

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES  
DIVISION OF FORESTRY  
CIRCULAR LETTER

Effective Date: May 1, 2006  
Expiration/Review Date: December 31, 2008

**CIRCULAR LETTER TO:** State Land Management Personnel

**SUBJECT:** Silviculture—Using Ecological Classification System (ECS) Information

**PURPOSE:**

This policy is intended to:

1. Initiate the use of ECS field guides and ECS-based *silviculture*<sup>1</sup> information for making forest management decisions and developing *site prescriptions*
2. Clarify the role of ECS in state land management.

After a phase-in period ending December 31, 2008, the result of this policy will be that native plant community (NPC) classifications will be completed on all forest regeneration (artificial and natural) sites except for *winter-access-only sites*. *Silvicultural interpretations* developed for each NPC will be used to support *site prescriptions*.

**RATIONALE:**

The department recognizes the importance of using ECS information in the management of state forest lands. *A Strategic Conservation Agenda 2003–2007*, which is a statement of what the department “believes is important,” lists the ECS as one of the strategic indicators. It is an important strategic indicator because:

“ECS products help us understand forests’ full potential to produce timber and wildlife and protect water and soil. They are essential for interdisciplinary communication and forest resource assessment. They are the link between landscape-level goals and what a forester chooses to do on a 20-acre timber sale. ECS supports other indicators of sustainable forest management ... and they (ECS products) help match appropriate silvicultural approaches to forest sites to achieve desired outcomes.” (*A Strategic Conservation Agenda 2003–2007*, Page 86.)

**RESPONSIBILITIES:**

**Forest Ecologist**

Provides training, develops *silvicultural interpretations* associated with NPCs, develops case studies to monitor effectiveness of ECS decision making, and provides assistance and trouble

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<sup>1</sup> Terms in *bold-italics* are defined in a definition section at the end of the document.

shooting in NPC classification and the development of *site prescriptions*. Forest ecologists will collect and compile all site classification locations and related data, produce a statewide point cover with attribute data, and maintain an archive of all observations and attribute data. This information will be provided to the regions and areas on a regular basis or as requested.

#### **Regional Silviculture Program Leaders (RSPL)**

Implements this policy within the region. However, the RSPL will work jointly with the **regional Timber Sale Program leader (RTSPL)** to establish regional NPC classification implementation goals, monitor implementation, provide training and assistance to the field, and insure that *silviculture* project objectives are supported by NPC classifications and associated silvicultural information.

#### **Area Silvicultural Program Leader (ASPL) and Timber Sale Program Leader (ATSPL)**

Ensure that all required NPC classifications are completed. The **area forest supervisor** will determine which program leader will have overall responsibility for providing oversight, review, and training to area personnel. However, it is expected that the **ASPL** will review and approve regeneration plans based on NPC classifications and the *silvicultural interpretations* developed for the particular communities.

#### **Silviculture, Lands, and Roads Supervisor**

Provides funding and direction to meet training needs, ensures regional implementation plans are developed, and monitors implementation plan progress.

### **POLICIES:**

#### **Long-Term Goal**

The long-term goal will be completion of NPC classifications for ALL sites appraised for timber harvest, except *winter-access-only sites*. When alternative methodologies for addressing the classification of these sites are developed, NPC classifications of these sites will also be required.

#### **Implementation**

This policy will be fully implemented by December 31, 2008. However, an implementation phase-in period will occur between the effective date of this circular letter and December 31, 2008. The phase-in period will provide time for additional training, developing classification experience, adjusting workloads, and trying different scheduling scenarios to accomplish full implementation. Therefore, during the phase-in period, it will not be expected that all sites will be classified.

#### **Focus During Phase-In**

During the implementation phase-in period, the focus for NPC classifications will be on artificial regeneration sites and for sites with *composition-change objectives*. If the NPC classification and accompanying *silvicultural interpretation* do not support a previously developed site prescription, that prescription must be modified. Complete NPC classification on similar adjacent, undisturbed sites when classification is required on already harvested sites.

### **Implementation Plans**

The regional Silviculture Program leader in consultation with the regional Timber Sale Program leader and the regional forester will develop an implementation plan and regional goals for the phase-in period. The plan and goals will be subject to the review and approval by the silviculture, lands, and roads supervisor.

### **Full Implementation**

After the phase-in period, a higher priority for project approval and funding may be given to those projects where project proposals are supported by data collected during NPC classification.

### **Forms and Classification Procedures**

The NPC classification form identified as **Version 1.3, Jan. 2006** is attached to this circular letter and will be used when classifying sites.

### **PROCEDURES:**

Procedures	Responsible
Complete NPC classifications and collect stand <i>growth-stage</i> data for all harvest sites. The preferred timing for this is during the initial stand exam or when a timber sale is being set up.	Area Staff
During <u>implementation phase-in period</u> , consult and follow the regional implementation phase-in plan that will focus on artificial regeneration and sites with <i>composition-change objectives</i> .	
Develop <i>site prescriptions</i> including regeneration plans for all sites to be harvested.	Area Staff
Forward NPC classifications, <i>site prescriptions</i> , and regeneration plans to the area's Silviculture Program leader (ASPL). Enter all NPC classifications into SRM.	Area Staff
Review the NPC classifications and <i>site prescriptions</i> for appropriateness.	ASPL
Forward a copy of the survey information to the forest ecologist at Resource Assessment for data capture and archiving.	ASPL
Forward ECS field sheet and regeneration project proposal to the regional Silviculture Program leader (RSPL) for all artificial regeneration projects, all natural regeneration that requires funding, and any <i>composition-change</i> projects regardless of the need for funding.	ASPL
Review NPC classification and regeneration project.	RSPL
Approve project funding.	RSPL
Respond to and consult with area staff, ASPL, and RSPL as data collections and <i>site prescription</i> preparation questions and concerns arise.	Forest Ecologist
Develop point covers from field data.	Forest Ecologist
Load point covers on local servers on an annual basis or as requested so areas have access to the information.	Forest Ecologist

Data capture procedures by the forest ecology staff will be used until the entry, archiving, and retrieval of this information is operational in the Forest Inventory Module (FIM) and Silviculture and Roads Module (SRM).

## **DEFINITIONS:**

***Composition-change objectives*** apply to sites for which planning objectives call for a complete change in tree species or a change in the tree species mix found on the site.

***Growth stages:*** Periods of stability and change throughout the course of natural succession. Each growth-stage is characterized by differences in composition and structure. The ECS program focuses on four growth-stage forests: young, transitioning, mature, and old.

***Silviculture:*** The art and science of controlling the establishment, growth, composition, health, and quality of forests and woodlands to meet the multitude of purposes and values of landowners and society on a sustainable basis.

***Silvicultural interpretations:*** Silviculture-related information developed for each native plant community and ***growth stage*** to help guide the land manager in developing site prescriptions.

***Site prescription:*** A strategy, including specific actions and timing, to move a stand's composition and structure to a desired condition and protect its ecological integrity.

***Winter-access-only sites:*** Sites in which access is restricted to the time of year when the ground is frozen or snow covered. The majority of these sites will be dominated by black spruce and tamarack. However, ***winter-access-only sites*** may also be upland sites that are accessible only during the winter due to being surrounded by wetlands. Examples would be upland islands within bogs.

Signed

/s/ **Dave Epperly** (5/11/06)

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Division of Forestry