

FOREST SERVICE

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Sales

Sales Policy  
(Selective Logging)

Portland, Oregon  
October 16, 1934.

Forest Supervisor,

Dear Sir:

It is considered that past experience of the Forest Service with clear cutting in the fir region together with the developments of truck and tractor logging and the findings of the research foresters of the Service, fully warrant the consideration of a change in timber sales policy. Clear cutting has always been questionable because of its tremendous losses in forest productivity, partly because of its attendant extreme fire hazard, frequently resulting in reburns and forest devastation, also because of the low degree of timber utilization. It is concluded that clear cutting practices on National Forest lands should be abandoned if possible and systems of selective logging devised and substituted.

Our experience has demonstrated that clear cutting which changes the natural forest cover and naturally moist growing conditions of the forest into large openings, exposed to the sun, and resulting in both voluntary and involuntary fires destroying the vegetable matter and actual soil fertility, is too costly in growth losses. A clear cut forest loses its productivity in wood products for a period of a few years awaiting the establishment of seedlings and for a further period of many years awaiting the establishment of pole size trees. Not only does the forest suffer this loss in productivity, which is largely avoidable under a selective system, but also with its exposed condition to the sun and wind, its inflammability is increased to the point where additional fires subsequent to the slashing fire frequently occur resulting in loss of the future crop, further loss in soil fertility and further threat to surrounding areas. Clear cutting methods as practiced also result in the destruction of tremendous numbers of younger trees of all ages and sizes below merchantable, and a loss in wood volume equal to nearly 20 M ft. BM per acre of the merchantable timber crop.

It is believed that these conditions can be rectified very largely by the adoption of intensive forestry practices involving light cutting systems which will retain a large percentage of the forest canopy and thereby preserve the forest growing conditions, will preserve the fertility and will obviate the burning of large areas with slash fires. Selective logging will also permit of a far higher degree of utilization-- particularly since timber may be sold and logged only when economic demand permits both tree selection and satisfactory utilization.

The immediate future policy therefore will be to develop, test and put into effect selective logging with individual tree and small group selection in western Oregon and Washington. Under this system clear cut areas of as much as 5 or 10 acres should be infrequent. Light cuttings involving 10 to 20% of the volume will either create slight additional hazard or permit of reduction at reasonable expense. Subsequent cuttings will be made at such intervals as will avoid accumulated increase in fire hazard. Where reduction of slash hazard is desirable it will be secured by piling and burning or by spot burning where small areas are clear cut. Truck transportation, tractor ground logging and carefully controlled short distance high lead logging on scattered small areas make the selection system possible.

The many complex problems incident to the adoption of this system will be attacked aggressively at once so that marking rules and logging methods applicable to various types and silvicultural conditions may be evolved. It is planned that these problems will be attacked both by logging from CCC camps on a demonstration and fact-finding basis, and through the detailed preparation of marking systems and logging plans to be supervised by Forest officers in timber cuttings under sale. Under the selection system it is planned that the logging methods will be stipulated by the Forest Service logging engineers and closely supervised by a Forest officer on the ground at all times.

Without publicity at present, therefore, because of the need for practicing selective logging on the ground to gain the needed experience in the beginnings of such intensive forestry practices, I am asking Forest Supervisors to turn their minds toward this selective cutting objective in the sales work, since we must solve this basic forestry problem.

Nothing in this letter should be taken to invalidate any existing sale contract in any respect. Existing contracts, however, which have not been lived up to by the purchaser and can be cancelled properly should be considered for cancellation action. Present experience is limited to favorable topography and other conditions. Further developments will provide acceptable methods for utilization of stands on rough topography of other difficult situations. The possibility of applying this system must be considered in connection with every application for National Forest timber. It is realized that any change in policy may have considerable affect on timber sale receipts in the immediate future. This is not objectionable in view of the burdensome oversupply of stumpage in private hands and considering the need for furthering the stabilization of the lumber industry as a legitimate part of the conservation program.

Very truly yours,

C. J. BUCK.  
Regional Forester.