

FOREST AESTHETICS

Information for Forest Landowners

Some forestry activities are highly visible to an aesthetically sensitive public. The image of our forest industry is directly influenced by the public's perceptions of the numerous forestry activities observable across our landscape. Any appearance of lack of planning, allowing waste of fiber, or disregard for public safety or water and air resource quality should be avoided. Conducting activities in an aesthetically acceptable manner is important to the future of forest management because, to an extent, forestry is practiced at the will of the public.

Concerns about the aesthetics of forest activities may be addressed by using principles outlined here. The issue is more fully addressed in the "Forestry Aesthetics Guide" published by the American Pulpwood Association/American Forest and Paper Association and is often addressed by Forestry Best Management Practices published by state forestry agencies. These publications are available through the Internet.

Forestry activities that are most likely to have the greatest impact on aesthetics include road location/construction/ maintenance, harvesting/logging, site preparation for reforestation including the use of forest chemicals, and prescribed burning. Advance planning is recommended for each activity as a proactive approach to improving forest aesthetics and maintaining a sustainable forest industry.

Consideration should be given to the visual aspects and concerns of each forestry activity as outlined below. Visualize how the forest might appear during and immediately after any forestry activity. Consider how this would look when seen by the public from a public road, commercial area, church, school, residential, or recreational area, areas readily observable from the public viewpoint. Ultimately, management decisions should be based on the degree of visual sensitivity appropriate to the site or portions of the site. Forest practices may also be aligned with companion goals of protecting and conserving water and air quality, soil productivity, and wildlife habitat.

Forest Roads and Skid Trails

Well-built and maintained forest roads contribute to visual quality of forest activities. The following points are examples of practices intended to improve the visual appearance associated with the design, location, construction, and maintenance of forest roads. Some practices to consider include:

- Locate and shape roads to minimize visibility of activities from public viewpoints.
- Minimize the number and width of roads necessary to meet objectives.
- Avoid exposed soil, uprooted stumps, damaged trees visible from public viewpoints.
- Avoid excessive rutting and the tracking of mud or dust on to public roads.
- Close and stabilize temporary roads and skid trails upon completion of activities.
- Use appropriate access control and signage to minimize unauthorized use of roads.

Timber Harvesting

Good harvest planning significantly reduces the impact of timber harvesting on visual quality. Important considerations are harvest timing, method, area shape and size, timber felling and skidding, logging decks, and logging slash placement. Some practices to consider include:

- Use aesthetic management zones (AMZs) or streamside management zones (SMZs) as visual buffers for forestry activities next to significant public viewpoints.
- Avoid exposed soil, high stumps, damaged or broken trees visible from public viewpoints.

- Remove or lop tops visible from public viewpoints.
- Use alternative methods for clear cutting when seen from sensitive public viewpoints.
- When thinning, establish operating corridors parallel to public viewpoints.
- Avoid large clear-cuts visible from public viewpoints.
- Minimize harvesting impacts created by activities during wet conditions.

Log Decks and Landings

Logging jobs are often judged by the appearance of their log decks and landings. Important considerations include the size and number of log decks and landings, proximity to highways and public viewpoints, and proper restoration upon completion. Practices to consider include:

- Plan log deck and landing placement in advance by carefully assessing terrain, deck size, and desired number of decks. Avoid locating in plain sight of public viewpoints.
- Properly dispose of all trash and litter
- Scatter or dispose of logging slash and stumps.
- Promptly stabilize exposed soils of log decks and landings when complete.

Site Preparation, Forest Chemical Application, and Regeneration

Site preparation and reforestation impacts the visual quality of the forest. Thus it is best to promote the rapid regeneration of harvested and site prepared areas in a visually acceptable manner. Some practices to consider include:

- Avoid broadcast application of herbicides in exceptionally visible and/or environmentally sensitive areas. Consider ground applied banded or spot applications in these areas.
- Avoid off-site applications to protect AMZs, SMZs, and neighboring properties.
- Minimize slash piling. Mechanically spread or burn unscreened slash piles.
- Fell damaged trees when visible from public viewpoints.
- Develop flight plans for aerial application of herbicides to minimize off-site flyovers.
- Orient planting rows parallel to roads and other public viewpoints.
- Avoid chemical applications near schools, churches, public areas during active hours.
- As a courtesy, consider notifying adjacent residents prior to treatment.

Prescribed Burning

Prescribed burning is an effective tool for controlling undesirable vegetation, improving wildlife habitat, and reducing fire hazards. However, prescribed burning, its smoke, and the immediate appearance of burned sites may produce visual impacts and other concerns among the public, particularly if conditions are not totally favorable for burning. Practices to consider include:

- Monitor weather and potential smoke impacts before, during, and after burning.
- Burn only during periods of good smoke dispersal.
- Avoid affecting smoke sensitive or visually sensitive areas.

In summary, forestry is often practiced in the public arena. Maintaining the flexibility to implement considerations for aesthetics into forestry activities that are within sight of public viewpoints or that may impact public areas will play a key role in maintaining public acceptance of forestry. The entire forestry community is encouraged to include aesthetic considerations in all management activities visible by the public. Together, we can improve the aesthetics of forestry activities, practice sustainable forestry, and maintain public acceptance of our practices.