TREES AND BRUSH CLEARING GUIDELINES

We truly appreciate individuals who help Hidden Valley maintain its ski and bike trails. To keep the trails and you safe, we have made the following suggestions:

When clearing trails, the main goals are to make the trails safe and aesthetically pleasing while allowing the wood to decompose naturally without creating a fire hazard.

When you are specifically clearing ski trails, the rules for dispersing cut wood and debris change significantly compared to standard summer hiking trails. Because ski trails rely on a packed snow base and are maintained by grooming machinery, improperly placed debris can ruin grooming equipment by posing safety hazards under the snow to equipment, groomers and skiers.

How to disperse wood based on size and shape:

Large Logs and Heavy Limbs

- Cut and Scatter – Cut large trunks into smaller, manageable sections (2-4 feet long) so they sit flat on the ground.
- Direction – Lay logs perpendicular to the slope and away from the side of the trail. This prevents them from rolling back onto the trail. Lay logs on downhill side of the trail if possible.
- Hide the Cuts – Angle the cut ends (flush cuts) away from the trail or mask them with dirt or leaves so they look more natural to passing trail users. Whenever possible, cut trunks even to the ground.
- Ground Contact – Ensure the wood touches the dirt as much as possible as this contact traps moisture which speeds up the decomposition and lowers fire risk.

Small Branches and Brush

- Scatter Widely – Carry smaller limbs and brush at least 8-10 feet completely off the trail. Do not pile brush up. Never throw cut wood or brush into creeks or drainage ditches. We are constantly making the ski trails wider during the winter. Any debris left near the sides of the trail will prevent this from happening.

- Butt Ends Away – Carry branches with the heavy, cut “butt ends” facing away from the trail and into the woods.
- Lopping – When lopping smaller trees in and alongside the trail, cut them flush to the ground. When cutting branches from trees along the trail, make sure the cut is flush with the tree. Leaving sharp branch stubs creates hazards for skiers and grooming equipment.
- Cut the “Ceiling” – Use pole saws to clear limbs hanging lower than 10 feet above the trail, accounting for the fact that a snow base will lift groomers and skiers closer to the branches.

Suggested Volunteer Gear List

- Work gloves to prevent blisters and protect hands from sharp branches and saw blades.
- Sturdy footwear for walking brush into the woods.
- Safety glasses to protect eyes from snapping branches and flying wood chips.
- Layered clothing as trail work will be highly active but standing around can get chilly.
- Long pants to protect legs from sharp branches, briars, and ticks.
- Daypack for water, snacks, lunch, and extra layers.

Safe Use of Chainsaws at Hidden Valley

- Whenever possible, have another person with you. They can move debris away from where you are cutting. They can help if something unexpected happens.
- Accidents Happen – Have an emergency action plan in place, i.e., an assistant (as mentioned above), someone expecting notification when you are done working, a phone to call for help, a first aid kit with blood stopper.
- Make sure your chainsaw is in good working order.
- Anyone working with a chainsaw on USFS land (Sommer's and Outback), should have gone through a USFS chainsaw training class.
- Wear UL-certified apron chaps or cut-resistant pants to protect yourself from a moving chain; use a hard hat; use eye and ear protection.
- Wear sturdy non-skid boots. Wear heavy duty gloves.
- Keep both feet firmly on the ground with your body angled away from the cutting chain.
- Keep both hands wrapped firmly around the handles.
- Engage the chain brake or shut off the engine whenever you walk or move between cuts.
- Maintain a buffer zone between you and bystanders.
- Never cut with the upper tip of the guide bar to prevent sudden kickback.
- Watch for branches under tension that can bind the bar; use plastic wedges to keep deep cuts open.
- Always check above you for "widowmakers" before cutting – hazardous, detached branches or tree tops, or entire dead trees hanging freely in the canopy that can fall without warning.
- If the task is beyond your skill level, leave it for someone with more experience. There will always be more trees and brush to clear another day.