

## UI Extension Forestry Information Series

### Diameter Limit Cutting

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A very common harvesting method used in Idaho is called diameter limit cutting. This is the practice of cutting the largest and most valuable trees in a woodlot and leaving the smaller, less valuable trees for the next harvest. It is often falsely referred to as “thinning”.

The rationale behind this type of management is based upon the fact that many small private woodland owners have their lands as a hobby and investment. The woodlot is managed on a spare time and need basis. Diameter limit cutting is simple to do and generates the most immediate money. This is all very fine except for two reasons. First, a landowner could get more money from that same woodlot if a long term management system that considers the future were used. Second, a big tree is not always older than a small tree, it is often just growing faster. By cutting all of the largest trees, the landowner may be leaving the slower growing or genetically inferior trees behind, which are more susceptible to disease and insect attack. This decreases the general health of the forest.

The advantages of leaving some of the best trees are many. Healthy big trees produce more seed and the resulting seedlings will have the growth characteristics of the parents. Big trees with good crowns also keep getting bigger and more valuable for the next harvest. A woodlot with a variety of tree sizes is more pleasant to look at and tends to be more beneficial for wildlife. Trees should be selected for harvest because they have stopped growing well, regardless of their size. A properly managed woodlot will produce a large percentage of big trees for harvest and still leave the best to continue growing and reproducing.

If you are thinking of harvesting timber, please contact an Idaho Department of Lands Woodland Forester, county Extension Agent, or private forestry consultant

for advice. A recent nationwide survey has shown that in most cases, a consulting forester can as much as double your future woodlot output while increasing your income from your present timber harvest. For more information contact the UI Extension Forestry office and ask for CIS 630 *Diameter Limit Cutting – A Questionable Practice*.



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