

Photo courtesy: Ray Campbell

Evaluating Ice Damage

by Jeff Stringer

Ice can cause a wide range of damage to woodland trees, from annoying, but un-harmful to catastrophic. This photographic guide will provide information that can help you assess tree damage relative to timber value loss¹. If you feel that you have significant damage to your timber trees contact a professional forester for assistance.

High Value Veneer -

High value veneer logs that are lying on the ground (1) or have main stem breakage (2) need to be removed quickly prior to rot, staining, and drying. It is best to remove them prior to the middle of the summer. Partially thrown trees (3) that are off the ground and still attached to the root wad (that is partially in the ground) have more time before they degrade.

Evaluating Top Damage -

A range of damage is common after ice storms. Typically most species that have less than 30 percent of the top branches damaged will be fine in the long-run (4). Trees with approximately 50 percent of their top branches removed (5) are suspect, some may live and some may die, often depending upon conditions during the next growing season. Trees with more than 50 percent of their top branches removed (6) will do poorly or die, either right away or in subsequent years.



Photo courtesy (4): Susan Fox

Photos courtesy (all but #4): Jeff Stringer



Top Damage to Small - Fast Growing Species - Fast growing species such as yellow-poplar can re-grow tops relatively quickly compared to slower growing species such as oaks. Figure 7 shows a yellow-poplar in the center that will re-grow its top easily. However, the two yellow-poplars on either side will probably sprout, but it will be a long time before they will re-grow a top sufficient to re-establish significant growth. Yellow-poplars that still have 30 percent of their crown intact (8) will recover.



Pines -

Pine stands can be particularly hard hit (9). Stands with this type of damage should be salvaged relatively quickly. Pine timber is very susceptible to staining that can start to occur the first growing season after damage.

¹ Consult FORFS 09-02 “Ice Damage – Timber Salvage Decisions” at www.ukforestry.org.

About the Author:

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