
TOWN OF HARVARD

CONSERVATION COMMISSION

POLICY FOR CUTTING TREES IN A RESOURCE AREA (WETLAND) OR BUFFER ZONE

The Harvard Conservation Commission protects trees in and around wetlands due to their numerous ecological values. Trees maintain water quality by stabilizing soils, keep water and wetland soils cool, protect native flora in the shaded understory and support wildlife. Standing dead trees or “snags” are of particular value to wildlife and may not be removed from a resource area (wetland) or the 100’ buffer zone (200’ within riverfront area, vernal pool or pond, such as Bare Hill Pond) without notifying the Conservation Agent. Downed trees, in the buffer zone, should generally be left in place due to their ecological value and the unavoidable disturbance caused while removing large trees.

If a tree poses a safety hazard by virtue of its condition and proximity to a building, an area of habitual activity, driveway or power line, an Emergency Certification Form can be issued by the Conservation Agent.

If a tree does not pose an obvious safety hazard it is the Commission’s policy that Conservation Agent or two Conservation Commissioners review the site to determine if the tree(s) may be cut or if a permit is required. Decisions are made on a case-by-case basis. Please note that if work requiring a permit is undertaken without the proper permit, permit fees are doubled.

Cutting to Create or Enhance a View

The Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act Regulations, 310 CMR 10.04, states that “Vista Pruning” means the selective thinning of tree branches or understory shrubs to establish a specific “window” to improve visibility. Vista pruning does not include the cutting of trees which would reduce the canopy to less than 90% of the existing crown cover and does not include the mowing or removal of understory brush.

Vista Pruning is allowed under the Act provided the activity is located more than 50’ from the mean annual high water line within a riverfront area or from a bordering vegetated wetland, which ever is further.

Thinning at staggered heights, to mimic natural conditions is recommended. The Land Use Administrator shall be consulted prior to any vista pruning.

Habitat & Shoreline Protection

Native vegetation at the edge of a body of water is of especially high value ecologically and is protected at a higher level by both State and Town regulations. The roots of trees and shrubs hold the banks of ponds and streams in place and protect against erosion from heavy rains, wave action and flooding. Shoreline vegetation also takes up nutrients from surface water before it gets into ponds and streams and screens and holds back debris, soil and pollutants from bodies of water. Wildlife is particularly active at water’s edge and trees, living or dead, which reach out over water play special roles as hunting perches for birds. Even dead trees that fall into the water have wildlife value.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Property owners unsure of whether or not the removal of a tree is within the jurisdiction of the Commission should contact the Conservation Agent, Liz Allard at 978-456-4100 ext. 321 or at lallard@harvard.ma.us

Request for Determinations of Applicability Applications can be found on the Towns website at www.harvard.ma.us

Feel free to stop by the office anytime during normal business hours Monday through Thursday from 8:00am to 4:30pm.

If you would like to speak with the Commission directly please feel free to attend a meeting. The Commission meets the first and third Thursday of each month in the Town Hall Meeting Room (please call for times).

Revised: June 7, 2018