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Post Storm Salvage Operations & BMPs

The destruction caused by Hurricane Laura in southeast Texas left many forest landowners searching for answers about what to do with all the broken and damaged timber. Salvaging this timber and starting over may be the only option for many. When conducting these operations, best management practices (BMPs) should be applied as if it were a normal harvest.

Forestry BMPs are voluntary practices that are designed to be an effective and practical means of preventing or reducing erosion and the amount of water pollution generated by forestry activities. A report released by the Texas Forest Service documents the positive results the forestry community has achieved in protecting water quality through the implementation of BMPs over the years.

However, in cases where there is a sense of urgency to harvest the timber, as in a salvage operation, we must still remember the long term benefits of using BMPs. BMPs help protect soil and water, two key elements necessary for growing a productive forest. Here are some things to keep in mind when harvesting or salvaging timber:



- **Make sure the ground is stable enough for heavy equipment.** Operating heavy equipment under wet conditions can cause excessive rutting, leading to losses in the site's productivity and causing impairments to water quality.
- **Pay close attention to Streamside Management Zones (SMZs) during salvage operations** Spotting the boundaries of these zones (50 foot buffer that aid in protecting water quality) now may be impossible for the salvage contractor. Remarketing or flagging these boundaries can increase their visibility.



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- **Special care should be taken when operating in the SMZ.** These zones act as the final filter before any sediment or debris reaches the stream. Haul roads, skid trails, and landings should be located outside of these areas.
- **Every effort should be made to protect and leave trees not severely damaged in the SMZ.** This is critical to prevent destroying the filtering and stream shading effects of SMZs. A residual density of 50 square feet of basal area should be left where possible.
- **Trees and tops should not be felled across or pushed into streams.** Hurricane Laura undoubtedly caused a lot of debris to enter East Texas streams, potentially negatively impacting water quality. Though this was due to a natural occurrence, any additional debris that enters the stream as a result of the salvage operation should be removed. Failure to do so could result in reduced stream flow and impaired water quality.
- **Follow BMP protocols for the rest of the tract and use common sense.** Despite the necessity to facilitate a quick harvest, BMPs should still be followed. Common sense will go a long way in keeping operators safe and preventing excessive damage to the site. Temporary erosion control may be utilized, but plans should be made to revisit the site as soon possible to shore up these measures.

When conducting hurricane salvage operations, landowners, loggers, and foresters should continue to practice sustainable forestry. Following the state's recommended BMPs is one way to ensure this. You can get a copy of the Texas Forestry Best Management Practices (Bluebook) at your local Texas A&M Forest Service office, download at <http://tfsweb.tamu.edu/BMP> or download to your mobile device by searching for "Texas Forestry BMPs" in the App Store (iOS) or Google Play (Android).