

December 2015

Cleaning

Cleaning is a forestry action which, like thinning, is of great significance for the development of forest value.



Cleaning in purely practical terms follows approximately the same principles as thinning: removing weak and damaged trees to the benefit of the more viable ones. The difference is that in clearing the focus is on the smallest-diameter parts of the stand, including what resembles shrub vegetation, from stems that are only about one metre high. Cleaning is performed between 5 and 15 years after regeneration felling.

Cleaning can serve several different purposes. One may be a wish to obtain a forest with thicker and more valuable trees, for example in future thinning. Likewise to clear particular tree species and mixes of species. Another is to leave and conserve natural and cultural amenities in the forest. Yet another purpose may be to improve manoeuvrability in the forest, with future thinning and felling in mind.

Cleaning aids future thinning, again in several different ways: One is that improved quality and growth of forest after cleaning results in a greater economic yield in thinning. Another economic benefit is that future thinning costs are reduced.

Despite cleaning being regarded as important to the forest and forestry there is no clearing obligation under the Forestry Act. On

the other hand there are certain rules. One is that the forest stand that is cleared must not become too sparse so that the timber-producing capability of the soil is not utilised. Another is that valuable areas of nature and cultural environments must not be damaged.

Cleaning is mostly done manually with a special brush saw. As in other manual forestry work, substantial knowledge is needed to perform the work effectively and safely. But thanks to the work being relatively simple it is largely done by self-employed forest owners. The rate of self-employment in cleaning is high, around 60%.

However, cleaning can be very time-consuming. This is one reason where there is a large pent-up need for cleaning in Swedish forestry, despite the fact that up to 300 000 hectares are cleaned annually.

Projects are in progress in Swedish forestry to develop efficient and cost-effective mechanical methods. One example of such development methods is what is known as crane corridor thinning, where cleaning is performed with special harvesting units that enable biofuel to be extracted from felled stems.