



Title:	Debris Management Standards for Timber Harvest Operations
Number:	AF-FDP-2017-07
Program Name:	Wildfire Management Branch and Forest Management Branch, Forestry Division, Agriculture and Forestry
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1. Purpose

To provide standards for debris management in timber harvesting operations in compliance with the *Forest and Prairie Protection Act*, the *Forests Act* and associated regulations. Compliance will help reduce the risk of wildfire to communities and other values within the Forest Protection Area of Alberta.

2. Context

The *Forest and Prairie Protection Act* and associated regulations outline debris management standards for debris produced from timber harvest operations. In addition to the management of debris through dispersal and disposal, this Directive also applies to debris retained for reforestation, reclamation, wildlife habitat or other landscape management objectives.

3. Definitions

Residual debris – any debris resulting from the harvesting process including but not limited to branches, bark, unusable pieces of the bole, tops and mulch/chipping of debris.

FireSmart Community Zone (FSCZ) – Generally, a ten kilometre buffer extending out from the centre of a community. However, the buffer may vary to take advantage of significant geographic feature which support wildfire management objectives.

4. Application and Implementation

Debris management standards must be linked to community protection and landscape objectives and must not conflict with legislative and regulatory requirements. All efforts should be made to identify cutblocks within the Annual Operating Plan (AOP) that fall within the FSCZ and plan debris strategies that align with this objective. Debris management strategies can also be addressed in Operating Ground Rules (OGR) when they come up for renewal to adhere to processes laid out in this directive. Alternate methods of debris disposal (e.g. mulching, chipping, air curtain sumps, etc.) should be considered and can be approved at the AOP stage. If burning debris, safe burning practices still apply including the consideration of timing of burning to reduce impacts.

Debris piles to be disposed of must be in conjunction with the terms of these standards and the 12-month debris disposal timeline set out in the Forest and Prairie Protection (Ministerial) Regulation. The Harvest Skid Clear date will indicate that the start of the next timber year (May 1) will be the start of the 12-month debris disposal period.

The intent is not to remove all debris from timber harvested areas as there are ecological and habitat benefits to debris being left on site after harvest.

4.1 FireSmart Community Zone (FSCZ) Debris Management Standard

In order to reduce the risk of wildfire, the following standards shall apply:

- The FSCZ is considered the boundary that will be used to delineate the debris management practices allowed inside and outside of the zone.
- Within the FSCZ, debris management standards must not include the retention of debris piles for any purpose. Any residual debris not piled and burned should be evenly distributed throughout the harvest area and must not exceed 60 m³/ha. Initial assessment is guided by the Forest Operations Monitoring Program (FOMP) visual guide which would trigger further measurement if needed. If more debris will be generated from harvest and retained on site, it must be approved prior to harvest.

4.2 Landscape Level Debris Management Standards

Beyond the FSCZ, debris pile retention for reforestation, wildlife habitat or other landscape management objectives will be considered an acceptable debris management strategy. Debris pile retention is subject to approval through the Annual Operating Plan (AOP) process in accordance with the standards described in this document.

Efforts to maintain scattered residual debris at pre-harvest levels of adjacent stands should be the goal. Standard debris practices that are outlined in the Alberta Timber Harvest Operating Ground Rules should be followed in conjunction with the following guidelines:

- Height of piles must not exceed 2 metres.
- Base diameter of piles must be no greater than 3 metres.
- Distance between piles must be no less than 15 metres.
- Distance from standing timber to debris piles must be no less than 25 metres.

The above conditions apply only to debris piles not intended for disposal and are located outside of any FSCZ. Piles to be disposed of, may be any size and located anywhere in the harvest area. If burning piles is the disposal method, a minimum distance of 25 metres from standing timber is recommended.

5. Approval and Enforcement Process

This section outlines the request for variances to the debris load, extensions for exceeding the 12-month debris disposal regulatory requirement, and enforcement that may result from non-compliance.

5.1 Debris Disposal Request for Variance

During harvest operations, there is a need to manage debris to minimize the risk of wildfire to communities and other values at risk within the Forest Protection Area.

Sensitive areas inside and outside of the FSCZ, such as slopes susceptible to slumping and erosion (particularly those associated with watersheds), may be reviewed by the Forestry Division local Forest Area Office on a case by case basis regarding debris disposal requirements. The assessment may be done through a detailed block plan submitted by the timber disposition holder, outlining the objectives of retaining excess debris. If the timber disposition holder wants to exceed the allowable limits of debris loading for a specific block, prior approval of a request for variance must be provided by the local Forest Area.

- This applies to blocks both in and outside of the FSCZ.
- Rationale and justification for the variance must be provided by the timber disposition holder in a request letter. The submission will be reviewed by the local Forest Area staff for decision.

5.2 Debris Disposal Extension Process

Timber disposition holders may apply to the Forestry Division local forest area office for a one-year extension where weather or operational conditions have prevented them from completing safe debris disposal through burning operations. A request letter indicating the opening numbers of the cutblocks and maps of the cutblock locations is to be attached to the Fire Control Plan submission as a part of the normal AOP approval process. The request for an extension of one year will be reviewed by the local Wildfire Prevention Officer in conjunction with the local Senior Forester. The response will be provided in writing through the normal Fire Control Plan and AOP approval processes for the timber disposition holder.

Where debris disposal by burning is the strategy, the timber disposition holder must report all burning locations to the local Forest Area office one month before the start of the fire season (see Fire Control Plan). The timber disposition holder must comply with all smoke related regulatory requirements and best practices in regards to notifications and air quality. Any burning for the purpose of debris disposal that occurs within a fire season requires a fire permit.

5.3 Debris Disposal Compliance and Enforcement

Agriculture and Forestry will complete field inspections as required by the Forest Operations Monitoring Program (FOMP).

Within FOMP, a Standard Operating Procedure that includes a visual guide will be used to determine whether or not a block is compliant with the appropriate debris load, pile size and location based on the conditions of this Directive and pertinent legislation.

Agriculture and Forestry may issue an “Order to Reduce or Remove a Fire Hazard” when debris piles have not been properly disposed of in accordance with this Directive and the approved AOP. In some instances, a fine or penalty may be issued. If the residual debris loads exceed the 60 m³/ha, Agriculture and Forestry will follow the appropriate FOMP process to implement enforcement measures.

Authorities

Forest and Prairie Protection Act
Forest and Prairie Protection Regulation
Forest and Prairie Protection (Ministerial) Regulation
Forests Act
Timber Management Regulation

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