

Eco-system Based Forest Management Manual to Guide Efforts on Public and Private Lands

One of the primary recommendations arising from the recent Forest Policy hearings was the desire to see government pay more attention ecological goods and services when managing public lands or assisting private land owners. This spring, the province has responded to that wish by releasing P.E.I.'s first Eco-system Based Forest Management Manual. The Manual will shape management activities on all public forest lands and guide publicly funded management programs for private land owners.

The manual builds on the principles and concepts of earlier forest management programs but, whereas earlier manuals tended to focus on forests as economic development tools, the new manual places priority on ecological principles and values. Other values such as income, employment, and economic development will continue to play important but lesser roles. The intent is to demonstrate that private and public forests, managed with public funding and support, result in public benefits for all Islanders.

The new manual contains several sections designed to address typical forest management issues and concerns. These sections include Infrastructure, Tree Establishment, Stand Improvement and Special Enhancement Techniques.

Infrastructure deals with the creation and maintenance of roads, trails, bridges and culverts. Roads and trails are an integral part of any forest management effort, but they should be designed to suit local terrain and soil conditions. The manual recognizes that because bridges and culverts pass through or over ecologically sensitive areas such as riparian zones, seasonal wetlands, and streams, extra care must be taken to minimize disturbances and ensure the free passage of water and aquatic creatures.

Tree Establishment is the creation of a new forest stand by natural seeding and/or tree planting with Acadian Forest species.

For sites which require some form of planting, the manual supports three planting systems including Full Planting, where an entire site is planted, Partial Planting, where only some areas of the site require planting, and Enrichment Planting, where selected species are planted in small numbers across the site.

Stand Improvement concentrates on reducing the impacts of several centuries of poor harvest and land use practices by removing low value trees and focussing attention on those with the highest potential values. Pre-commercial Thinning and Commercial Thinning remove a percentage of the trees in order to improve the overall quality of the stand and provide more sunlight and root space for higher quality trees. Shelterwood systems remove mature trees in a series of two or more cuttings allowing long lived, shade tolerant species to become established in the forest shade. Release treatments focus on the removal of trees which overtop, and thus shade out, more desirable tree species growing underneath. By removing the overstory, more sunlight and nutrients reach the shaded seedlings.

The final section is Special Enhancement Techniques. This section deals with the non-timber attributes and benefits of forest lands. In many cases these are things which, while intangible, still mean a great deal to people and to the health and productivity of our forest lands. These techniques may be related to wildlife habitat, forest aesthetics, non-timber forest products, and recreational values.

The Eco-based Forest Management Manual should be seen as a living document because as new information and strategies become available, the manual will be revised and updated to reflect the new knowledge and the interests of society. Core concepts are being written into new management plans for public forests. As well, they have been incorporated into the newly revised Forest Enhancement Program - www.gov.pe.ca/forestry/fep - for private woodlot owners. You can access the Summary version at www.gov.pe.ca/forestry/Eco-summary or the complete Technical Manual at www.gov.pe.ca/forestry/eco-manual