

**New York State Office of Parks, Recreation
and Historic Preservation**

**POLICY ON THE MANAGEMENT OF TREES AND OTHER
VEGETATION IN STATE PARKS AND HISTORIC SITES**

Introduction

New York State law directs the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) to operate and maintain the State Park and Historic Site system to conserve, protect, and enhance the natural, ecological, historic, cultural, and recreational resources contained therein and to provide for the public enjoyment of and access to these resources in a manner which will protect them for future generations.

Forests and trees are an integral part of the State Parks experience, creating a “parkland” aesthetic, supporting forest-related recreational activities, enhancing scenic and cultural landscapes, and providing shade and shelter for park visitors. In addition, trees in cultivated and natural settings are an integral part of the educational mission of state Parks. Forestlands are habitat for an incredible diversity of plants, animals, and ecosystems. They provide a variety of ecosystem services such as clean water and flood control, and can serve as laboratories for scientific research on forest health and wildlife habitats. And by drawing carbon dioxide out of the air and “sequestering” carbon, growing trees and forest ecosystems play an important role in mitigating global warming emissions. For all these reasons, the protection of trees and forests is a core element of OPRHP’s mission.

However, there are circumstances when it is necessary and appropriate to prune and/or remove trees and other vegetation as part of the agency’s stewardship to manage and maintain its natural resources and operate its diverse State Parks and Historic Sites. This policy identifies such circumstances.

Approximately 16% of the 330,000-acre State Park System is classified as “developed or managed areas,” which includes day use areas, picnic areas, campgrounds, recreational and interpretive facilities, cabins, swimming beaches, boat launches, golf courses, public gardens, roadways, parking areas, historic sites, and many other types of public use facilities. In order to provide safe and enjoyable recreational and interpretive experiences for the public, and to assure the safety of agency staff, OPRHP actively manages trees within the developed areas of our State Parks and Historic Sites.

Conversely, approximately 84% of the State Park System is natural habitat. In undeveloped forestlands under our jurisdiction, as a general rule OPRHP follows a “passive management” approach, allowing natural processes and natural succession to govern the development of forest ecosystems. This policy recognizes that aging mature trees, standing dead snags, downed trees, and forest openings created by wind and other

natural disturbances provide important habitat for many species of birds, wildlife, and other organisms. Downed vegetation, including large trees that are allowed to fall to the forest floor, is important for enhancing forest soils and allowing new forest stands to regenerate in forest openings.

Tree Cutting and Removal Policy

OPRHP will actively manage trees and forested areas where necessary to: protect public health and safety; maintain scenic, cultural, recreational, historic, and aesthetic landscape features; and conserve native biodiversity. In most cases, decisions about the removal of individual trees is appropriately made at the park management level (e.g. by the Park Manager and park operations staff), in consultation with Regional Office staff. Larger scale proposals – such as significant tree pruning and removal to re-create historical viewsheds, large-scale habitat restoration efforts, tree removals in high visibility parks and sites, or removal of specimen trees – will be submitted as a brief written proposal to the Director of Resource Management, the Deputy Commissioner for Operations, and the Deputy Commissioner for Natural Resources for approval. In addition, removing trees or vegetation within a historic landscape requires review under Section 14.09 of the Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation Law.

Circumstances where tree cutting and removal are appropriate within State Parks and Historic Sites include:

1. Removal or pruning of individual trees in developed areas of State Parks and Historic Sites, as well as along roads and trails, that are in danger of falling or dropping limbs, creating a potential health and safety hazard to the public or OPRHP staff, or that threaten agency buildings or structures. OPRHP has adopted a hazardous tree identification program that is implemented on an ongoing basis within all parks and historic sites. Trees identified as presenting a public safety risk should be promptly removed. Substantial removals of hazardous trees in developed park areas should be accompanied with an ongoing tree-planting effort to assure that such areas retain a “park-like” character over time. At properties that have historically significant landscapes, the location, diameter (dbh), and species of removed trees should be documented and replanting should use the same species at the same location whenever possible.
2. Removal of trees necessary for the construction, operation, maintenance, or restoration of buildings, structures, recreational or educational facilities, golf courses, roadways, utilities, firebreaks, or other infrastructure.
3. Pruning or removal of trees and other vegetation to maintain or restore important scenic overlooks and views, in developed areas of parks and sites and along roads and trails, which enhance the park visitor experience and protects the character of the area impacted by removals.

4. Restoration of historically significant landscapes at Historic Sites and State Parks that have been lost over time due to the lack of sufficient agency resources to maintain ornamental plantings or mow or clear fields and open areas. To the extent that such activities include replanting of vegetation, restoration design should take into account where appropriate the use of native species and minimize the potential for establishment of invasive species.
5. Pruning or removal of trees and vegetation to restore or improve habitat for significant plant or wildlife species or ecosystems. For example, intensive restoration efforts to restore pine barrens habitats through cutting and prescribed burning practices are appropriate activities on state parkland. Conversion of tree plantations to natural forest ecosystems is also an allowed activity provided that such plantations are not part of a recognized historic landscape (conversion of historic landscapes requires prior consultation with the Field Services Bureau).
6. Removal of invasive species and actions taken in response to widespread infestation of pathogens, disease, or insect pests impairing forest health.
7. Response to windstorms, ice storms, wildfire, or natural events. Although de minimis downed tree removals may be allowed, OPRHP will not automatically “salvage” trees damaged by such events, but rather will determine whether damaged or downed trees should be removed, or left in place, on a case-by-case basis, after considering public safety, facility operations, and ecological protection issues.

Where practicable, trees and vegetation removed for the purposes outlined above should be used for appropriate activities within the parks and historic sites, such as firewood, mulch, fencing, educational exhibits etc. All tree removals should be done in accordance with best management practices that minimize soils erosion and associated impacts to adjacent natural areas and infrastructure.

Typically, cutting or pruning of trees will be undertaken by OPRHP staff, who must adhere to OSHA standards, be equipped with appropriate protective gear, and be properly trained in the safe use of chain saws, chipping equipment, and other tree cutting and removal equipment. In other circumstances, OPRHP may contract with a qualified private company for tree removal services (private companies may remove and retain trees if allowed under the contract – the removal of trees by private contractors, when necessary to achieve any of the seven goals listed above, does not constitute “commercial logging” as defined in this policy).

All tree removal actions must comply with applicable agency guidelines, laws, regulations, and constitutional provisions, including the State Environmental Quality Review Act. All cutting and removals done in accordance with this policy will be conducted in a manner that minimizes impact on the surrounding visual and natural environment. Restoration and cleanup are important elements of any tree pruning or removal projects. Conditions following such pruning and/or removal should be as

consistent as possible with the environmental and/or historic character of the affected area prior to the work.

Prohibition on Commercial Logging

Commercial logging, as distinct from activities stemming from the operation and maintenance of OPRHP facilities, is defined as “the management, harvesting, and sale of trees and related wood products to private business enterprises engaged in the purchase or sale of saw timber, pulpwood, firewood, wood biomass, or other similar commercial wood products.” OPRHP’s mission does not include the management of forestlands for the production of commercial forest products.

Commercial logging activities are prohibited on lands under the jurisdiction of the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. The agency will not manage its lands for the economic production and cutting of trees, nor will it enter into agreements with public or private entities to conduct commercial logging within the State Parks or Historic Sites.

Any questions regarding implementation of OPRHP’s tree cutting and vegetation removal policy should be directed to the Deputy Commissioners for Natural Resources and Operations.

This policy is effective immediately.

Dated: March 12, 2009



Carol Ash
Commissioner