FOREST PRACTICES CODE

General Bulletin

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Preparation of Silviculture Prescriptions for Emergency Situations

Introduction

This bulletin has been prepared to assist the district manager and is designed to provide advice related to the best available information for SP preparation, where emergency harvesting is required. Circumstances exist that limit the quality of information being used at the time of SP preparation and approval. This advice is meant to apply under only those limited circumstances where an emergency may have restricted the normal planning expectations – it must not be used as an excuse for poor planning.

For example, in years of severe bark beetle infestation, one of the tools used to manage these population explosions is initial attack strategies which involve timber harvesting. New areas of beetle infestation do not become known until the late summer or fall after a forest health survey has been completed. The identification of beetle infested areas in late summer of fall will often limit field collection data for SP preparation.

Discussion

To prevent further spread of the beetle population, harvesting needs to take place during the winter before the beetles emerge the next spring. This means there is extremely limited time to prepare an SP prior to approaching adverse weather conditions, (frozen ground and deep snow cover) when assessing the area for critical site factors, soil conditions or small streams.

For these circumstances, there are two avenues to follow:

1. Where volumes are less than 500m^3, or clear cut areas are less than 1 ha., including contiguous openings that are subject to a previous SP exemption.

   An area may be exempted from an SP, however, the DM may apply conditions to the exemption to recognize unique characteristics of the site or other identified resource features that need to be addressed.

2. Where volumes are greater than 500m^3, or clear cut areas are greater than 1 ha., including contiguous openings that are subject to a previous SP exemption.

Preparation of the SP is based on best information available. In normal practice, it is expected that a detailed site assessment will be completed in order to address key aspects

of the SP, including riparian, reforestation, terrain stability, soil disturbance, archaeology, and other resource features. In emergency situations, best information may be based on information gathered on an adjacent site, local knowledge, use of soil maps for the area, or familiarity with similar sites elsewhere, but should always include a ground check. This may be aided by photo interpretation.

There is recognition of the uncertainties associated with preparation of the SP based on best information when it must be provided when the ground is covered by snow. Increased reliance on the judgement of the professional forester making the prescription may help satisfy the SDM that the plan meets the test of s41of the Act. The SDMs must turn their mind to the prescription and be satisfied the prescribing forester has indeed properly assessed the risks of proceeding with an SP without the benefit of a complete and thorough site assessment. Professional foresters are accountable for any and all work they do in their capacity as professionals. Accountability is exacted through the complaints and discipline process of the ABCPF. Reliance on professional accountability must be made and it must recognize that the professional who prepared the plan used their best judgement based on their knowledge and experience. They are accountable to the ABCPF. Before accepting an SP prepared under these circumstances there should be some assurances made by the licensee that the block will be harvested before the next beetle flight. It is also important to note that in some sensitive areas, (e.g. critical features are known to be present but can not be assessed due to site limitations) the prescribing forester or the DM may determine that it is not appropriate to write an SP without a full site assessment being completed.

FPC Act s34, s35 and s36 provide authority for amendments. For the example outlined above, the forester could state in the SP that a normal site assessment was not done and the site will be revisited to verify conditions and amend the plan to the extent necessary as soon as site conditions permit and before any unnecessary risks are encountered.

The preparation of the SP by the RPF and the approval by the SDM are distinct activities within the same administrative process. It is important that any issues (limitations) identified at the preparation stage be presented to the SDM at the approval stage for complete and full consideration.

Blocks with significant values such as fish streams, archaeological interest areas and wildlife habitat areas should be processed in the normal manner and rarely as an emergency. This means recognizing and relying on other regulated provisions such as s51 of the Act and provisions in the THPR. Districts should consider mechanisms for assessing such issues on a drainage-wide basis, in order to "clear" areas known to be at high susceptibility to beetle attack.

Finally, any strategies or measures (OPR s18(1)(t)) for harvesting in emergency situations should be expressed in the forest health sections of the FDP to provide a clear link between the two plans and ensure consistency is met. This strategy might include mapping of known areas of bark beetle attack on the FDP map.

References

1. FPC Administration Bulletin No. 6 - SPs for multiple salvage areas

2. FPC Administration Bulletin No. 5 - Guide to approving forest operational plans after June 15, 1998

3. Administration of Forest Operational Plans – Chapter 1 – Forest Development Plans

4. Administration of Forest Operational Plans – Chapter 2 – Silviculture Prescriptions

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