

Tree Farm Threats



September 20, 2025

Justin Penick, Acorn Forestry owner, stated that the biggest threat to tree farmers is the changing market for logs. He said, “We are outgrowing what the mills will accept.” He further explained that many mills are going to a restricted butt size, which means that they are only buying smaller logs. Tree farmers can no longer assume that there will be a profitable market for their large 30-year-old trees. Some tree farmers are resorting to a 15–18-year cycle with no thinning between planting and clear-cutting. The farmers may remove flawed trees, e.g. trees with forked tops, with a weed-eater three years after planting.

Truckers’ demands are limiting the distances they will haul logs which shrinks the radius in which loads will be hauled. Additionally, truckers are requiring a larger percentage of the gross from each truck load which reduces the percentage of the gross available to landowners.

Justin discussed the threats of weather events. Flooding during the pine growing season can lead to tree mortality. Hurricane Harvey, with its 60 inches of rain in some areas in 2017, flooded approximately 3.6 million acres of rural property.

During the 2021 Uri ice storm, it was probably the *abrupt drop* in temperature, rather than freezing temperatures themselves, that caused tree mortality. In general, East Texas forests get the brunt of freezing rain events as they progress from west to east. The severity tends to diminish the storm travels east.

Tyler County experiences 50 – 60 days with thunderstorms each year. A tree struck by lightning may die within days - or it may continue to live in a weakened state. Weakened trees are susceptible to ips beetles. The ips beetles can cause stress to the tree and create an opportunity for turpentine beetles to attack the stressed or dying tree.

There is a new blight affecting loblolly pine trees in Louisiana, especially in areas that are wet and highly productive. Tree blights are typically bacterial and can lead to tree mortality. Sparce, weakly-colored needles on loblolly trees are symptoms of this blight, for which there is not yet a treatment. Foresters have detected the blight in Texas.

Eminent domain for pipelines, powerlines and other development projects is a threat to tree farmers. Justin encouraged individuals to push and resist eminent domain, but to avoid Condemnation Court. One tree farmer built an airport, with one flight a year, on his property to prevent a public utility easement from crossing his property. If a public utility easement is going to cross your property, be sure you secure the right to drive across it. This could be critical during logging operations.

Justin encouraged tree farmers to protect boundaries and limit liabilities by marking property lines with purple paint and/or three-strand barbwire and/or posted signs, and by securing lease agreements with anyone who uses your property -- even with neighbors who are encroaching.