



Clearcutting

Clearcutting is a forestry practice where most or all trees are cut in a harvesting area. Contrary to popular belief, clearcutting is considered one of the most sustainable ways of managing forests in certain forest regions. Clearcutting is the most ecologically appropriate way to harvest and renew tree stands in the boreal forest. The reason for this is that clearcutting closely emulates naturally occurring disasters that commonly impact the boreal forest, such as fires, insect infestations, wind, and floods. Removing a large proportion of the tree canopy allows many boreal tree species to germinate and flourish because of their high demand for sunlight, resulting in an even-aged forest stand.



Even-Aged Stand Management

There is a variation of harvesting patterns when clearcutting a forest stand.

These patterns include strips, patches, blocks, or other configurations that mimic natural disturbance patterns. Fallen trees and branches, stumps, and other debris, are left behind on the forest floor for several reasons. A few reasons include providing nutrients for the soils and future trees, as well as habitat for a variety of plants, animals and insects.



Ecological, social and economic factors are always taken into account when choosing a silvicultural method of harvesting. Clearcutting and shelterwood harvesting is primarily used for even-aged stands.

Part of sustainable forest management is choosing the appropriate harvesting method for the forest type. The method of clearcutting is a process that includes accounting for the biodiversity and ecology of the site. The boundaries of a clearcutting harvest usually follow the contours of the landscape, and reserves within large patches may be maintained to minimize damage and protect features like wildlife corridors.

Following a clearcut,
the area is renewed
and may be left untouched
from 60 to 120 years!

Clearcutting & Certification

Canada has the world's largest third party certified area of sustainable forest. We follow strict guidelines and standards set out by these certifications to ensure that:

- Biodiversity within a harvested area is maintained, protected and conserved
- Harvested areas are reforested, either naturally or through tree planting

Clearcutting is a good method to deal with forest pests and disease, and is usually the safer method for forest workers.

The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) and Canadian Standards Association (CSA) certifications, all accept clearcutting as a sustainable method of harvesting forests when done correctly.

Misconceptions About Clearcutting

Clearcutting is not the same as deforestation.

Deforestation involves the removal of a forest with no intention of re-establishing it for the future.

Clearcutting is a silvicultural harvesting method that removes a large amount of trees with the intention of improving future stand genetics, quality and species composition through regeneration.

A photograph of a forest landscape. In the foreground, there is a pile of cut logs and branches. A stream flows through the middle ground, surrounded by green vegetation. In the background, a dense forest of tall trees stands on a hillside.

Clearcutting does not cause more erosion than partial cuts. In fact, erosion is almost completely uninvolved with how much wood is removed from a stand, but HOW wood is removed from a stand does influence erosion. In most cases, it is the poor building of roads, either in or near streams, or with big slopes, in order to remove wood from clearcut areas that leads to erosion.

A photograph of a landscape after a clearcut. The ground is covered with numerous tree stumps of various sizes. In the foreground, two red squirrels are sitting on a pile of rocks, looking towards the camera.

Clearcutting does not destroy all resources. Areas that have been clearcut allow species that thrive in sunlight to grow. These areas also do not decrease nor increase the abundance of wildlife or their habitat, but rather rearrange both habitats and populations.

A close-up photograph of a small green seedling with two leaves growing from the forest floor. The background is a blurred forest floor with fallen leaves.

Clearcutting does not result in the death of a forest. In fact, after a clearcut, the forest immediately begins regeneration at a mass scale. With a variety of species benefiting from the disturbance (e.g. jack pine, poplar).

Advantages of Clearcutting

Ecological Advantages

- Allows shade-intolerant (sun-loving) species to regenerate
- Allows for the conversion of forest types (deciduous to coniferous forests and vice versa)
- Along with fire, it stimulates the regeneration of young forests
- Provides foraging opportunities for larger grazing animals, and habitat and foraging features for many small mammals and insects

Types of Clearcutting

Uniform Clearcut
Strip Clearcut
Patch Clearcut
Clearcutting with Reserves
Slash & Burn

Economic & Social Advantages

- Focuses tree harvesting in one area at one specific time, resulting in immediate income
- Economical method of regenerating, managing and controlling disturbances to even-aged forests
- Minimizes costs of road building and multiple entries into one harvest area



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