

## **Forest Health**

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"Forest health" is an often used, and often abused and misunderstood concept. In terms of forest management, forest health is often defined as growing trees which are vigorous, free of insects and diseases, of good form, of desirable (a.k.a. commercially valuable) species, and at a spacing in the forest which allows them as fast a growth as possible without compromising timber quality. This definition frames health in terms of human (economic) values for wood products. Forest health can also be defined on an ecological basis. Dead, diseased, old, and slow-growing trees of all species naturally occurring on the site are part of a healthy forest from a biodiversity perspective.

It's important to remember and acknowledge that we are most often discussing forest health in terms of human values. The forest doesn't care if a large veneer quality tree dies, rots, or burns. We humans often do. When viewed through a set of ecological values, the number of reasons to justify timber harvesting decrease noticeably. They might include:

- 1) Infestation of an exotic, non-native insect or disease whose spread could be prevented or significantly reduced by harvesting.
- 2) Improving wildlife habitat or maintaining habitat for species that are rare or declining.
- 3) Significant mortality or blowdown resulting from exotic, non-native causes.
- 4) Applying the principles of restoration forestry, as we are beginning to understand them. This might include addressing years of build-up of fuels due to past human interference with natural fire cycles.

Silviculture is a practice by which we respectfully remove products from the forest for human use, employing methods which we believe most closely imitate and least impact the "natural" processes occurring there. It's important to acknowledge the distinction between our human and ecological definitions of forest health, and not to use the former to justify creating forests of diminished ecological value.