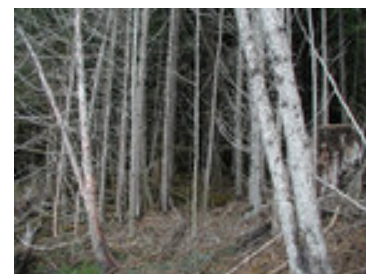


Background

The past practice of harvesting riparian area forests to the stream bank has resulted in a number of cumulative effects problems. Loss of old growth forest along streams, especially wood dependent channel types, results in water temperature changes, increased erosion and sedimentation rates, bank destabilization which may cause streams to become broader and shallower, and long-term loss of large wood recruitment into the stream which impacts the quality of fish habitat.

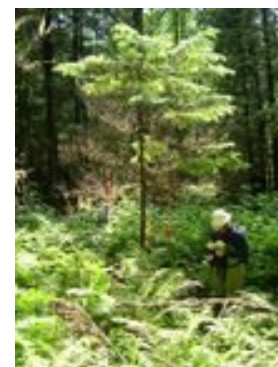
Thinning young growth riparian stands decreases the time needed for the stand to begin to regain old growth function (large diameter conifer trees, multi-story canopy, understory diversity) and may decrease the time needed to produce large trees for recruitment into the stream system. Many restoration practitioners feel that riparian thinning plays an important role in a long-term, holistic stream restoration program. Large wood placement may help preserve existing legacy wood in impaired systems or bridge the gap until stream-side forests can provide their own wood.



Unthinned forest showing depauperate understory.

Outcomes

- Riparian thinning efforts on Prince of Wales usually average about 200 acres/year.
- Even if thinning only decreases the amount of time needed for riparian forests to provide large wood by 75-100 years, it is an investment that is easily justified by the high cost of artificial wood placement



Riparian thinning to release conifers along an alder dominated stream

Successes

By modifying prescriptions slightly and treating slash, riparian thinning can provide immediate wildlife benefits (forage production and landscape level travel corridors and linkages). Other benefits take longer to realize. However, the unique partnership between non-profits and the Forest Service has been an important success of this project.

Timeline This is an ongoing project and partnership that began in 2004.

Future Work Select sites are monitored on a 3-5 year schedule with emphasis on changes in tree growth and understory diversity.

Details Project partners: US Forest Service (Fisheries, Wildlife, & Timber), Trout Unlimited, The Nature Conservancy; Funding Sources: USFS Watershed funds, Trout Unlimited, The Nature Conservancy; Business Contractors: Various, based on Prince of Wales.