



News Release

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Ice Storm Leaves Many Private Forests In Ruin

LITTLE ROCK, ARK. – On January 26, 2009, the northern third of Arkansas suffered extensive damage from an ice storm that left thousands without power and the landscape in shambles. Community leaders, emergency response personnel and residents have worked tirelessly over the past weeks to clear away tons of debris from splintered and uprooted trees in populated areas. At the same time, private forest landowners throughout the area are faced with the daunting task of determining the steps they need to take to salvage as much timber as possible, remove debris to reduce potential hazards, and restore their devastated stands.

Robin Moore owns 450 acres of forest land just north of the Buffalo River near Ponca in Newton County. “Twenty-five to 30 percent sustained major damage, and 90 percent sustained minor damage,” said Moore. “When I say minor, I mean the crowns are clipped off, the trees are bent over with the roots out of the ground.”

Moore is a member of the Tree Farm system and participates in the Forest Stewardship program. The property was purchased in 1971, and he began managing the forest in 1983 by planting 90 acres of Loblolly pine. The remaining acreage has been kept as naturally regenerating hardwood stands.

Moore compared the damage trees suffered this year as compared to the 2000 ice storms. “I think it was worse in 2000 for pines,” said Moore. “This storm was much harder on the hardwoods. I am amazed at how much damage there is. What appeared to be health hickory, white oak, red oak has been snapped off halfway up.” He added that maples seem to have been even more affected by the weight of the ice

AFC County Forester Chris Wyatt has visited with Moore to assess the damage, but Moore notes there are few options available to salvage the trees damage. “There are a few shaving mills in the area. The trees that are damaged can be taken there, but it’s hardly worth the effort. However, I would like to see them used rather than letting them rot.”

The Arkansas Forestry Commission (AFC) encourages all landowners to have their forested property evaluated by an AFC County Forester, a consulting forester or an industrial forester. Consulting and industry foresters can provide timber marking services. Marking is a vital tool used to ensure that only trees that must come out due to damage are taken, unless others are also marked to make a timber sale worthwhile.

Some forest stands have been entirely destroyed, but many may still have enough healthy trees to allow for regeneration. To find the contact information for AFC county offices, visit www.arkansasforestry.org/districts/district_map.html or call (501) 296-1940. The AFC has an online directory of consulting foresters at www.arkansasforestry.org/manage/consultingforesters.html, and has created a page designated to Ice Storm Damage information. The following is a sample of the information affected forest landowners should know:

■ **Are funds available to clean up my stand through FEMA?**

At this time there is no funding available through FEMA for forest landowners to remove debris from their property. At this time, the counties of Baxter, Benton, Boone, Carroll, Clay, Craighead, Franklin, Fulton, Greene, Independence, Izard, Jackson, Johnson, Lawrence, Madison, Marion, Mississippi, Newton, Searcy, Sharp, Stone, Van Buren and Washington have been declared federal disaster areas. More information about FEMA and its programs can be found at www.fema.gov.

■ **Should I have a salvage-cut operation on my stand?**

Trees with greater than 50 percent loss of the live crown or with the bole bent or butt defected greater than approximately 45 degrees from vertical are considered severely damaged and can be cut for salvage. The most severely damaged stands should be salvaged first, and an emphasis should be placed on pine stands because they are more susceptible to pest outbreaks. Care should be taken to ensure that enough good trees per acre are left after a stand is thinned to prevent overcutting.

When only a few trees per acre are damaged, it may not be worth the effort to sell them. Landowners or consulting foresters should have at least two to three bids before arranging a timber sale agreement. The agreement should be signed and have Best Management practices outlined. A sample timber sale agreement can be found online at www.arkansasforestry.org/pdf/bidform2.pdf.

■ **How can I tell if a tree is going to make it or not?**

Pine and hardwood trees with partially destroyed crowns will be put under stress for future growth, and during the summer months they will need to have adequate rainfall to ease the stress. Small hardwood or pine trees (under 15 feet in height) usually straighten after severe bending. Taller severely bent trees should be considered for removal during the next scheduled harvest. An evaluation can be made next year to determine the number of living trees.

Hardwood trees have a greater tendency to recover from partially destroyed crowns. However, hardwood trees with broken tops or branches over three inches in diameter should be considered for salvage during the next scheduled harvest.

For pine, research has shown that loblolly and shortleaf pine trees bent less than 40 degrees from vertical can completely recover within two years. Trees bent 40 to 60 degrees recovered, but demonstrated varying amounts of crook and sweep. Only trees bent more than 60 degrees did not recover enough to make acceptable growing stock. Trees with broken tops but still have four or more living limbs remaining should survive until the next thinning operation. One of the lateral branches will become the terminal, and in eight to 10 years, the only sign will be a sharp crook in the bole at the point where the break occurred. However, these trees will experience growth losses. If three live limbs or less remain, the tree should be harvested as quickly as practical.

■ **How many “good” trees per acre should I have in my stand before I start over?**

For pine, stands less than five years old should have approximately 350 trees or more per acre. As pine trees get older, fewer trees per acre are needed. Pine stands five to 15 years old may need only 150 to 200 trees per acre. Older pine stands could produce sawtimber if as little as 100 trees per acre remain.

Trees should be well-distributed over the property, and should be undamaged enough to grow until final harvest. Holes created by downed or broken trees may need to be replanted. When inter-planting, remember to back away from the standing trees enough so that seedlings won't be affected by the shade of the remaining trees.

For hardwoods, similar numbers of residual good trees per acre are advisable. However, fewer numbers could be adequate depending on the species and soil conditions. A professional forester should evaluate your hardwood stands to determine what is necessary.

■ **Will insects or disease be a problem to the remaining trees in my stand if left to grow?**

Insects

Pine stands — *Ips* beetles are attracted to slash, damaged and downed trees. Drying of material reduces attraction to these beetles. Unsalvaged, downed trees should be cut from the root system to aid rapid drying. Black Turpentine Beetles (BTB) are also attracted to damaged trees and cut stumps. Close monitoring of pine stands should be conducted several times during the summer. These beetles usually attack only a few trees at a time. www.barkbeetles.org/southernbarkbeetles.cfm (*Ips* and BTB)

Hardwood stands — Stressed trees are susceptible to a host of borers that are present in the forests at all times. Close monitoring of stands and removal of heavily attacked trees is recommended.

- www.barkbeetles.org (Red Oak Borer)
- www.forestpests.org (White Oak Borer, Two Lined Chestnut Borer)

Diseases

Pine stands — should have no problems.

Hardwood stands — Red oak trees stressed by crown breakage may be susceptible to hypoxylon canker, a sapwood decay fungus that causes rapid red oak mortality. A more serious, long-term effect of crown breakage is opening trees to various stem and heart rots, which, while not killing trees, reduces their value over time. www.forestpests.org (Hypoxylon Canker)

More in-depth information on each of the above agents is available by clicking on the *Insects and Diseases of Trees in the South* link found on each page; and www.forestryimages.org provides pictures of insects, diseases and damage.

AFC County Foresters are available for consultations at any time.

■ Are seedlings available to replant my stand?

Yes, the AFC nursery has pine and hardwood seedlings for sale. These seedlings are sold “bare-root” and are between eight to 18 inches in length for pine, and eight to 30 inches in length for hardwoods. Tree planting season in Arkansas normally occurs between December 15 and March 31.

A list of seedlings available and pricing is available online at www.arkansasforestry.org/seedlingsales_new.htm, or by contacting your local AFC office. Orders for the next planting season should be placed early (anytime after July 1) as certain species sell out quickly.

■ Will there be money available to help me replant my stand?

Contact your local Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Farm Service Agency (FSA) or AFC office. Cost-share programs currently available for reforestation are the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Southern Pine Beetle Prevention and Restoration Program (SPBPRP).

EQIP is administered through NRCS and provides payments to approved applicants at the rate of approximately 50 percent of total practice costs. Applicants can apply year-round, and applications are ranked annually (usually in the early spring each year.) EQIP can help replant both pine and hardwoods, help with fire lane construction, forest stand improvement and many other practices.

SPBPRP is administered by the AFC who receives funding in the spring to disburse to eligible landowners. Payments are reimbursed at the rate of 40 to 75 percent to replant pine only, as well as other management practices on pine stands such as pre-commercial thinning. Applications are available at your local AFC office.

■ Can I deduct my loss off my taxes?

Contact a tax consultant or accountant that is knowledgeable about timber taxation rules. Forest landowners may be shocked to find out how little can be deducted when timber is destroyed or damaged due to a storm. Deductible loss is the allowable basis (value invested) in the timber minus any insurance or other compensation received. Establishing basis may help you recover

reforestation costs in younger plantations destroyed. A consulting forester can help you determine the amount of basis a forest has. If the forest landowner does not have a basis, the reportable loss is zero.

If your county has been declared a federal disaster area, forest landowners may elect to apply any casualty loss to the prior year's tax return. For example, the loss can be applied to the 2008 tax return, instead of waiting to file the loss on the 2009 return. More information can be found online at www.arkansasforestry.org/manage/Taxtips.html.

■ **Who can I get to determine the volume loss in dollars so I can report it on my taxes?**

A consulting forester or other professional forester would need to furnish this information.

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