

DNR Forest Practices Q & A:

Precommercial Thinning and Forest Health Biomass Removal

Are you planning to thin your forested lands in Washington state? If so, the following information will assist you to determine whether you need to submit a Forest Practices Application to the Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to conduct a precommercial thinning and/or forest health thinning activity.

You will need a Forest Practices permit if you will be doing any of the following:

1. Selling any harvested timber, regardless of the amount.
2. Harvesting 5,000 board feet (about one log truck load) or more of timber (including live, dead, or down material) for personal use in any 12-month period. Personal use includes firewood, fence posts, and similar uses.
3. Operating equipment, building roads, or constructing landings within, near, or involving any of the following:
 - a. The shoreline of a Shoreline of the State water (Type S) or a riparian management zone of a fish-bearing water (Type F) or non-fish perennial water (Type Np). (Call DNR Forest Practices if you will be within 200 feet of any water or channel migration zone.)
 - b. Use of equipment within or adjacent to riparian management zones, wetland management zones, channel migration zones, and equipment limitation zones that causes rutting and ground disturbance with potential to deliver sediment to typed waters. If the equipment arm is only reaching into the above-mentioned areas to cut or remove timber, an FPA may not be required.
 - c. Off-road operation of skidding systems on side slopes greater than 40 percent.
4. Any activity in or around potentially unstable landforms. (WAC 222-16-050(1)(d)(i)).
5. Any activity affecting (disturbing) archaeological/historic or tribal cultural sites. (WAC 222-16-010).
6. Any activity with potential effects to State-listed threatened or endangered species. (WAC 222-16-080).
7. Harvest of timber that must be left to meet shade requirements within 75 feet of streams. (WAC 222-30-040).

NOTE: If you are uncertain if you are conducting any of the above-mentioned activities or have any of the above elements, please contact your local DNR Region office for assistance or set up an appointment with the applicable Forest Practices forester prior to submitting your Forest Practices Application (FPA).

What is precommercial thinning?

Precommercial thinning is the cutting of trees not for financial return but to reduce stocking in order to accomplish other desirable goals for stand improvement (e.g. increased fire resiliency, increased yield of residual stand). Material cut during a precommercial thinning is typically left on-site.

Is removing precommercial thinning or biomass material a type of harvest?

Yes, if the decision has been made to remove the thinned trees or biomass material from the site this is a type of harvest. One exception is firewood for personal use in an amount less than 5,000 board feet (WAC 222-30-010(1)). Precommercial thinning where the residual material is left on the site is not commercial harvest. An example would be cutting non-commercial trees, chipping them, and leaving the chips on site or cutting non-commercial trees and leaving the whole tree on site. This is typically done with trees less than 6 inches in diameter.

What harvest type is forest tree or biomass material removal?

Biomass removal can be either a timber harvest (WAC 222-30-010(1)) or a salvage (WAC 222-16-010), depending on what is being removed.

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What class of forest practice is a precommercial thinning or forest tree biomass removal?

Precommercial thinning and biomass removals are classified like any other type of forest practice and therefore could be any of the four classifications. (WAC 222-16-050).

What age or size of trees are typically harvested for a precommercial thinning?

Stands that are precommercially thinned are typically less than 20 years old and have diameters at breast height less than 6 inches. Stands that are older or have larger-diameter trees are typically thinned commercially.

Do I have to leave all trees that provide shade?

It will depend upon the location of your forest practices activity. Some areas that lie within 75 feet of streams may have to have most or all of the trees retained to provide shade. (WAC 222-30-040 and Board Manual Section 1).

Can I do an alternate plan for harvest adjacent to streams?

Possibly – we recommend contacting the Region office so that you can meet with the Forest Practices forester assigned to the area where you will be conducting your activity. Many areas have site-specific conditions where it helps to discuss what type of activity will be conducted prior to submitting an FPA.

If material from a thinning is sold/marketed, can the operation be a Class I forest practice?

No. The Class I definition includes only precommercial thinning where the material is left on-site or may be removed by hand, piled, and burned on site or away from the site in a safe location.

NOTE: Other permits for your activities may apply including but not limited to a county clearing and grading permit or a DNR Wildfire burn permit.

After working through these questions and you have made the decision to submit a Forest Practices Application because thinning material will be removed and sold, DNR will need some information from you to review and classify your FPA. You or your consultant must provide a clear description of the vegetative material and disclose if the goal is to remove the vegetative material from the site. A clear description is especially important if the proposed operation is listed as salvage, because the types and amount of material removed may have different effects on soil erosion potential, site productivity, and reforestation techniques. Therefore, the applicant must specify exactly what is to be removed. For example: only trees from precommercial thinning, down logs, snags, stumps, brush, tops and limbs, or any combination of the above. If you require additional assistance, please contact your local DNR Region office.

Here are some links that may help you better understand forest practices activities, the Forest Practices Rules, what local DNR Region your land is in, as well as the forms you will need if you complete an FPA:

[Forest Practices Illustrated](#), [DNR Region Offices](#), [Forest Practices Rules](#), [Forest Practices Board Manual](#), and [Forest Practices Forms](#).