

INFORMATION FOR FOREST LANDOWNERS

Forestry operations are highly visible and subject to the perceptions and opinions of an environmentally aware public. Furthermore, the image of the forest industry is directly influenced by the perceived quality of forest operations. Conducting operations in an aesthetically acceptable manner is important to the future of the forests in Texas. We believe that concerns about the aesthetics of forest operations can be addressed by using aesthetics guidelines published by the Forest Resources Association/American Forest and Paper Association and Forestry Best Management Practices published by the Texas Forest Service. Both publications are available through Texas Forestry Association or on the Internet at www.pfmt.org/aesthetics/ and txforestservice.tamu.edu/.

Forestry aesthetics is the application of practices that enhance the visual quality of management for forest products. These practices should be carried out with the companion goals of protecting and conserving water and air quality, soil productivity and wildlife habitat. Operations that are likely to have the greatest impact on aesthetics, which Webster describes as "a perception of beauty," include road locations/construction/maintenance, harvesting/logging, site preparation for reforestation including the use of forest chemicals and prescribed burning. Advance planning is recommended for each operation as a proactive approach to improving forest aesthetics. Consideration should be given to the visual aspects and concerns of each forestry operation as outlined below. Furthermore, management decisions should be based on the degree of visual sensitivity appropriate to the site.

FOREST ROADS

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

- Minimize the number and width of roads necessary to meet objectives.
- Control water movement and erosion with BMPs for forest roads.
- Locate roads to minimize visibility from highly utilized travel routes.
- Close and stabilize temporary roads upon completion of activities.
- Provide appropriate access control to minimize unauthorized traffic.
- Avoid excessive rutting and erosion and tracking mud on to public roads.

TIMBER HARVESTING

Good harvest planning significantly reduces the impact of timber harvesting on visual quality. Look at what you plan to do as you might see it immediately after a logging operation, be it a thinning or a clear cut, and visualize how it would look if seen from a public road, or nearby residential or recreational area. Important considerations are harvest timing, harvest method, harvest area shape and size, timber felling and skidding, and logging decks. Some practices to consider when conducting timber harvesting include:

- Minimize harvesting impacts during wet conditions.
- Avoid large clear-cuts visible from major travel routes, recreational areas, and viewsheds.
- Use aesthetic management zones (AMZs) or streamside management zones (SMZs) as buffers next to major travel routes or recreational areas. There are tax advantages for AMZs and SMZs in Texas. Check with a consultant or professional forester for more information.
- Consider alternative methods to clear cutting adjacent to major travel routes, residential and commercial areas, recreational areas, etc.
- Avoid leaving high stumps and damaged or broken trees
- Consider removing or lopping tops down within viewing area.
- When thinning, consider establishing operating corridors parallel to viewing areas.

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 viewsheds, and proper restoration upon completion of logging. Practices to consider include:

- Dispose of all trash and litter properly.
- Restore and stabilize log decks and landings promptly.
- Scatter or dispose of slash and stumps as soon as possible.
- Plan in advance by taking locations, terrain, size, and number of decks into consideration.
- Avoid decks and landings in full view of major travel routes or near property lines.

SITE PREPARATION 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:

- Follow land contours on slopes when using mechanical site prep and planting techniques.
- Avoid off-site applications and protect sensitive areas, aesthetics management zones, streamside management zones, and neighboring properties.
- Consider keeping slash piles to a minimum and leveling or burning unscreened slash piles.
- Consider felling damaged trees and dead vegetation to create a clean cut appearance.
- Avoid broadcast application of herbicides in exceptionally visible and/or environmentally sensitive areas. Consider ground applied banded or spot applications in these areas.
- Avoid chemical applications near schools, churches, public areas during active hours.
- Respect adjacent landowners' privacy.
- Notify adjacent residents prior to treatment.
- Develop flight and application plans to minimize off-site flyovers and turns.
- Consider orienting planting rows parallel to roadways or viewing areas.

PRESCRIBED BURNING

Prescribed burning is one of the most effective tools for controlling undesirable vegetation, improving wildlife habitat, reducing major fire hazards and improving management access. However, prescribed burning, smoke, and burned sites may produce visual impacts and other concerns among the public, particularly if conditions aren't totally favorable for burning. Some practices to consider include:

- Monitor weather and possible smoke impacts closely before, during, and after burning.
- Burn only during periods of good smoke dispersal.
- Notify adjacent residents prior to the burn.
- Avoid affecting smoke sensitive areas or visually sensitive areas.

In summary, overall management objectives and special considerations play a key role in aesthetics planning. Flexibility in operational planning and in applying these guidelines is necessary when addressing catastrophes, different forest types, and unique conditions. The entire forestry community should be encouraged to include aesthetic considerations in its overall management approach. Together, we can improve the aesthetics of forestry operations and the application of sustainable forestry practices.