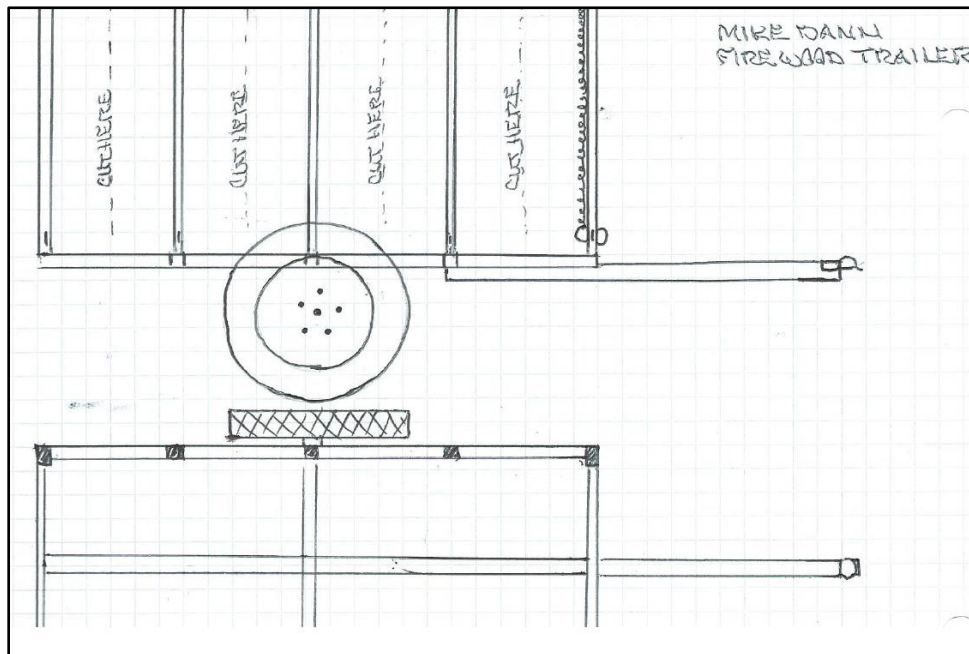


Mike Dann's Strategies for Collecting Firewood, Using His Unique Firewood Trailer



Firewood Trailer Sketch

I believe that producing firewood from regrown small stems on the cut-over woodlots so common in Maine can provide all kinds of benefits for landowners: Exercise, a renewable alternative to fossil fuel, the satisfaction of working with and improving our environment – and the excuse to buy some pretty neat toys!

A good portion of our woodlot had been high-graded. We probably paid \$500 for every merchantable tree. Yet this lot has provided us with firewood every year. At four cords annually, that's a value of about \$1,000. Starting with mostly saplings and a few small poles, we started thinning. We often found a potential crop tree – white ash, red oak, sugar maple, red maple. We released their crowns. And we do a light thinning between crop trees. The goal is to thin through the available diameter classes to produce valuable trees. An eventual group selection cut will produce patches of regeneration that we can start thinning again. I'll let professionals cut the big trees. As I get older, I want a supply of firewood from stems I can easily handle.

So how do we handle it? My boss and mentor, Cliff Swenson, impressed on me that transportation starts at the stump. I have a compact 4WD tractor, but an ATV will do. It's been easy to construct tractor trails every 100 feet. Here's where old pasture land works for you: The big rocks have been cleared and the ground is good for small equipment.

Judy and I cut firewood in the winter. It's easier to see the woods, there are no flies, and without leaves, the stems handle easier. Judy cuts stems under three inches with a handsaw; I cut larger ones with a chainsaw. If a stem is under three inches, we leave it tree

length or semi-tree length. We take every stem to a 1-inch top. If it's over three inches, I cut it four feet. I cut very few stems over six inches. We drag the stems to a tractor trail. A benefit of using small material is that we've lived here 22 years, and I just bought a wood splitter. If my shoulders weren't wearing out, I wouldn't have needed it.

When the ground dries, I start hauling with my pulp trailer. The bed is about 6 feet long and about 2-1/2 feet between the stakes. There are removable metal stakes every 16 inches – picture a miniature log trailer. I'll load either smaller tree length, or two tiers of four-foot wood. Back at the dooryard, I tie a rope binder at each set of stakes. With my Husky 353 and 18-inch bar, I saw up the load on the trailer, making a cut from each side between the stakes. It takes about 10-15 minutes to cut a cord of wood. And most wood stays on the trailer, which makes it a lot easier to put it in the woodshed. The trailer is the real secret.

The other half is the way we burn wood. Our house has a great room, and our wood cookstove has an air-tight firebox. Burning small wood means many trips to the woodbox. But if your stove is in the middle of your living space, you can check the fire as you go by.

Mike Dann is a member of Maine Woodland Owners Board of Directors.