


Woodland Stewardship Online

12: Noise and Visual Quality – Activity


How this helps you:

Learn how to minimize the impact of noisy forestry operations; assess how your forest blends visually with the surrounding landscape; and make your property visually appealing to neighbors and the public when building roads and trails, harvesting timber, regenerating trees, and conducting woodland improvement practices.

Step 1: Develop strategies for Noise Reduction

- **Step 1A:** Read the Introduction and Noise Management sections ( PDF , page 139-140).
- **Step 1B:** When creating noise from chainsaws and heavy equipment that may bother neighbors or the public,
 - Work during midday and avoid working in early morning and late evening.
 - Use noisy equipment during days of the week or periods of the year when neighbors or the public are less likely to be close by.


Step 2: Work on Landscape Management

- **Step 2A:** Read the Landscape Management section ( PDF, page 140-141).
- **Step 2B:** To get a landscape perspective, consider the attributes of your property and neighboring properties for a couple of miles in all directions. Drive roads, look at aerial photographs, or use a Website to get a view of your place on earth surrounded by other properties.
- **Step 2C:** What are the dominant features in this landscape, e.g., continuous forest, mostly open agricultural fields with scattered woodlots, wooded lakeshore with second homes? Considering the appearance of your woodland, does it blend into this landscape or clash with scenic landscape features that surround you?
 - In a large expanse of unbroken forest, small openings created by timber harvests provide visual interest and increase opportunities for viewing wildlife.
 - Where most of the landscape is a checkerboard of timber harvests, maintaining a large stand of mature trees will add great appeal to your property.
 - Create a scenic vista by felling trees in the foreground or by thinning a stand of trees or pruning lower branches to create sight lines through the understory.
 - Manage the tree species composition of your woodland to encourage trees with special visual appeal because of their trunk shape, blossoms, bark color, fall foliage color, or other characteristics.
 - You can create an open park-like understory by maintaining a dense overstory that

shades the ground and discourages understory vegetation. Such stands, however, will reduce the variety of wildlife that uses the area.

- To block sightlines into a woodland, screen an objectionable view, or create privacy, encourage shrubs and ground vegetation by lightly thinning a dense canopy leaving 60 to 80 percent crown cover. For year-round screening, establish spruce, fir, or pine along the woodland edge.

Step 3: Consider how trails, roads, skid trails, and log landings impact the visual quality of your woodlands

- **Step 3A:** Read the Road and Trails section ( PDF, page 141-142).
- **Step 3B:** Recreational trails, roads, skid trails, and log landings may disrupt the aesthetic appeal of your woodland.

Locate them to:

- Minimize the total mileage required to accomplish their purpose.
- Reduce their visibility from nearby vantage points, such as scenic overlooks, streams, and lakes.
- Minimize the need for visible structures (such as bridges, culverts, ditches) and make them from products that blend with the landscape.
- Build them on the best soils, considering the potential for compaction, displacement, and erosion.
- Reduce sightlines from your roads into clearcuts or landings by using small road openings through a band of trees or by designing curves in road alignment so the road visually disappears into the opening. (Figure 12-6)
- Hide borrow pits, rock crushing sites, and log landings out of public view behind vegetation screens or hills.

When clearing roadways:

- Utilize merchantable timber—avoid large debris piles that will require many years to decay.
- Disperse cleared debris away from the travel right-of-way so it is less visible.
- Push stumps off to the side so they remain upright—a more natural appearance.

Protect your soil:

- Build travelways when the ground is dry—wet soil will compact and may interfere with regenerating trees or other vegetation.
- Shape and stabilize disturbed areas (such as ditches and cut-and-fill sites) as quickly as possible to avoid erosion.
- Install temporary erosion control devices, such as straw bales, mulch, or woody debris, to help stabilize soils before vegetation becomes established.
- Avoid planting grass for soil stabilization in woodlands, if possible, since seeding usually introduces nonnative species.


- **Step 3C:** Stop forestry activities and close the road when the road is especially susceptible to water damage, e.g., in spring after the ground thaws and after heavy rain.

To keep unsightly mud off public roads:

- Harvest when the ground is dry or frozen.
- Maintain a hard surface on the haul road.


- Provide clean fill (gravel or wood chips) on the haul road for about 200 feet before the highway entrance.
- **Step 3D:** Close a road after its primary use has ended.
 - Remove culverts, temporary bridges, signs, and other structures that are no longer needed.
 - Fill in ruts and stabilize eroding areas by reshaping, seeding, and fertilizing as appropriate.
 - Rehabilitate borrow pits when you're done using them.
 - Reshape the pit to fit the natural landscape contours, spread good soil over the surface, and reseed.

Step 4: Consider the visual quality of your woodlands for a timber harvest

- **Step 4A:** Read the Timber Harvest section ( PDF, page 142-144).
- **Step 4B:** Plan harvest and regeneration systems that quickly regenerate trees, to minimize the visual effects of harvesting. Each harvest and regeneration system described in Chapter 4: Regenerating Woodland Stands has a different visual effect.
- **Step 4C:** On soils that are susceptible to compaction, rutting, and puddling, do not operate harvesting equipment immediately after the spring thaw and following heavy rain.
- **Step 4D:** On low-strength soils (such as those with high organic content), use low ground pressure equipment (e.g., wide tires) or drive on slash mats to avoid soil damage.
- **Step 4E:** Harvest stands by the single-tree or group selection method to produce an uneven-aged woodland and avoid the temporary barren appearance of clearcuts. Keep in mind, however, that the selection method regenerates mainly shade-tolerant tree species.
- **Step 4F:** To soften the visual effect of clearcuts, make them appear to be small by:
 - Cutting them in narrow, irregular shapes.
 - Shaping them so only a small portion is visible from a travelway.
 - Leaving tree islands or corridors of uncut trees across clearcuts.
 - Positioning them to follow major land contours rather than cutting across contours (Figure 12-4).
 - Leave bands of uncut trees between the clearcut and public roads, trails, or waterways (Figure 12-5).
 - Feather the borders where they adjoin stands of older trees (Figure 12-5).
 - Some people prefer the appearance of complete clearcuts where no trees are left standing, whereas others prefer clearcuts that retain scattered live trees. Scattered live trees or groups of trees break up the monotony of large clearcuts and provide vertical habitat for birds. Some songbirds and raptors benefit from the residual trees.
- **Step 4G:** In general, leave dead standing trees (snags) for wildlife nesting, denning, feeding, and roosting sites, as well as for escape areas. Near travelways:
 - Do not leave snags in the foreground.
 - Hide scattered snags with vegetative islands or


- Locate snags around the edges of an opening so they are camouflaged by background trees.
- **Step 4H:** During selection harvests:
 - Control the direction of fall to minimize damage to residual trees and position the fallen tree for skidding.
 - Leave bumper trees standing along roads and skid trails to protect nearby trees of better quality that will be left standing.
 - Fell bumper trees last.
- **Step 4I:** To avoid unsightly woody debris after a harvest:
 - Remove as much wood as possible for products.
 - Cut stumps low and lop slash so that it is no more than 2 to 4 feet above ground level.
 - Near heavily traveled public roads, avoid leaving piles of woody debris and eliminate or minimize slash within 50 feet of travelways. Beyond 50 feet cut slash to a maximum height of 2 feet.
- **Step 4J:** To reduce the amount of unusable logs, limbs, and bark at log landings:
 - Trim as much unusable wood from the trees as possible before the logs are skidded to a landing.
 - When logging has been completed, burn, bury, or disperse residual woody debris and reseed landings.
- **Step 4K:** Clean up refuse and discarded equipment from the harvest area.

Step 5: Think about regeneration

- **Step 5A:** Read the Regeneration section ( PDF, page 144).
- **Step 5B:** To conceal logging debris and enhance visual quality, choose a harvest system that will quickly regenerate the species that you want to encourage or that help prepare the site for planting (see Chapter 4: Regenerating Woodland Stands and Chapter 6: Managing Important Forest Types).
- **Step 5C:** Controlled burning, mechanical scarification, or herbicides may be recommended to control competing vegetation or prepare a seedbed. When possible:
 - Choose practices that can be conducted in the spring just before green-up, in the fall just before leaves turn color, or during the dormant season because they do not result in unsightly dead leaves on vegetation.
 - Avoid or screen slash piles that are visible from public travelways.
 - Use low-impact site preparation methods such as patch or row scarification.
 - Apply herbicides in spots or strips rather than broadcast treatments.
- **Step 5D:** To encourage natural-appearing stands with apparent random tree spacing, plant trees at irregular spacing or in offset rows that are parallel to the road, not perpendicular to it (Figure 12-7).
- **Step 5E:** Use wider initial spacing to minimize the number of re-entries to the site for thinning and to encourage natural regeneration of other species.

- **Step 5F:** Promote a mixture of species, both naturally occurring and planted.
- **Step 5G:** Favor long-lived species where appropriate to minimize the frequency of your management activities.

Step 6: Consider improvement practices when thinning, culling, weed-tree removal, pruning, and applying herbicides

- **Step 6A:** Read the Woodland Improvement Practices section ( PDF, page 144).
- **Step 6B:** (see Chapter 5: Woodland Improvement Practices). During Thinning, culling, weed-tree removal, and pruning:
 - Harvest and use as much wood as is economically feasible to minimize the amount of woody debris left on the forest floor.
 - Near travelways, keep slash height below 2 feet by removing, lopping, crushing or burning whenever possible.
 - When thinning trees in rows, use selective harvesting near travelways to break up the row effect (Figure 12-8).
- **Step 6C:** When you need to kill invading broadleaved hardwoods in conifer stands, favor nonherbicide treatments when possible.


When applying herbicides:

- Leave untreated or selectively treated areas adjacent to travel routes.
- Favor band treatment or spot treatment over broadcast treatment.
- Choose late-season or dormant-season herbicides to avoid unsightly dead, brown leaves on treated plants during the growing season.

If you need to deaden unusable trees:

- Kill them standing so they fall down over a period of years thus avoiding the impenetrable mass of debris.
- Deaden deciduous trees during the dormant season to avoid unsightly dead, brown leaves on trees during the growing season.

Step 7: Learn about ways of protecting your woodland

- **Step 7A:** Read the Woodland Protection section ( PDF, page 145).
- **Step 7B:** Protect your woodland against unsightly damage from fire, insects, and diseases by following management recommendations in Chapter 6: Managing Important Forest Types and Chapter 7: Forest Health.