

 UI Extension Forestry Information Series

Is New Forestry Really New?

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Much attention has recently been focused on something called *New Forestry*. On the surface one would assume that an entirely new forest land management concept has been discovered and that more traditional approaches are no longer acceptable. In my judgment, *New Forestry* is primarily greater application (particularly on Federal land) of some well known, but less commonly used, silvicultural practices - not the invention of something really new. These practices have the potential for reducing conflicts between wood production and other objectives, and for providing greater forest diversity through the more thoughtful application of ecological knowledge.

New Forestry developed primarily in the west coast Douglas-fir region. By far the predominant silvicultural system has been to clear-cut, prepare the site (usually by burning the slash), and plant. This rather simple system has been successful for dealing with mature and over mature coastal Douglas-fir. However, the landscape is now dotted with artificial-looking patches of very uniform single-species plantations. The forest no longer "looks like a forest". Under *New Forestry*, clearcutting might be replaced in some situations with what is called *irregular shelterwood* in silviculture textbooks. Under this system, perhaps two-thirds of the mature trees are removed in the initial entry. After regeneration has become established by natural seeding and/or planting under the remaining shelter, most of the residual mature stand would be removed. But even after this second harvest entry, some of the original stand - perhaps 10 trees per acre - would be retained through all or part of the next rotation. This system maintains continual tree cover, creates more structural forest diversity, and "looks like a forest".

Other *New Forestry* variations may be appropriate depending on the specific stand and site conditions. Man-

agement for uneven-age units through selection silviculture is also being touted as *New*. What is new is greater application of such practices. Much non-industrial private forestry (NIPF) management in the Inland Northwest already resembles *New Forestry*.

Forest Service silviculturists often feel the pressure of the federal Forest Management Act of 1976 which mandates regeneration within 5 years of harvest. To assure rapid regeneration, the clearcut, site preparation, and plant system is the way to go. Natural regeneration systems (either even-age or uneven-age) require much more application of ecological knowledge, more time and care in preparation, and more patience - regeneration will not always occur immediately. Widespread application of more natural-appearing systems will mean greater management costs. The more sophisticated methods will require more sale preparation time and will mean that the best silviculturists are doing the marking - not inexperienced summer crews. Site preparation and logging are often more difficult (particularly on steep ground) and this means added costs. More frequent stand entry is another artifact of most partial cutting systems; this could cause soil compaction problems, may mean more roads and more road maintenance, and again, higher management costs.

Establishment of even-age plantations is still a logical practice in many situations and the only rational alternative in some, but public interest in a more natural approach to forest land management will undoubtedly lead to greater application of other silvicultural systems. Also, a greater emphasis is being placed on management of entire drainages instead of prescribing for 20 or 10 acre units. This allows for better integration of ecological values and commodity production.

The focus on *New Forestry* is drawing attention to forest practices and is causing foresters to be more innovative in prescribing practices which are ecologically and socially acceptable. This will certainly be beneficial in the long run, but let's not assume that everything that we have been doing has not been sound management - there

are many examples of *New Forestry* in the Inland Northwest which have been around for a long time.

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