

Oregon's timber harvest regulations

In Oregon, private forest landowners, loggers and timber companies harvest trees in a variety of ways, but all must comply with the Oregon Forest Practices Act. The state law outlines a set of rules for private timber harvesting aimed to protect soil productivity, water quality and wildlife habitat, and ensure replanting after harvest.

With clearcutting, for instance, the state requires leaving forested buffers around streams as well as some standing trees and down logs for wildlife habitat. The forest practices rules also limit the size of clearcuts, and the entire harvest area has to be planted with seedlings to grow into a new forest.

Private forest landowners must notify the state of a planned timber harvest. These timber harvest notices are used by Oregon Department of Forestry stewardship foresters to inspect logging sites throughout the state and respond to complaints about potential violations of the forest practices rules. Stewardship foresters spend a lot of their time educating landowners about the rules, but also have the authority to cite and fine those who break the law.

State forest protection rules governing private timber harvest

Limits on clearcutting

Oregon rules limit clearcuts to 120 acres, and adjacent areas in the same ownership cannot be clearcut until new trees on the original harvest site are at least four feet tall or are four years-old and the stand is free-to-grow. This “green-up rule” must be met before harvest can occur on an adjacent stand, meaning Oregon has an additional standard beyond survival for establishing a new forest.

Stream buffers

Oregon law requires that trees be left as buffers along streams to protect water quality and fish habitat. Forested buffers shade streams and keep the water cool. Trees fall into streams and form aquatic habitat. Buffer widths vary depending on stream size and whether the streams contain fish or provide drinking water.

Leave trees and down logs

Logging crews must leave at least two live trees or two snags and two large logs on the ground per acre for wildlife habitat.

Forest roads

The location, construction, maintenance, use and drainage of forest roads used by logging crews must prevent sediment from getting into streams. State rules encourage roads to be built away from streams and to minimize the number of times a road crosses a stream. When a road does cross a stream, fish must be able to pass through the crossing.

Wet-weather hauling

Log trucks may not use some forest roads during wet weather, to avoid muddying streams. Roads that are used during winter months must be properly maintained.

Landslides

The state can prevent private timber harvest on a steep slope if homes or busy roads lie in the path of a potential landslide that could begin in the harvest area.

Planting

Seedlings must be planted within two years after harvest. Within six years of harvest, young trees must be tall enough to out-compete grass and brush and grow into the next forest.

A Day in the Woods: Clearcutting

Join Mike Cloughesy and Nicole Strong as they talk about clearcutting in Oregon's forests. People are surprised to learn that there is not only an economic advantage to clearcutting, but an ecological one as well - at least for Oregon's state tree, the Douglas-fir.

