

WHAT IS CLEARCUTTING ?

This article is written by Michael W. Skenfield, Registered Professional Forester No. 1597 in state of California, and distributed as an educational tool by the Sierra Nevada Logging Museum, White Pines, California. Mr. Skenfield has been a forester in the Sierra Nevada Range for over 50 years. He is also a soil erosion specialist and a Professional Wetland Scientist.

Based on the science of Forestry, timber harvests are a forest improvement tool, not a means of economic gain. Economics comes into play as part the harvesting process because the sale of timber provides the revenue for conducting forest improvement and protection work. Economics is not what determines a timber harvest method. Harvest methods are based on what a specific forest type needs to maintain a healthy and sustainable tree population.

There are two basic harvest methods recognized by the science of Forestry for the Mixed Conifer (ponderosa pine, sugar pine, incense cedar and white fir) forests of the Sierra Nevada Range:

- **Selection** - choosing individual trees based on their health (susceptibility to bark-beetle attack or a weakened condition from disease) and on their dominance over vigorous young trees attempting to attain a mature position in the forest. Choosing trees for removal must also be based on what provides for the sustained yield (long-term production) of the forest.

- **Regeneration (clearcut)** - removing all trees in a given area so that the forest block can be regenerated (replanted). In Mixed Conifer this method can only be chosen when the existing forest area is in poor condition (from fire, insect attack, disease or from previous logging operations) so that a healthy forest cannot be maintained. An important objective for the forest land owner is for the forest land to produce as much growth(volume) as it can for the given soil and water available. This is much like an orchard owner choosing to rip out (clearcut) a field of fruit trees that have become old and unhealthy. On privately-owned timber land, regeneration harvests must be replanted and must reach a standard density (stocking) within five years or the area must be planted again. This requirement and many other strict standards are set for timber harvest operations on private land under the California Forest Practice Act (Z'berg-Nejedley 1973) and the California Forest Practice Rules Article 3. Silvicultural Methods. Please check out the website for further clarification: www.calfire.ca.gov/resource_mgt/downloads/2013_FP_Rulebook.

To know anything about forest management practices in California, it is essential to at least browse through the Forest Practice Rules to see what the law requires of anyone cutting commercial timber species. Loggers don't just go cut trees as they please! Trees considered Commercial Species must be harvested only after a plan has been prepared by a Registered Professional Forester and approved by the state Board of Forestry. A proposed "clearcut" harvest must meet all the requirements of the Rules including reforestation, erosion control, wildlife protection and water quality protection. Logging contractors hired to harvest trees and transport logs must be licensed by the state (Licensed Timber Operators) and must comply with the Rules.

Since the early 1900's our country's foresters and loggers have worked toward conserving our natural resources. Sustained yield is the objective of sound forestry practices! Carefully planned and implemented clearcuts are a means for starting anew in areas of the forest that need a new start. Within a few years the harvested block is covered with young trees and a cycle begins for growth toward maturity. Foresters know that there are many challenges related to managing large forested acreages, but with over one hundred years of experience and continued research efforts, foresters can meet these challenges. Foresters are available to answer questions on this subject at sierraloggingmuseum.org.