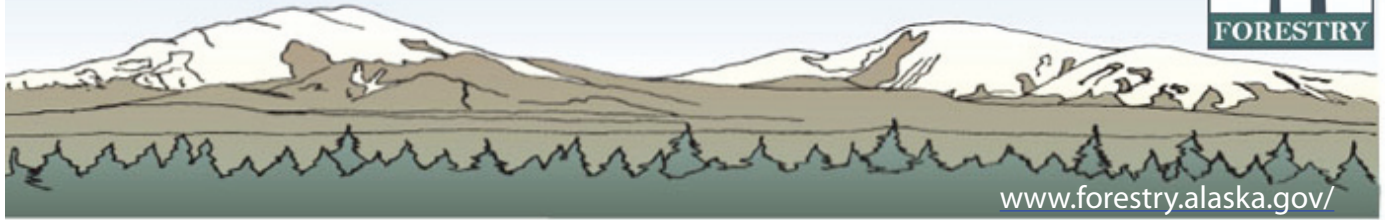


CUTTING FIREWOOD



The woodstove or fireplace is the centerpiece of many homes on chilly Alaska evenings. As heating fuel prices rise, more people are looking to this renewable fuel to heat their homes.

Wood is plentiful in most areas of Alaska and many people turn to their own property to harvest firewood. Selectively removing less desirable trees from the forest can increase its overall productivity by reducing competition for light and nutrients, allowing the remaining trees to benefit from more available resources.

GET PERMISSION FIRST

Before you cut firewood from land other than your own, get permission from the landowner. Determine if permits are required or if there are guidelines to follow.

The State of Alaska Division of Forestry allows cutting firewood for personal use on designated areas of state land. Contact your local Forestry office for a permit and the locations where firewood cutting is allowed. A directory of state offices can be found at www.forestry.alaska.gov/divdir.htm.

Some areas in the Chugach and Tongass national forests are open to cutting firewood. Contact a U.S. Forest Service office for locations and requirements. A directory of Forest Service offices in Alaska can be found at www.fs.fed.us/r10/.

WOOD SMOKE AFFECTS AIR QUALITY

Wood smoke contributes to air pollution and poor air quality. Smoke contains microscopic particles that, when inhaled, can cause health problems and agitate respiratory conditions. Newer stoves and fireplaces are more efficient and produce fewer emissions but they cannot eliminate them.

To increase the efficiency of your woodstove and reduce air pollution, build smaller, hotter fires, which burn the fuel more completely and produce fewer emissions. Do not burn green wood or let fires smolder. Season firewood for at least six months (preferably 12) to allow your fire to burn hotter. Avoid burning on days when advised not to by local air quality reports and on days when there is little wind to stir the air. Have your stove or fireplace cleaned and inspected yearly by a professional to keep it functioning properly and efficiently. For information about woodstoves and ways to reduce wood stove emissions visit: www.dec.state.ak.us/air/anpms/as/pm/wshome.htm. For more information about heating with firewood visit: <http://www.alaskawoodheating.com/>.

SAFETY FIRST

Felling trees can be fun and exciting but it is also very dangerous. Never work alone and pay attention to those working around you. When using chainsaws, splitters, and other power tools, read and understand the user manual and obey all safety precautions. Use proper personal protective equipment including a hard hat, safety glasses, hearing protection, a sturdy pair of boots and gloves, and protective chainsaw pants or chaps.

A sharp chainsaw will make the felling and bucking process easier, safer, and more enjoyable. Identify and be aware of any hazards in the area such as power lines, roads, vehicles, or structures. Also carefully inspect each tree for defects, lean, and other safety hazards, and make sure that the

drop zone and your escape route are clear before starting to fell a tree. Trees with large cracks or have conks (mushrooms) on the trunk can be dangerous so be extremely cautious when removing them. Conks on the trunk indicate that decay is present in the stem, possibly creating an unsafe tree. If the tree is not posing an immediate danger to users of the forest, it provides good habitat for cavity nesting bird and animals and can be left alone.

Identifying potentially hazardous trees and conditions requires knowledge, training, and experience. If the safety of one or more trees concerns you, consult with someone who has extensive experience with unsafe trees or hire a professional. For more information about hazardous trees visit the U.S. Forest Service hazard tree management website at www.fs.fed.us/r10/spf/fhp/hazard/.

HARVEST WISELY AND WITH CARE

Plan to make use of every part of the tree, leaving nothing to waste. Branches, tops, and even the small twigs can be used as kindling. Scatter any remaining debris such as leaves, needles, and fine branches in the forest. Another option is to chip any unused debris and place it around trees or in landscape beds as mulch.

When selecting trees for firewood, choose those whose removal can improve the condition of the forest. Remove trees that:

- have a lean or a sweep in the trunk,
- have misshapen or otherwise irregular trunks,
- have been overtopped by other more vigorous trees,
- are dead but still standing (unless they are habitat snags),
- are down and have not begun to decay.

To help reduce habitat for spruce beetles, all spruce trunks and branches greater than four inches in diameter should be debarked and dried in sunny areas away from other mature spruce. Spruce beetle adults look for new trees to lay eggs in from late May through mid-August so do not prune or damage live spruce during that period.



Conks indicate decay. Exercise extreme caution and consider professional assistance when removing a tree with conks.

Harvest carefully and avoid damaging the trees and other plants that you intend to leave. If you use a winch to remove logs, do not allow the logs or the cable to rub or drag along the remaining trees as this can cause permanent damage or kill them by removing bark and damaging roots.

Obey any rules or restrictions of the landowner and do not fell trees that are marked for other planned harvests, or those marked to be left for wildlife habitat or seed trees.

THE BIG PICTURE

The forest is home to thousands of creatures and plants, both large and small, so when deciding which trees to harvest, keep the long term health of the forest ecosystem in mind. Standing dead trees play an important role in forest ecology and many species of birds, mammals, and insects depend on the habitat these dead trees provide. Try to maintain one to six standing dead snags per acre. Tall trees such as cottonwood, hemlock, and spruce located near water may provide perching sites for eagles, hawks, ravens, and other birds, so from a wildlife standpoint its best to leave them. Watch for active nesting sites and cavities, and leave those trees alone.

If you are harvesting trees from your own property, consider developing a management plan to guide your harvesting activities. The Division of Forestry Forest Stewardship Program assists private landowners in forest planning and in the active management of forest resources. More details about this program and how it can help you can be found at www.forestry.alaska.gov/stewardship/ or by calling (907) 761-6309 in Palmer.