

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
WASHINGTON 25, D.C.

In reply refer to:
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Memorandum

To: Washington Office and All Field Offices
From: Acting Director
Subject: Policy on Cutting and Use of Forest Material

Intensified interest by conservation agencies and organizations in the over-all policy concerning cutting and removal, or use of park vegetation, and the application of that policy in field areas have focused our attention on existing policy statements as they appear in the National Park Service Administrative Manual and memoranda. In order to clarify and coordinate this material, the following restatement of policy has been prepared. This statement simply brings together material now found in the Manual and clarifies the intent of certain phases of the general policy. This material will be incorporated in the revised Administrative Manual as pertinent sections are prepared and issued.

Vegetation

The vegetation within each area of the National Park System is an important element of that area, and any modification of the vegetation that creates an environment in conflict with the basic purposes for which the area was established must not be permitted. Within areas in the National Park System, everything is conserved, and removal of trees or other vegetation is done only for reasons of safe public use or for protection of the area. Salvage of forest products is simply incidental to removal and shall never be the reason for removal.

In the scenic and scientific areas preservation of the vegetation in a natural condition is paramount, and management and use must be subordinated to this primary objective. On the other hand, the vegetation in historical areas, parkways and similar areas, should be managed and maintained in such manner as to perpetuate settings or environments in keeping with their primary purpose. In all areas, any clashes of proposed use or activities must be resolved on the basis of primary concern for the things the Service is charged with protecting.

In all areas, certain cutting and removal projects are necessary: (1) to protect and maintain the vegetation within the areas; and (2) to provide, under approved development programs, for safe use and full enjoyment of the areas by the people. In contrast, the cutting or removal of any live or dead vegetation for the primary purpose of use, sale or exchange, violates the fundamental purpose of the areas as expressed in the basic laws and regulations relating to them.

Use, sale or exchange of forest materials shall be permitted only in accordance with the authority contained in Section 3 of the Act of August 25, 1916 (39 Stat. 535), when such utilization is incidental to approved protection or development projects, and when the removal will not result in damage to other fundamental values. Types of cuttings or clearings and disposals permitted under this policy are summarized as follows:

1. Cuttings or clearings necessary in the construction of fire lines for the control of existing wildland fire.

Also, superintendents are authorized to designate sites in selected areas for fire control training, including cutting or clearing. However, this shall be in areas removed from visitor use and in locations where unnatural conditions already exist, and the authority must be exercised with restraint and good judgment.

2. Reduction of Recognized Fuel-Fire Hazards. Provision may be made to reduce the fire hazard in and surrounding visitor use and administrative areas and along main traveled roads, particularly where flashy fuels and annual vegetation create an exceptionally high fuel fire hazard. Method and degree of treatment will depend upon the circumstances in each case, and preservation of forest and wildlife values must be given primary consideration. Cutting or salvage in interior areas to reduce fire hazards resulting from fires, insects or diseases, blowdowns, storms, floods, avalanches, etc., can be justified only under extreme or unusual conditions. Such cutting or salvage shall not normally be practiced in areas of the National Park System, and each proposal must be individually recommended through channels and approved by the Director. Similarly, construction of fire breaks to provide physical breaks in the event of fire occurrence require normal review and approval of each proposal before such work can be undertaken.

3. Control of Insect and Disease Pests. Under the broad policy of endeavoring to maintain the park areas free from introduced insect and disease pests and to procure and maintain endemic conditions of native pests, control treatments frequently require cutting, treatment and sometimes removal of host plants. Normally only those species, particularly tree forms, actually attacked or damaged by the pest are felled, treated, or removed in accordance with sound pathological or entomological considerations. Projects for the control of epidemics normally require review and decision by the Washington Office before work is undertaken. Routine maintenance control work, particularly in public use areas, should be carried on as needed to insure adequate protection of the area. However, removal of potential or risk trees as practiced in silvicultural control of bark beetles by timber management agencies or industries shall not be practiced in areas of the National Park System.

4. Reduction or control of exotics or noxious plants. The policy of excluding exotic species shall be adhered to as a primary objective. Where exotic species already exist and are to be retained, they should be kept under reasonable control at all times. Eradication or control of poison ivy and similar poisonous or noxious plants may be undertaken, whenever practicable, in and immediately adjacent to public use or administrative areas.

5. Construction and maintenance of roads, trails, and utility rights of way and building and development sites, including winter use areas, under the approved development program. Cuttings and clearings shall be restricted to the right of way or development site, after the boundaries have been defined on approved plans and forest material may be used or otherwise disposed of through sale or exchange when such removal will not result in damage to adjoining vegetation or to other fundamental values.

6. Vista or similar clearings for esthetic or special effects and restoration and maintenance of historic settings when the work is done in accordance with a special or long-range program approved for the area. Forest products may be salvaged when removal will not result in damage to other values.

7. Elimination of vegetation hazardous to life and property. Some dead snags, large dead limbs, live but weakened trees standing near or overhanging heavily used roads, public use or administrative areas are hazardous to property and people and should be removed in accordance with legal requirements. Forest products may be salvaged when removal will not result in damage to other values.

8. Construction of minor structures, such as trail bridges, patrol cabins, etc., in isolated areas where it is clearly impractical to secure construction material from outside the area. All cutting for such projects, however, shall be done with due regard to the preservation of the forest, wildlife and landscape features.

Recently, it was necessary to issue a brief statement covering the policy of the National Park Service on salvage logging and for your information it is quoted below:

"The authority of a park superintendent to remove timber or other material is limited to areas designated on the Master Plan for public use, such as campgrounds, roads, administrative areas, etc. Within these sites only such trees and other vegetation are removed as are absolutely necessary for the development, and for public safety. The park superintendent is responsible for carrying out this policy in park development, and for maintaining such areas in safe condition for visitor use. The salvage material removed is a product of the operation and it is utilized merely because not to do so would be wasteful. Salvage is never the primary reason for removal of any vegetation.

"Problems arising outside of these designated use areas such as blowdowns which create fire hazards, or insect infestations of epidemic proportions must be referred to the regional office and then to this Office for study and approval before control action may be initiated. If these problem sites are along existing roads, material may be salvaged which needs to be removed and is excess to the normal ecological cover. Such salvage proposals must be included in the justification furnished for the work. Clean-up must be done carefully to maintain this normal balance. There will be no removal of 'potential' insect hazard trees and it has never been the policy of the National Park Service to do so."

You will note that the above quotation is simply a summary statement of the complete policy outlined previously in this memorandum.


Acting Director