

BC Journal of Ecosystems and Management

Volume 7 - Issue 2

Published by FORREX Forum for Research and Extension in Natural Resources

Abstract

Restoration of forests attacked by mountain pine beetle: Misnomer, misdirected, or must-do? Philip J. Burton

Much of the forest killed by the current mountain pine beetle outbreak in British Columbia will never be salvaged for commercial purposes. It has been suggested that large areas will need "restoration" to secure future timber supplies and habitat values in a timely manner. I argue that restoration is not the most appropriate term to apply to this scenario, as beetle-impacted forests generally are not ecologically degraded. Furthermore, available data indicate that pure pine stands constitute a minority of the forest area affected by the mountain pine beetle (*Dendroctonus ponderosae*), and that more than 40% of stands dominated by lodgepole pine (*Pinus contorta* var. *latifolia*) have adequately stocked understories. This implies that much of the affected area will recover on its own and can provide mid-term and long-term forest values without human intervention. While prescribed fire may be an appropriate tool for ecological restoration and stand renewal in selected landscapes, perpetuation of even-aged stands of lodgepole pine may not be prudent. It would be more appropriate to call stand conversion and accelerated regeneration activities "stand rehabilitation" when enhanced timber values are the goal. Ecological restoration may be needed to repair critical habitats or to safeguard aquatic resources in the wake of the pine beetle outbreak. However, restoration must be done with clear objectives, and is likely to be a minor component of the overall management picture. In all cases, an objective assessment should assure that intervention will not do more harm than good, and actions should be evaluated against the alternative of no treatment.

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