BRITISH COLUMBIA

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Statutory Decision Makers
(see attached distribution list)

Dear Colleagues:

The Inter-Agency Management Committee (IAMC) recommends that the procedures outlined in the attached document be used during the current mountain pine beetle outbreak to manage forest health in special ecological areas such as old growth management areas (OGMAs). The procedures are designed to allow mountain pine beetle salvage to be effectively addressed without unduly compromising biodiversity.

This document is a modification of the procedures released earlier as Biodiversity Conservation Committee (BCC) Update #5. The changes made were in response to input from industry and the Ministry of Forests.

These procedures will be repeated in BCC Update #6 which also contains guidance on replacement of OGMAs. That update is in preparation and will be released once the appropriate reviews have been completed.

If you have any questions about the procedures, please contact Robin Hoffos at this office.

Yours truly,

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Procedures for Implementation of the MPB-Biodiversity Strategy During the Outbreak Phase

Introduction

The Mountain Pine Beetle–Biodiversity Strategy established procedures for addressing forest health and biodiversity during severe outbreak conditions. Implementation of the strategy has revealed some concerns. First, licensees have objected to the requirements for intensive probing when clearcuts are proposed inside ecological features. Second, during the current major beetle outbreak situation, the ability to find and maintain stable replacement areas for damaged, ecological features is almost impossible.

Consequently, a modified approach has been developed. The new approach is expected to achieve an equivalent level of land stewardship to the strategy while promoting economic utilization of damaged stands, but provides clearer direction to proponents and managers.

Procedures

The strategy, as previously developed, is still regarded as the most appropriate procedure for addressing strategic harvesting choices pertaining to MPB and biodiversity. For low levels of MPB attack (<10%), where single tree and patch cutting is appropriate, the strategy should be followed. The modified approach is provided only in situations where clearcuts are proposed or replacement areas should be considered.

Consistent with the approved strategy, there must be compelling reasons to warrant clearcut harvesting within an ecological feature. The ecological feature must constitute a major threat to forest health at the landscape level or the ecological attributes of the feature must be so compromised that replacement is warranted. In the latter case, the high level of susceptibility of older pine stands leaves few options for replacement.

The biological value of a stand is not governed solely by the level of tree mortality, but rather by its aggregate condition (all attributes considered). Even stands with high mortality contain snags, coarse woody debris, understory characteristics and recruiting forest, which all contribute to biodiversity. Consequently, the biodiversity value of these stands can only be assessed relative to other candidate stands in that area and such assessments are only meaningful once the MPB epidemic has subsided.

The strategy, including this modified approach represent a **strategic** approach to decision-making. It is best not to prepare silviculture prescriptions until the strategic assessment has shown that harvesting is warranted. Efficiencies and cost savings will not accrue unless this procedure is followed.

The following textbox represents a summary of recommended procedures for different levels of MPB attack and harvesting approaches. For more detail, consult the MPB-Biodiversity Strategy

1. Current attack levels <10%. Single tree and patch cutting of infected pine only consistent with the approved strategy

2. Current attack levels >10% and clearcutting is proposed:

a) Conduct grid probes and harvesting of grid cells consistent with the MPB-Biodiversity Conservation strategy, **OR**

b) Where intensive grid probes are **not** conducted:

Clearcut harvesting of the pine component within ecological features can occur only when the following criteria are met.

i) The outbreak is within the **Suppression MPB zone** and the ecological feature is deemed to represent a **major** threat to the surrounding landscape because:

- Current pine attack level within the feature is greater than 10%, and
- Adjacent pine stands within the normal flight distance (2km flight distance at 11-20% attack; 5 km flight distance at >20% attack) are common and highly susceptible to attack, and
- Sanitation of all infected, adjacent pine stands within the normal flight range of the MPB can, and will be implemented before the next beetle flight,

OR

ii) The outbreak is within the **Maintain Low MPB zone** and the ecological feature is deemed to be a **leading** infection center within the zone, representing a **major** threat to the surrounding landscape because:

- Current pine attack level within the feature is greater than 20% and
- Adjacent pine stands within the normal flight distance (5km) are common and highly susceptible to attack and
- Sanitation of all infected, adjacent pine stands within the normal flight range of the MPB can, and will be implemented before the next beetle flight,

OR

iii) The outbreak is within any zone and the **mortality** within the ecological feature exceeds 80% and

- Suitable replacement areas of mature or old forest comprised of <25% pine are available within the same LU NDT-BEC unit.

Where clearcutting of the pine component is proposed in an ecological feature, the proponent will provide the required *strategic assessments* along with a recommended replacement area

to the MOF District Manager. MSRM and WLAP will review the proposed replacement areas as a referral and provide a response to MOF within 3 weeks.
Replacement areas must be within the same NDT-BEC subunit of the landscape unit and should be equivalent or greater in size to the area harvested. Maps are required to show the location, area and forest cover characteristics of both the clearcut and candidate replacement areas. Within harvested areas, tree species other than lodgepole pine should be reserved for long term diversity and exceptional care should be taken when logging. Damage should never exceed 10% of the pre-harvest basal area of the non-pine species.

Where proposals do not meet the above criteria, clearcutting of the pine component should not occur within ecological features. Even stands with high levels of attack may represent the best available options for biodiversity and therefore should be left for assessment once the epidemic has subsided.

Once the epidemic has declined in the region or sub-region, MSRM will review OGMAs to determine where harvest and replacement is warranted. Consistent with achieving the balance of land uses in the region, socioeconomic considerations will apply to the assessment of harvest and replacement options.