CU IN THE WOODS

Smartphones, More Than Just a Communication Device for Forest Landowners

By Jeff Fellers

Though the first cell phone was released in the early 1990s, most of us probably did not go out and buy one right away. The majority of us probably did not get a smartphone until the early 2000s. It was not until Apple launched the first iPhone in 2007 that the smartphone world was set on fire. Since that time, the capabilities of smartphones have increased drastically. They are now often used as tools with many applications (apps) that help forest landowners better manage their forests.

There are numerous devices available to forest landowners to access technology. Smartphones, computers, GPS units, and tablets, just to name a few. With the evolution of smartphones and the apps associated with them, many forest landowners no longer need computers, GPS units, or tablets to access the new technology. Now, some forest landowners do not want to fool with new technology or smartphones. That is ok. Utilizing new technology often provides a great opportunity to get younger generations involved in property management.

This article will look at how technology can be used and some of the apps available that may interest forest landowners. Some apps are free, and others may be purchased. Keep in mind; it is impossible to list all the applications that are available for forest management. It can often be very beneficial to talk with other landowners and see what apps they use and like.

<u>Mapping</u> — Mapping can provide a birds-eye view of a landowner's property. It can be used to delineate timber stands, wetlands, food plots, calculate area, or just view aerial photographs. Many of the apps available have the option to reference the smartphone's GPS and automatically locate your position. Below are some apps and webpages that may be of interest.

Google Earth — Available for free on both mobile devices and computers. Projects can be edited on the computer and then viewed on a smartphone. It also has a time slider that allows a landowner to look at aerial photographs from different years. This is a great tool for landowners. The user interface is probably one of the easiest to use. Google Earth can be downloaded at https://www.google.com/earth/. The app is available for both Android and Apple devices.

Avenza Maps — A free program with options to purchase different maps. The app gives the option of using the program offline when cellular service is lacking. This is one big difference from some of the other mapping programs. This program is a little harder to use than Google Earth but may give you a few more functions. For more information on Avenza maps, visit https://www.avenzamaps.com/. The app is available for both Android and Apple devices.

My Land Plan — A web-based program that gives the landowner the ability to map properties and store records for individual features. As a landowner, you will be able to map your property, set goals, and then customize your information based on your management activities. This program is not as mobile-friendly and is accessed through a web browser. For more information on My Land Plan, visit https://mylandplan.org/.

Area Calculation — This is important to help determine stand acreage or acreage in general. There are numerous apps available that work great. Many can measure distance and area. A simple search of "area calculation" on your smartphone's app store will bring up a variety of area calculation apps that should work fine.

Parcels — Having access to land parcel data can help a forest landowner learn who owns adjacent properties and see an estimate of property lines. Keep in mind that this data may not be survey grade or 100% accurate, but it gives you a good idea of where property boundaries are located.

Websites — In South Carolina, most counties have a GIS database where you can access parcel data for the county. Most of these county sites will provide free data. An example of the Newberry County GIS

site can be found at the link below.

https://map.newberrycounty.net/parcel/

LandGlide – An app that allows access to parcel data. It is available for Apple and Android devices with a fee. The app provides online and offline access to data. This is beneficial when cell phone reception is poor. The app can still be used if data is previously downloaded. For more information on LandGlide, visit https://www.landglide.com/.

Tree Identification – This is another tool that landowners may find useful when managing their property. Many of the apps available allow the user to take a photo of the tree characteristics and then the app will show suggestions for the identification of the tree. While it may not always be 100% correct, these apps are pretty good. Most of the time, they can lead you in the right direction in identifying the tree species.

vTree – An app developed by Virginia Tech. This app uses your location to narrow down the trees commonly found in your area. Instead of using a picture, this app asks you a series of questions to narrow down the identification options. It is available for Apple and Android devices. For more information on the vTree app, visit https://dendro.cnre.vt.edu/dendrology/vtree.htm.

LeafSnap – Allows the user to take a picture of any plant. It has a claimed accuracy rate of 95%. This is a free app available for Apple and Android devices. For more information on LeafSnap, visit https://plantidentifier.info/.

Technology has made many more resources accessible to forest landowners by using a smartphone. This article lists only a few. Most of these apps are easy to find and install on a smartphone. The user interfaces are typically easy to navigate as well. Don't be afraid of new technology. Try it…you might actually like it.

This article was featured in CU IN THE WOODS Winter 2021 Edition, you can view the full newsletter at:
https://www.clemson.edu/extension/forestry/newsletter/newsletter_files/2021-winter-forestry-newsletter