



Recommended Performance Standards for Deer Wintering Areas in Overhead Utility ROW Projects

March 26, 2012

Applicability: This document applies to linear right-of-way projects that cross Deer Wintering Areas (DWA) mapped by MDIFW. Deer Wintering Areas are a critical habitat for white-tailed deer living at the northern end of their range. A DWA is the habitat where deer go to avoid harsh winter winds and deep snow. During a winter of average severity, a deer living in southern Maine will require this shelter for 35 to 70 days. In far northern Maine dependency is usually 90 to 160 days. Quality winter shelter occurs where certain landforms and forest stands meet. Overhead utility right-of-ways can fragment DWA cover or travel lanes, can provide enhanced access for predators, and can provide an important source of browse.

General Project Alignment : Where practicable, right-of-way alignment should be designed to avoid vegetation clearing within mapped DWAs. Where full avoidance is not an option, alignments should minimize fragmentation of the habitat by crossing as close to the outer edge as possible, or minimizing the length of the proposed disturbance by crossing narrow portions of the DWA.

Specific Deer Wintering Area Performance Standards

A. Defining Boundaries and Setbacks

The limits of DWAs must be clearly marked in the field prior to the start of construction or subsequent maintenance work.

B. Arboricultural Management Practices

(1) Capable vegetation may be removed and controlled within the transmission line corridor portions of the development. However, within DWAs, a "feathered" clearing and maintenance approach will be used. Specifically, forested areas of the ROW will be cleared in a manner that allows for a gradual increase in tree height away from the centerline, as long as it does not impinge on the safety and reliability of the transmission line. Areas under the transmission line centerline may be cleared and maintained, but as the clearing approaches the edge of the ROW, an increasing amount of taller coniferous cover will be left to allow deer the ability to travel unimpeded from browse

areas to quality cover during restrictive winter conditions. Capable vegetation is defined as species that are capable of growing to a height that would reach the conductor safety zone. Most tree species in Maine are defined as capable vegetation.

(2) When terrain conditions permit (e.g., ravines and narrow valleys) capable vegetation must be retained and permitted to grow within DWAs where maximum growing height can be expected to remain below the conductor safety zone. Narrow valleys are those that are spanned by a single section of transmission line, pole-to-pole.

(3) When capable vegetation within a DWA must be removed for the purpose of construction, natural re-generation of non-capable woody vegetation must be allowed within the DWA. To facilitate the regeneration of natural vegetation, the contractor must separate the topsoil from the mineral soil when excavating during project construction. The excavated topsoil must be returned to its original place and position in the landscape and appropriate erosion control methods utilized.

(4) Within a DWA impacts to scrub-shrub and herbaceous vegetation, and other non-capable species must be minimized to the maximum extent practicable.

(5) As deer frequently travel along riparian zones within DWA's a vegetated buffer at least 100 feet wide on either side of streams, rivers, or wetlands associated with a DWA should be maintained. Only capable vegetation that pose a safety or reliability issue will be removed within this buffer during construction and maintenance activities.

(6) No herbicide will be used within DWAs and maintenance activities will be preformed by hand to promote hardwood stump sprouting that provides valuable browse for wintering deer.

(7) Harvesting is encouraged during winter conditions to protect regeneration, provide a one-time but beneficial source of food for deer (tops, downed lichen, etc.), and enhance deer mobility during the operation through snow compaction by logging equipment.

C. Spill Management

(1) Any spill or release of petroleum products or other hazardous material within a utility transmission line corridor must be managed in accordance with the Spill Contingency Plan as approved by the Maine Department of Environmental Protection.

(2) No fuel storage, vehicle/equipment parking and maintenance, and refueling activity should not occur within a DWA.