemicals that will do a good job of releasing the

crop trees. The question is: Will the release pay for itself? First, are the crop trees taller than the competition? If they are a foot or so taller than the competition, then they will outgrow their competition and make a stand which can be cleaned up with fire at a later date. The cost of the release spray will be around \$80 - \$100 per acre. How many cords of pulpwood will it take per acre to pay for the release? At the current price of \$19 per cord, it will take 5 1/2 cords. Will the release increase production the 5 1/2 cords

stand that has hardwood competition. *Velpar* had been used successfully by many landowners with sandy soil applying a grid pattern of treatment, and it is fairly economical. Mechanical treatments can also be employed to good effect. Weed eaters may be used to lower the number of competing trees, regardless of species, but these should be taken care of at a smaller size, if possible.

A mower or drum chopper can also be utilized with good success to lower competition by mowing or chopping in strips,



An example of pine seedlings that have been chemically released.

for repayment to investment, plus interest? If so, then do it. If not, then the decision will need to be made of whether the release is needed to ensure that the stand is viable. If stand viability is the question, then the release is needed, and the stand will just have to be less profitable.

A note on taxes here may be appropriate. Any release that is done before Year 4 must be amortized as a “stand establishment cost.” A release in Year 4 or after can be taken as an ordinary expense. If Uncle Sam is going to pay part of the tab, a release may look better.

There are a number of methods that can be utilized by landowners to release a

leaving about one swath between treated swaths. This method gives your selected trees the jump on the competition. It should be employed where the crop trees are growing “on site.” This method uses the growth rate of the crop trees, pines usually, to allow them to stay ahead of the competitors.

Remember, an acre of land is only going to grow a specific number of cords of wood per year. You can grow

those cords on 500 trees or you can grow them on 1500 trees.

Sometimes a combination of methods used during the rotation can be profitable, such as mowing strips in natural regeneration and releasing with chemicals at a later time.

Release is just another tool to make the timber stand more profitable. The current low pulpwood prices make release for improved production a practice that needs to be analyzed. If you are releasing to help ensure a well stocked stand, it is a viable practice. ♣