

Gov Delivery – Private Forest Lands – #7 – November 2015

Title: Alternatives to Hinge Cutting

News and Updates for November 12, 2015

This is a short update from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources about private forest land issues. We hope that this information will help you *manage, protect and enjoy your forest*.

Alternatives to Hinge Cutting.

It is early November, so about 1 million Michigan residents are thinking about deer hunting in their favorite spot in the woods on November 15. Whether you are a deer hunter or a bird watcher, many forest landowners work hard all year long to manage their forest to provide suitable habitat for the birds and animals that they enjoy watching.

“Hinge cutting” is a habitat management technique that is becoming popular among deer hunters in Michigan. Hinge cutting is a method to cut down a tree using only a back cut that does not fully sever the tree’s trunk from the stump, leaving the fallen tree connected to the stump by a “hinge” of bark. The intent is to keep the fallen tree alive for a while to provide deer with browse for food, bedding habitat, and to direct their traffic flow in the woods.

Many professional foresters and wildlife biologists have questions about hinge cutting as a habitat management technique. Hinge cutting has not been researched in controlled scientific studies, so there are not any data to support the wildlife habitat benefits claimed by its proponents. Hinge cutting might provide good habitat for deer, but landowners have other habitat management options that produce greater long-term habitat benefits for wildlife.

The strongest argument against hinge cutting is human safety. Cutting down a tree with a chainsaw is an inherently dangerous activity, and hinge cutting greatly increases the risk to the chainsaw operator and others in the woods. *Hinge cutting violates the basic rules for safely felling a tree.* Hinge cutting a tree of any size could result in the tree snapping back towards the operator or a “[barber chair](#)” where the tree splits suddenly and falls straight down on the operator.

Hunters and landowners using a chainsaw in their woods should do everything possible to maximize their safety. Always wear personal protective equipment (helmet, eye and ear protection, chaps, gloves, boots). Never stand near a tree being cut down by another person. Always use proper techniques to safely fell a tree of any size. Know how to operate your saw. Get safety training and follow the rules that keep you safe. If professional tree fellers like loggers and arborists refuse to practice hinge cutting, why should an amateur risk their life for possibly better habitat?

There are alternatives to hinge cutting for managing your forest habitat.

First, work with a qualified natural resource professional when seeking advice about your habitat management options. Look for proper credentials (formal education, on-the-job training, certifications, insurance, compliance with OSHA laws, etc.) when hiring a professional forester, wildlife biologist, or qualified logging professional. These professionals can help you improve your wildlife habitat, while also managing for additional land improvement goals.

Second, commercial timber harvesting practices create wildlife habitat benefits that equal or exceed hinge cutting. Standard forest management techniques can provide food and cover for a longer period, over a greater area, than do-it-yourself hinge cutting. You can greatly reduce your personal risk, and possibly increase your income, by hiring a forester to administer a timber sale conducted by a professional logger. Work with your forester to accomplish multiple land management goals.

Third, when you are doing your next habitat improvement project in your woods, [please fell trees using the safest possible techniques](#). A hinge cut tree will soon be just as dead as a tree cut down with safer techniques. Learn to identify tree species so you can keep the trees that provide multiple benefits, and harvest the trees that do not help you accomplish your habitat goals. Retain mast producing trees like oak, beech, hickory, and serviceberry as they produce natural food sources for deer and other wildlife. Read the "[Managing Michigan's Wildlife: A Landowner's Guide](#)" to get a basic understanding of forest ecology and wildlife management. Keep up the good work in your woods!

If you would like to work with a natural resource professional to improve your wildlife habitat, there are [125 professional foresters and 5 wildlife biologists](#) who can help you develop a [Forest Stewardship Plan](#) for your property. If you would like to discuss alternatives to hinge cutting, please contact Mike Smalligan, DNR Forest Stewardship Coordinator, at 517-284-5884 or smalliganm@michigan.gov.

Forest Facts.

When we talk about hunter safety, we usually think about gun accidents or falling from a tree stand. But hunter safety in the woods starts months before hunting season when you are out in the woods using your chainsaw to improve wildlife habitat. Logging is a dangerous occupation, with 77 professional loggers in the USA dying at work in 2014 (US Bureau of Labor Statistics). According to [MIOSHA](#), 26 workers (in all professions) have died on the job in Michigan in 2015, and two of those workers were killed by a tree. Stay safe out in your woods!

Important Dates:

December 18: Cut-Off Date to sign up for [EQIP](#) funding from [NRCS](#) in 2016

January 24-27: [Midwest Fish and Wildlife Conference](#) in Grand Rapids

Questions?

To learn more about additional programs available to assist private forest landowners, or to find the DNR service forester in your area, go to www.Michigan.gov/PrivateForestLand.

