

CLEARCUTTING FACTS AND MYTHS

MYTH: Clearcutting is the same as deforestation.

FACT: Deforestation is the permanent removal of a forest, normally for development purposes. Clearcutting followed by natural regeneration or replanting is a sustainable practice.

MYTH: Clearcutting always causes environmental damage.

FACT: State and federal laws are in place to protect soil and water quality during all forest harvest operations. NC Forest Service, NC Division of Water Quality, and NC Division of Land Resources employees monitor harvest operations for compliance with these regulations.

MYTH: Clearcuts are a biological desert for wildlife and plant species.

FACT: Deer, quail, fox, hawks, rabbits, and many species of songbirds are just a few examples of species that rely on clearcuts for food, cover, and nesting habitat. Several endangered species of plants benefit from clearcuts that provide full sunlight that is essential for them to flower and reproduce (Examples for NC are Fraser's Loosetrife, Cooley's Meadowrue).

FACT: Clearcutting is a useful forest management tool, but is not appropriate in every situation.

Depending on the age and size distribution of the forest, selective removal of the lower quality trees from the stand can provide more room for the best trees to continue to grow, improving stand development and health. Some types of selective harvest are very useful for naturally regenerating a new forest.

FACT: Clearcutting can be ugly.

When compared to a healthy, mature forest this can be a true statement. However, a clearcut is not a static environment and will ultimately be replaced by another aesthetic forest.

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North Carolina
Department of
Agriculture and Consumer Services

Steve Troxler, Commissioner

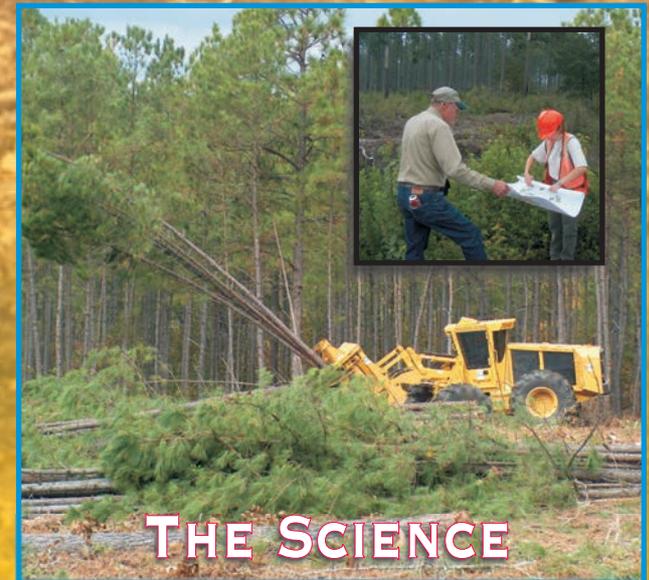
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THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE PRACTICE

Clearcutting is a major change in the forest landscape which requires careful planning and execution. A Professional Registered Forester can help determine if the practice is appropriate for your land.

Its your land -- Plan for it!

History of Clearcutting

The practice of clearcutting began in the 1800's and was largely driven by economic concerns. For efficiency's sake, all trees that were usable by a sawmill were cut at one time. This often led to the total exploitation of old growth forests, with no concern about protecting water quality or the environment.



In response to this unsound practice, a more common method of selective timber harvesting began in the early 1900's. This type of harvest removed only the most commercially valuable trees in the forest, and some species might have been totally eliminated. This left trees that were suppressed, forked, crooked, diseased, and genetically inferior to the trees that were removed. This poorly thought out practice of harvesting the best trees and leaving the low quality trees is known as a "high grading".

The practice of "high grading" removes the best quality trees, leaving low-quality trees to become the next stand. This "selective" type of harvest appears to leave the forest intact, but it is actually far worse for the health of the remaining forest.



In the 1950's and 60's, professional foresters recognized the degradation of forests that had been high-graded, and began to recommend clearcutting to address forest health concerns. Clearcutting, followed by replanting or natural regeneration, began to be a common practice across North Carolina.

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Science Behind Clearcutting

As trees mature, their growth begins to slow, and can become more susceptible to insect and disease attack. Clearcutting, followed by prescribed reforestation can be a sustainable way to address the management of a forest that is declining in health.

Clearcutting can help to establish a forested area with a tree species that requires full sunlight to regenerate and grow well. Many species in North Carolina require full sunlight to regenerate, and cannot successfully grow in areas that are selectively harvested.



Yellow poplar is considered one of the more commercially valuable hardwood species and requires nearly full sunlight conditions to regenerate and grow.

Species Intolerant to Shade:



Loblolly pine
Black locust
Longleaf pine
Willows
Shortleaf pine
Cottonwood

Yellow poplar
Butternut
Black walnut
Black cherry
Sycamore
Sweetgum

Clearcutting Timeline

New Clearcut...



11 Years after Clearcut...



30 Year old Forest...

Benefits of Clearcutting

Forest Sustainability

With increasing demand for land from a growing population, the revenue generated from timber sales may be the only incentive for a landowner to keep their property as forestland.



Wildlife Habitat

Professional wildlife biologists have long recognized the importance of early successional habitat created by clearcutting. Certain species of wildlife depend entirely or partially on this type of habitat for survival.



Economics

Clearcutting maximizes the amount of revenue from a harvest operation by utilizing all material from the site. Modern clearcuts remove a higher percentage of merchantable wood. Valuable sawtimber used for lumber and pulpwood used for paper products are harvested, leaving the tract as clean as possible.

This can minimize reforestation costs because there is less logging debris to hamper tree planting. A young stand grows faster and accumulates value at a much higher rate than an overmature forest.

