



Michigan Department of Natural Resources

POLICY AND PROCEDURE

32.22-01 – Best Management Practices for Forest and Wildlife Management Adjacent to Recreational Trails (Issued: 11/01/2016)

Issue/Purpose:

To integrate designated public recreational trail opportunities with timber management and wildlife habitat activities on state forest land.

Policy:

The natural resources of the state are held in trust for the citizens of Michigan and it is the administrative responsibility of the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to manage and conserve these resources for use and enjoyment today and in the future. The DNR manages for acceptable and sustainable levels of use and conservation of timber and wildlife through careful consideration and understanding of multiple values and economic interests.

Management of state forest land provides direct economic benefits through the sale of timber, hunting, trapping, and many recreational uses including hiking, skiing, equestrian use, motorized trails, camping, and more.

Explanation:

The DNR policy and procedure [32.22-07 – Forest Management](#) details that state forests are to be managed for multiple-use benefits, and both Forest Resources (FRD) and Wildlife (WLD) Divisions are jointly charged with the responsibility of developing comprehensive management plans to ensure these benefits are realized. The two divisions collaborate in partnership with Fisheries Division, Parks and Recreation Division (PRD), Law Enforcement Division (LED), stakeholders and the public to manage timber, habitat, wildlife, and recreation on state forest lands for the benefit of current and future generations.

Most management decisions are made as part of the DNR's Compartment Review Process (DNR policy and procedure [32.22-15 – State Forest Inventory and Compartment Review](#)), which provides an opportunity for public review and input, and engages all DNR divisions in evaluating forest conditions and collaboratively making treatment prescriptions. Decisions are supported by scientific facts, and principles, and reflect the needs for timber and wildlife species, desires of stakeholders and users of the forest, and changing conditions.

Recreational trails traverse thousands of miles and are well dispersed in state forest land. Timber harvests are also periodically scheduled over much of the same area. With a few notable exceptions, these activities are not mutually exclusive, and they must be made as compatible as possible, allowing valuable timber to be harvested and wildlife habitat renewed, while minimizing adverse impacts on trails and the trail users, and retaining a trail for users.

Modifications and adaptations should be considered in the layout and administration of every timber harvest which involves a recreational trail. Timber sale specifications, contractor awareness, and corrective actions when necessary, all contribute to minimizing negative effects. When recreational trails pass through planned timber sales, staff must take reasonable and appropriate actions whenever possible to minimize or avoid damages or undesirable effects on trail users.

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Requirements:

In conformance with policy, procedure and written guidance, unit managers and wildlife biologists shall prepare draft treatment proposals for the forest utilizing the compartment review process. During this interdisciplinary process all resource values, including recreational values will be considered. PRD Unit Managers, Supervisors, and/or Recreation Specialists participate in this process to help ensure recreational values are considered along with timber, wildlife, and other values. Any differences in judgment which cannot be resolved at the compartment review will be referred to FRD District Supervisor, WLD Field Operations Manager, and PRD District Supervisor, and higher levels within FRD, WLD and PRD if not resolved at the district level.

Cover type management disturbs vegetation and alters the appearance of the land. These disturbances provide wildlife habitat, provide timber products, and maintain healthy forests. There's an increased sensitivity to aesthetics along recreation trails and pathways. There are a variety of approaches and considerable latitude in carrying out forest practices to reduce undesirable visual effects. Use the following approaches as appropriate:

- Utilize seasonal restrictions to reduce visual and user impact.
- Consider clearcutting only on one side of a recreational trail. When trees in the clearcut area are at least 3 years old or 5 feet high at the desired level of stocking (see [IC4371, Forest Certification Green-Up Guidelines](#)), then an adjacent stand can be treated by clearcutting. This does not apply to selective management.
- Utilize signage to inform trail users of logging operations. Signing needs for a sale should be discussed at compartment review and incorporated into plans for the timber harvest. Consider placing informational signs to explain what is happening and why the harvest is being conducted. Signing recreational trails during active logging operations shall be a standard practice, and done either by staff or via a requirement in the timber sale contract. The division performing the treatment will provide information to PRD for the signing of nearby campgrounds and parking areas. Signage placed in campgrounds or trailheads should include a public contact number for the local unit office for questions or to report issues or observations.
- Protect confidence markers by utilizing contract and permit specifications requiring protection of the markers. PRD will assess the need for additional confidence markers.
- Emphasize the retention of trees near or along the recreational trail. Many timber sales have standing trees retained for wildlife, seed and/or visual management purposes. Trees and patches of trees strategically left along recreational trails help preserve trail aesthetics. These patches should be substantial enough to withstand windthrow and not lead to increased trail maintenance.
- It must be noted that unmanaged green belts can present problems in the overall management of state forest lands. Narrow green belts have been tried in the past and often result in a significant number of blown down trees, creating unsafe hazard trees and requiring clean-up efforts. Shallow rooted trees such as jack pine rely upon canopy mass to withstand wind events. Green belts of larger width are not being managed as an integrated part of the forest system, and trees will be more susceptible to forest health issues. These forest health issues, such as oak wilt, can then move into nearby healthy forest stands. Leaving green belts along long stretches of trails also reduces the

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amount of timber volume available to the forest products industry. This practice is not recommended.

- Consider temporarily relocating trails when harvests occur. In some cases, permanent reroutes will be recommended and these should be proposed far enough in advance to allow a thorough review of trail proposals by all DNR divisions. In some cases, signage, direct contact with users, and media contact will be helpful to inform users of changes in trail location.
- Contract specifications should be developed and utilized to avoid using recreational trails during forest management operations where possible. If a recreational trail is used, it will be maintained in a passable condition on a daily basis. Normally, the widening of any single track recreational trail is not allowed.
- Recreational trails that are placed on forest roads do not give recreationalists exclusive use of those roads. Forest roads are utilized by many different types of users. In many cases, commercial vehicles utilizing these roads will perform road maintenance during their operations. Wherever possible, consideration will be given to using alternate trucking routes in order to avoid a recreational pathway. If a recreational trail crosses a road, commercial vehicles shall not block the trail crossing.
- Convert stands to cover types that are conducive to selection cut management if the site is suitable and it meets management objectives for the area. It must be noted that some forest types need to be clearcut in order to properly regenerate. In addition, some areas require extensive cutting due to forest health issues because dying trees can be a hazard to recreational users and make the trail difficult to use. Wildlife management sometimes requires large openings for species such as Kirtland's Warbler where the DNR is managing for preservation of threatened and endangered species.
- Manage the visual impact of slash adjacent to trails. Contract and use permit specifications shall prohibit leaving slash and debris on any recreational trail or road, campground roads or trailheads. Campgrounds shall have slash removed to allow a low ground clearance vehicle access onto the campsite.
- Where acceptable, large stands can be broken into smaller staggered age classes in groups or strips. Frequently, one of the first cut units can buffer the next cut.
- Design landing and decking areas away from recreational trails whenever possible. Creation of a new access road or decking area needs to be weighed against the disturbance to the landscape and impact on trail users. Loggers should not deck wood on or adjacent to recreational trails without DNR approval. This should be standard practice and included in timber sale specifications.
- Work with contractors on a one-to-one basis to make sure they are aware of trail concerns and to help avoid potential conflicts. Contractors often come up with ways to protect and improve trails at the pre-sale conference.
- Ensure timber sale contractors are aware of the presence of recreational trails by including a notice in the sale prospectus, displaying recreational trails on maps, and reviewing trail locations during the presale conference.

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- Timber sale administrators shall provide information to contractors informing them of recreational user concerns regarding operation of equipment.
- PRD shall inform WLD and FRD of upcoming events at least 30 days in advance. Timber sale administrators shall advise contractors of an event and provide guidance on how to minimize impact to event participants. Timber sale administrators shall inform PRD of active timber sites during a scheduled event to allow PRD time to place informational signage at appropriate trailheads and campgrounds.
- The DNR enforces timber sale contract specifications for all operations and takes appropriate remedial measures to address contract violations. Contracts involving recreational trails are administered to ensure trails are maintained in a safe and usable condition and that all contract specifications are followed. Timber sale administration site visits may occur more frequently when recreational trails are in the sale area. PRD recreation specialists will be provided an opportunity to view the site before the sale is closed.

Additional Equestrian considerations:

- Temporary trail reroutes through nearby untreated stands may be the most effective way to avoid user conflict. Temporary reroutes may be a narrow 3 to 4 foot wide trail, and equestrian groups are often willing to assist in the trail relocation.
- Equipment operation can spook horses, and contractors may be able to voluntarily minimize impacts by avoiding trail users, idling down equipment while horses pass, or perhaps even shutting down engines. Timber sale administrators will provide information to contractors informing them of equestrian concerns regarding operation of equipment.
- If possible, avoid using cobblestone or sharp-edged stone or rock to repair rutting or holes on designated equestrian trails (22a or 23a road gravel is acceptable). If using cobblestone or large sharp-edged stone on designated equine trails, top dress it with a surface layer that is acceptable for horse traffic.
- If wood must be decked along a designated equestrian trail, such as the Shore-to-Shore trail, the decked wood shall not be higher than 8 feet, and only placed on one side of the trail.

Administering Division:

Forest Resources Division

Related Reference:

[32.22-07 – Forest Management](#)

[32.22-15 – State Forest Inventory and Compartment Review,](#)

DNR Green-Up Guidelines

FRD Visual Management Handbook

[IC4371, Forest Certification Green-Up Guidelines](#)

Michigan DNR State Trails Implementation Plan

Right to Forest Act PA 676 of 2002

Work Instruction 6.2: Integrating Public Recreational Opportunities with Management on State Forest Lands

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Keith Greagh, Director Effective Date