

GUIDE TO THINNING

One of the most important tools in good forest management is thinning to maintain proper spacing. Proper spacing will provide the following benefits:

- Increases the health and vigor of the stand.
- Helps individual trees resist insect and disease attacks.
- Reduces risk of forest fires.
- Provides space for the sunlight to reach the ground and encourage growth of ground plants and flowers.
- Tree density affects property values, which are highest at 140 trees per acre. If density is more than 140 trees per acre, land values decrease in proportion to the additional trees.

Desired spacing varies with tree size. A general rule for tree spacing is five feet plus one foot for every inch of tree diameter. A more scientific approach to spacing can be found at http://csfs.colostate.edu/pdfs/landowner_g4thin_scr.pdf.

In selecting trees to be retained or those to be removed consider the following:

- Select the healthiest trees to be saved. A healthy tree generally has a single pointed top, a straight trunk and full foliage of typical color. It is free of insects, disease and animal or mechanical damage.
- If you have several species on your property, try to maintain a good mixture. This management tool prevents total loss of your forest in case of insect or disease outbreaks which affect only one particular species. If you have only one or two tree species, select a balanced mixture and consider planting other tree species.
- Plan to keep your best character trees. These are trees that have one of the following qualities:
 - Have a unique shape or appearance.
 - Provide a diversity of species.
 - Perform a particular function.
 - Stand out among the crowd (prominent).
 - Hide undesirable views such as roads, buildings, power lines, etc.
 - Provide homes for wildlife.
- Be careful not to develop “square patterns or rows”. Remember the rule is only a guide. Some trees may be closer together or farther apart.

CUTTING: Cutting trees is dangerous work. Numerous experienced contractors are available to do this work. If you choose to do this work follow safety precautions.

Generally, lower stumps are better for safe walking and eventual wood disintegration. Four inches or less is a reasonable goal.

LIMBING: When thinning your trees it is a good practice to limb your remaining trees. Around homesites, limbing trees up to ten feet reduces the fire hazard. Cut limbs flush to

the main stem or trunk. Limbing all trees up to six feet is beneficial for growth but not necessary.

CLEAN UP: During thinning operations slash will accumulate. Eliminating slash reduces fire hazards; improves aesthetics; helps develop grass and other vegetation; and improves access. The following methods of slash disposal are available to property owners at Crystal Lakes:

- Chipping
- Lopping and scattering
- Loading and hauling to the community slash pile for burning

FOLLOW-UP: Because forests are not static, continued work in the future will be necessary. After three to five years, you may need to thin again. Take time to follow-up and examine your property each year. This is especially important in the fall after the mountain pine beetle flight season.

The above information was obtained from the Colorado State Forest Service.

See http://csfs.colostate.edu/pdfs/landowner_g4thin_scr.pdf for additional information.