

STANDARD 33: FOREST MANAGEMENT, OLD GROWTH AND WILDLIFE HABITAT

Primary Objectors:

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Interested Person: Heavenly Resorts

Summary: Objectors expressed concerns that Standard 33 allowed nearly unlimited discretion to cut trees greater than 30 inches diameter breast height (dbh) which are important for wildlife habitat. Specific concerns about degradation of spotted owl habitat were expressed. Objectors propose only allowing removal of trees greater than 30 inches dbh for safety or equipment operability purposes, and utilizing project-specific forest plan amendments when removal for other purposes is needed.

The Forest Service proposes a revised standard which reduces discretion and addresses habitat concerns as follows:

- Removal of trees with potential to spread insects and disease is limited to developed recreation sites and facilities
- Removals to reduce stand density are limited to stands where mortality is imminent unless densities are reduced, as quantified by stand density index
- Removals in PACs are limited to unoccupied PACs, as described in the PAC restoration standard (SG90)
- Removal of TECPS nest trees and adjacent habitat elements is prohibited

Other standards and guidelines provide additional protection - the combination of SG 36, 37, and 38 would effectively prevent conversion of late seral stands to mid seral. SG 33 is not intended to provide for removal of many large trees in the event of widespread tree disease or insect outbreaks; project-specific NEPA analysis would be needed under those circumstances. Forest plan amendments are not necessary for the types of removals described in the revised standard.

FEIS version:

SG33. *Retain trees 30 inches dbh or larger. Where trees greater than 30 inches DBH need to be removed, ID Team members (e.g., vegetation management specialist, wildlife biologist, scenic specialist, recreation management specialist) will propose trees to be removed, girdled for snag creation, or felled for coarse woody debris during project development.*

*Exceptions under which a tree 30 inches dbh or larger can be removed include the following:
[Standard]*

- a) The tree(s) larger than 30 inches dbh presents a safety hazard, or prevents equipment operability.*
- b) The tree(s) larger than 30 inches dbh is a host/source of insects or disease or where stands are at a high risk of beetle outbreak and/or disease transmission*
- c) The preponderance of overstory trees within the stand are greater than 30 inches dbh and at high densities, the selection for removal or snag creation would allow competitive release for growth of the largest trees*
- d) Shade tolerant trees larger than 30 inches dbh are increasing the rate of mortality or out-competing preferred species*
- e) When necessary to support aspen, meadow or stream restoration*
- f) When managing for blister rust resistant sugar pines that require removal of competing trees within a sufficient radius to improve health of the sugar pine.*

Objectors' remedy: Eliminate the standard and utilize project-specific forest plan amendments to remove trees greater than 30 inches dbh for purposes other than safety or equipment operability.

Previous Forest Service Instruction:

- Clarify in the Record of Decision that removal of trees greater than $\geq 30''$ dbh will be the exception rather than the rule.
- Consider instructing the Regional Forester to have the LTBMU track and evaluate the impacts of removing ≥ 30 dbh on the quality and distribution of closed-canopy late seral coniferous forests for vegetation management projects such as fuels reduction and restoration. Exclude tree removals associated with special use permits such as utility lines.

Proposed revised Forest Service instruction:

SG33. Retain trees 30 inches dbh or larger. Where trees greater than 30 inches dbh need to be removed, ID Team members (e.g., vegetation management specialist, wildlife biologist, scenic specialist, recreation management specialist) will propose trees to be removed, girdled for snag creation, or felled for coarse woody debris during project development. Exceptions under which a tree 30 inches dbh or larger can be removed include the following:

- a)** The tree(s) larger than 30 inches dbh presents a safety hazard, prevents equipment operability, or removal is required in conjunction with a special use permit (e.g utility line).
- b)** The tree(s) larger than 30 inches dbh has been successfully infected by disease and/or infested by insects with potential to spread to adjacent trees and is in a developed recreation site or facility site (e.g. a communication site).

- c) The average dbh of overstory trees (dominant and co-dominant trees) within the stand is greater than 30 inches dbh and the stand density index (SDI) indicates that mortality is imminent (e.g. SDI_{max}); the selection for removal or snag creation would allow competitive release for growth of the largest trees, and selection of trees for removal would give preference to shade tolerant trees.
- d) When necessary to support aspen, meadow or stream restoration
- e) When managing for blister rust resistant pines that require removal of competing trees within a sufficient radius to improve health of the pine.
- f) Removal, snag creation, or felling for coarse woody debris of trees equal to or larger than 30 inches dbh is only allowed in PACs when necessary for PAC restoration (to move PAC habitat closer to desired conditions) in PACs that meet conditions in SG90.
- g) In TECPS-occupied or known nesting, denning, roosting trees and adjacent high-habitat-value trees (e.g., trees that provide thermal or protective cover) removal, snag creation or felling for coarse woody debris of a tree equal to or larger than 30 inches dbh is prohibited. [Standard] **(additional information in MIS issue paper)**