

STANDARD AND SPECIFICATIONS FOR PROTECTING VEGETATION DURING CONSTRUCTION



Definition

The protection of trees, shrubs, ground cover and other vegetation from damage by construction equipment.

Purpose

To preserve existing vegetation determined to be important for soil erosion control, water quality protection, shade, screening, buffers, wildlife habitat, wetland protection, and other values.

Condition Where Practice Applies

On planned construction sites where valued vegetation exists and needs to be preserved.

Design Criteria

1. Planning Considerations

A. Inventory:

- 1) Property boundaries, topography, vegetation and soils information should be gathered. Identify potentially high erosion areas, areas with tree windthrow potential, etc. A vegetative cover type map should be made on a copy of a topographic map which shows other natural and manmade features. Vegetation that is desirable to preserve because of its value for screening, shade, critical erosion control, endangered species, aesthetics, etc., should be identified and marked on the map.
- 2) Based upon this data, general statements should be prepared about the present condition, potential problem areas, and unique features of the property.

B. Planning:

- 1) After engineering plans (plot maps) are prepared, another field review should take place and recommendations made for the vegetation to be saved. Minor adjustments in location of roads, dwellings, and utilities may be needed. Construction on steep slopes, erodible soils, wetlands, and streams should be avoided. Clearing limits should be delineated (See Section 2).
- 2) Areas to be seeded and planted should be identified. Remaining vegetation should blend with their surroundings and/or provide special function such as a filter strip, buffer zone, or screen.
- 3) Trees and shrubs of special seasonal interest, such as flowering dogwood, red maple, striped maple, serviceberry, or shadbush, and valuable potential shade trees should be identified and marked for special protective treatment as appropriate.
- 4) Trees to be cut should be marked on the plans. If timber can be removed for salable products, a forester should be consulted for marketing advice.
- 5) Trees that may become a hazard to people, personal property, or utilities should be removed. These include trees that are weak-wooded, disease-prone, subject to windthrow, or those that have severely damaged root systems.
- 6) The vigor of remaining trees may be improved by a selective thinning. A forester should be consulted for implementing this practice.

2. Measures to Protect Vegetation

- A. Limit soil placement over existing tree and shrub roots to a maximum of 3 inches. Soils with loamy texture and good structure should be used.
- B. Use retaining walls and terraces to protect roots of trees and shrubs when grades are lowered. Lowered grades should start no closer than the dripline of the tree. For narrow-canopied trees and shrubs, the stem diameter in inches is converted to feet and doubled, such that a 10 inch tree should be protected to 20 feet.

- C. Trenching across tree root systems should be the same minimum distance from the trunk, as in "B". Tunnels under root systems for underground utilities should start 18 inches or deeper below the normal ground surface. Tree roots which must be severed should be cut clean. Backfill material that will be in contact with the roots should be topsoil or a prepared planting soil mixture.
- D. Construct sturdy fences, or barriers, of wood, steel, or other protective material around valuable vegetation for protection from construction equipment. Place barriers far enough away from trees, but not less than the specifications in "B", so that tall equipment such as backhoes and dump trucks do not contact tree branches.
- E. Construction limits should be identified and clearly marked to exclude equipment.
- F. Avoid spills of oil/gas and other contaminants.
- G. Obstructive and broken branches should be pruned properly. The branch collar on all branches whether living or dead should not be damaged. The 3 or 4 cut method should be used on all branches larger than two inches at the cut. First cut about one-third the way through the underside of the limb (about 6-12 inches from the tree trunk). Then (approximately an inch further out) make a second cut through the limb from the upper side. When the branch is removed, there is no splintering of the main tree trunk. Remove the stub. If the branch is larger than 5-6 inches in diameter, use the four cut system. Cuts 1 and 2 remain the same and cut 3 should be from the underside of the limb, on the outside of the branch collar. Cut 4 should be from the top and in alignment with the 3rd cut. Cut 3 should be 1/4 to 1/3 the way through the limb. This will prevent the bark from peeling down the trunk. Do not paint the cut surface.
- H. Penalties for damage to valuable trees, shrubs, and herbaceous plants should be clearly spelled out in the contract.