

**Grown here at Home: Floyd forester explains benefits of restorative forestry**

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FLOYD, Va. (WDBJ7) Jason Rutledge is known all over the country for the modern horse-logging method he uses. On the outside it may seem like an archaic way of doing things, but Jason believes it's truly the best way to sustain the beauty of our forests.

"Seventy percent of the forest land in Virginia is in private ownership in tracks of 10 acres or less," said Jason Rutledge, owner and operator of Ridgewind Farm Suffolks.

Because of this, Jason says the land isn't suitable for mechanized harvesting.

"You can't bring a machine onto 10 acres without wanting to cut every tree there to make it profitable for use; and the landowners won't have that. What I'm doing forestry wise is practicing restorative forestry, by imitating nature and only taking the worst trees first," Jason said.

That's where Jason's Suffolk horses come in. They cut down a tree, cut the log down into the proper lengths, attach it to the log arch and from there the horses wait for their command to go.

"Standing here for a few seconds after we hook that chain keeps them from reading the signals on their own. I want them to wait for me to ask them to go. They want to do what we ask them," explained Jason. The logs weigh between 1,500 and 2,000 pounds. Jason says his horses pull between 20 and 24 logs a day.

"I call it the ultimate low-impact overland extraction technique. These animals can actually move more weight with less impact on the ground itself than any other method available," Jason said.

By clearing the forest this way, Jason says it maintains its aesthetic, all while allowing the forest to flourish. For these reasons, Jason says horse logging has become the method of choice for private landowners.

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