

September 13, 2020

Good Morning Fellow Forest Owners!

Fall is in the air but so is smoke! We are now in our traditional fire season and the threat of snow at any time helps us with fires that may start. Our thoughts and prayers are with our fellow forest landowners who may have been impacted by the fires that have occurred and we hope the next few weeks brings some moisture.

2020--the summer with no forestry field trips. Darn! The Forest Stewardship Classes were held but last-minute changes were made to adhere to the social distancing and mask requirements. Thanks to all the participants and advisors that braved our current situation and continue to work on their forests! There are a few online opportunities for continuing education so keep watching!

Hopefully, you were able to get out into your forest this summer, take a look around and enjoy. This social distancing did promote forest walks! As we get to the end of the growing season there are a few new opportunities to pursue on your property.

BLOWDOWN: We have had more wind than usual. Wind combined with the high amount of moisture we received has caused some blowdown to occur. It occurred mostly in the spring, but we have had some windstorms throughout the summer as well. Wind can affect all tree species but as a general rule there is less impact in species with a deep tap root. The tap root provides the structure to keep the tree upright. Ponderosa Pine and Western Larch have the strongest tap root and tend to withstand the wind the best. Douglas Fir follows with a moderate tap root and then there are Engelmann Spruce, Grand Fir, Subalpine Fir, Lodgepole Pine, Western Hemlock, and Western Red Cedar with their very shallow roots. These shallow rooted species like to grow in clumps and help each other stand up but the wind can take a toll on them. So what if you have blowdown? You have all heard that we need to leave some large woody debris out there for habitat...isn't that what the blowdown creates? Yes... it just comes down to amounts, timing, and consequences. If you have one tree come down, you may just decide it is great habitat. If you have 10 trees fall then you have a lot of habitat, a fire hazard, an economic opportunity, and a potential beacon for bugs...some of our friendly bark beetles. Once the bugs are present, and they run out of the down trees...they will target your standing green trees. This gets us right back to having a healthy forest on your property. If your forest is healthy. Healthy being a forest with a variety of species, not too overcrowded, and not too much fuel on the ground, then it may survive this setting without you doing anything. But if your forest is already stressed due to trees competing for resources, a drought, or other insects and disease, then the standing green trees may be at risk. Take another walk, assess your forest for health and then make your best estimate of the risk that blowdown may be to your forest. If you are thinking of harvest, now is the time to identify all features on your property that need to be protected as stated in the Montana SMZ Law and rules.

<http://dnrc.mt.gov/divisions/forestry/docs/assistance/practices/sMZfullcopy.pdf>

REGENERATION: This is the time of year to honestly assess the condition of regeneration in your forest—whether it is natural or artificial (planted). Maybe you took a walk in June and found that you had new natural seedlings coming in—that is great! But keep in mind that we have not had much moisture since July 1st, and those new seedlings do not have strong or large root systems. Natural seedlings are very vulnerable to drought and competition for the first few years. Now is the perfect time to evaluate the natural regeneration on your property. You may find that most of your little green

seedlings are now little red seedlings and are no longer viable. While it is not an outcome most of us want to see, it is a situation that we need to be aware of. If your goal is regeneration, and you find mortality in your current seedlings, you may need to reassess what actions will be needed to ensure that natural regeneration is still an option. As you walk, keep your eyes out for this year's cones, which may provide seed for additional regeneration, and the amount of Site Preparation (bare mineral soil) still present. These observations will become very important if your current seedlings look poor and you have concerns about low stocking levels in your trees. If you have planted trees (artificial regeneration) in the spring of 2020, and you have been watching them, hopefully you have found that they are in good condition. As with the natural regeneration, now is the time to do an end of the year assessment of their first growing season in your forest. If you have mortality, you may still be able to take advantage of site preparation and replant next spring. If you need to replace seedlings, October is the time to check on the DNRC seedling nursery website (<http://dnrc.mt.gov/divisions/forestry/business-management/conservation-seedling-nursery>) or your local forestry company to obtain additional seedlings to plant in the spring of 2021. Just a reminder, trees need to be planted close to the elevation that the tree seed originated. Local nurseries and DNRC can help you determine the most appropriate seedlings for your site.

BURNING: Although it may be hard to think about burning slash, we are getting closer to that time of year. Burning slash can impact our neighbors and our communities with a fire that escapes or by creating poor air quality. No one wants to contribute to those issues. Montana does have a designated burning season which falls between March 1st and November 30th. There are burning regulations/permits for each county so be sure and check with your local DNRC office prior to any burning. Also check air quality guidelines for your location. For example, for Flathead and Lake County go to DNRC website for permits : <http://www.firesafekalispell.com/> and for air quality : <https://flatheadhealth.org/environmental-health/burn-restrictions/>. Each county/DNRC office will have similar websites for additional information. These sites provide guidelines for any permits needed, and contacts for air quality assessment prior to burning. And of course, check the weather! If a dry wind is predicted, it may not be the right day for you to burn! Pick the time that is appropriate for your burning... snow or rain prior to burning your piles will help minimize "creep" as you burn. Although burning in the winter months can be accomplished with a permit, it is not preferred as the impact on air quality can be extremely high.

After burning, watch for "hold overs". A hold over occurs when the material in your pile is not totally consumed, or fire gets into a stump or root and never really goes out. Hold Overs can rekindle a week or many months later. Keep an eye out for any lingering smoke! Once burning is complete, if you had a Hazard Reduction Agreement (HRA) on your property due to commercial harvest, be sure to let your local service forester know when the burning is complete so your bond will be returned.

It's been quite a year. As we go into the fall there is always so much to do! Do what you can, but be kind to yourself. These forests are a lifelong journey! Take that walk and enjoy your forest! We will have the winter to plan and dream.

Take care.

Lorrie