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Abstract

Visual Resource Management in British Columbia - Part II: Partial cutting in the frontcountry: A win-win solution for short-term timber availability and aesthetics?

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This paper explores the potential of alternative harvesting practices (including partial cutting) to meet Visual Quality Objectives (VQOs), while providing short-term timber volumes substantially higher than is currently possible with clearcutting under the existing visual resource management (VRM) system in British Columbia. In general, public preferences decrease as visible landscape alteration increases. This has led to the impression that VQOs are a major constraint on timber supply in visually sensitive areas. However, various studies of the relationship between aesthetics and timber availability indicate that the amount of timber removed may have less influence on public preferences than the pattern and distribution of cutting. In British Columbia, the prescriptive approach to VQOs as an automatic constraint on timber supply can ignore substantial opportunities to meet these objectives with increased timber harvesting through partial cutting techniques and better landscape design. Based on B.C. Ministry of Forests perception studies, hypothetical relationships between short-term timber availability and VQO intensity at the landscape level suggest that using partial cutting in areas with more restrictive VQOs could offer at least equivalent or increased timber availability relative to conventional clearcutting. In the Arrow Forest District, initial analyses suggest that the impact of VQOs on timber availability could theoretically be reduced by as much as 10.3% if partial cutting is used in visually sensitive frontcountry situations—without sacrificing aesthetics. However, a thorough study of the advantages, disadvantages, and feasibility of these techniques is needed.

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