



## PCTA Trail Skills College Curriculum Field Reference



# Course 101. Brushing and Scouting

### STUDENT SKILL OUTCOMES:

- “Trail Eyes” to see the PCT trail corridor and clearing limits.
- Ability to accurately survey a trail for logs, brushing and major tread needs
- Safe use of loppers and hand saws, including commitment to PPE.
- Effective lopping and sawing skills to protect trees and maximize efficiency.
- Clear understanding of and commitment to PCTA reporting procedures.

### KEY TERMS:

**Blow Down:** (aka **wind fall**) any trees fallen across a trail, though usually the result of high winds, most commonly in the winter storm season.

**Brushing:** removal of brush, saplings, and tree limbs to open the trail corridor to proper clearing limits for a given trail.

**Clearing Limits:** (aka **clearing specifications, trail specs...**) exactly how wide and how high to cut tree limbs, shrubs, blow down and tree saplings to open the trail corridor for users. For the PCT, from the ground to 24” high, cut an opening 3’ wide. From 24” to 10’ cut an opening 8’ wide. This large corridor allows from some vegetation regrowth before packstock are obstructed. Other kinds of trails have different specifications.

**Log Out:** trail work removing blow down; usually in the spring to open the trail for high use season. In Wilderness areas the work is done with hand tools such as crosscut saws; while elsewhere it is usually done with chain saws.

**Spring Pole:** a severely bent green sapling tree or branch held by a larger downed tree in such a way to produce dangerous energy in the sapling that can be released suddenly when cut. Very dangerous, especially because it does not look threatening to the uninitiated.

**Trail Corridor:** (aka **travel corridor or trail prism**) best thought of as a tunnel through the woods, it includes all the elements of a trail affected by construction and maintenance

workers including the excavated back-slope and tread, and the entire area within the clearing limits.

**Trail Triage:** when there is more work to do than available labor (almost always), we must make choices about which work to do now and what to postpone. Usually problems that threaten the safety of users or are causing serious erosion are top priority.

### HANDOUTS:

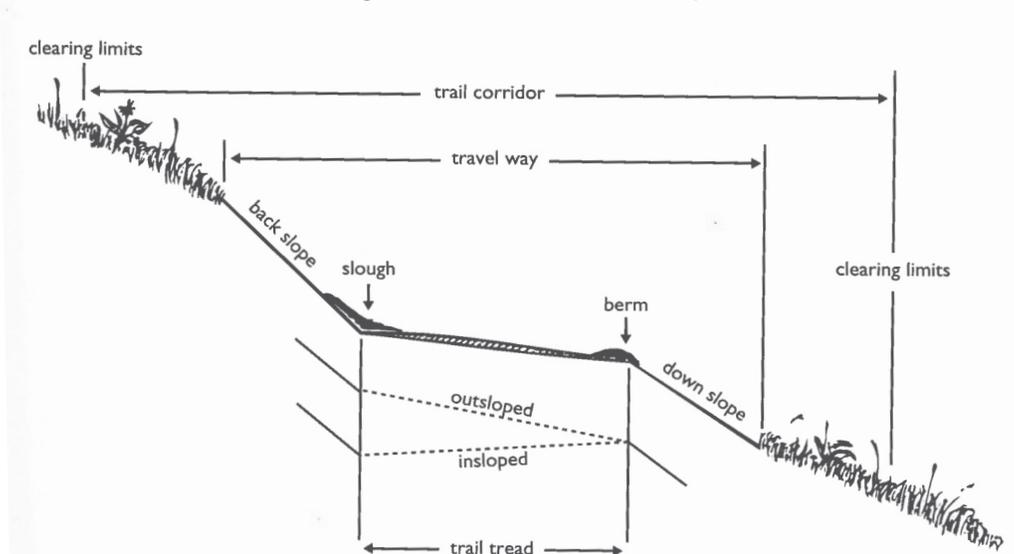
- Trail Work Project Planning form

### KEY CONCEPTS:

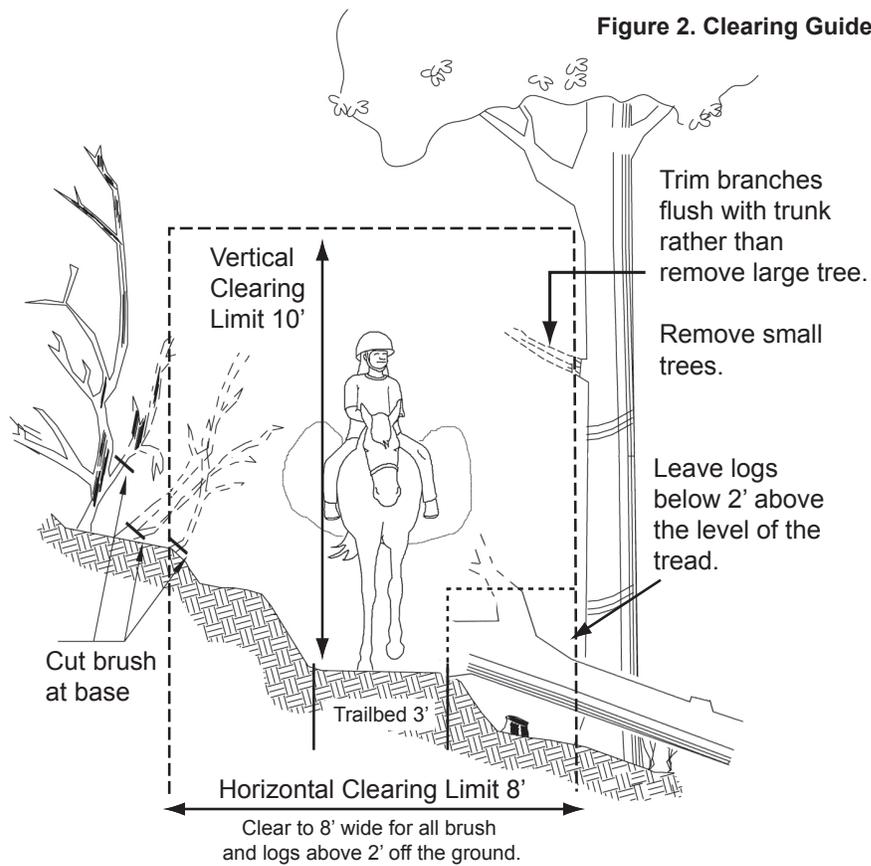
- 1) Safety Documents and Concerns: Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), Job Hazard Analysis (JHA), Tailgate Safety Session (TSS), Emergency Action Plan (EAP)
- 2) Trail Crew Leave No Trace: Have a positive impact on the land through trail work and be sensitive to off trail and camping impacts.
- 3) Develop “trail eyes”
  - recognize perpetually growing plants
  - keeping the corridor properly cleared
  - take good scouting notes
- 4) Scout Accurately: know where and who to report scouting notes to and make sure they are reported promptly.
- 5) Trail corridor and clearing limits:
  - 3’ wide up to 24” (approx. knee height)
  - 8’ wide up to 10’ height
  - Below the knee, leave obstacles close-in to prevent tread widening and OHV incursions
- 6) Outfall ditches of drainage structures must be cleared of logs, branches, saplings.
- 7) Loppers are easily broken, cut nothing bigger than your thumb, no twisting. Hand saws (folding, scabbard, and bow saws): pros & cons of each. Also pole saw technique.
- 8) Cut flush and deep: close to the ground; limbs flush with bole of tree (leaving collar if present) to help tree heal and avoid “pack grabbers” (staubs). With brush, “When in doubt, cut it out”--it will grow back. Cut extra as “preventative maintenance.” Grub or pull out the roots of multi-stemmed shrubs and small tree seedlings.
- 9) Recognize and safely remove spring poles.

- 10) If time, prepare for log out crew by cutting limbs off blow down across the trail.
- 11) Report work promptly.

**Figure 1. Trail Structure Terms (IMAGE COURTESY OF THE SCA)**

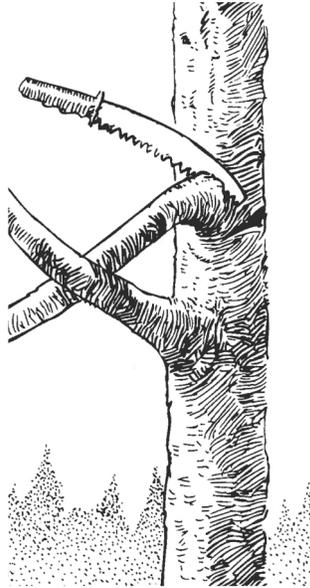


**Figure 2. Clearing Guide**



*\* These are general trail-wide clearing guidelines. Please work with your local land manager to determine if different guidelines are used in your local area.*

**Figure 3. Saw branches almost flush with the trunk to avoid leaving hat racks. (IMAGE COURTESY OF THE SCA)**



**Figure 4. Look out for spring poles (trees or limbs that are held down by other trees.) Spring poles can release with great force, causing serious injuries. Make a series of small cuts on the inside of the bend when severing a spring pole. (IMAGE COURTESY OF THE USFS)**

