

Firewood gathering on the Kenai Peninsula is not as easy as it seems

by Doug Newbould

You might think that with the millions of dead spruce trees on the Kenai Peninsula, getting a load of firewood should be a simple task. At almost any point on the road system where you can see mature stands of white spruce, you can bet that some of the trees are dead—victims of the spruce bark beetle. So, with a seemingly endless supply of dead firewood, why is it so hard to get a few cords laid up each year for those cold winter months?

In a word, the answer is—access. Whether it's a firewood permit for a special wood-cutting area on public lands, written permission to cut and remove wood from a private landowner, or enough snow on the ground for you to take your snowmachine out to that dead snag you've been eye-balling for the past six months...access is the key to successful firewood gathering. And I'm talking about legal access here. We all need to understand that every tree in the United States of America (including Alaska) is somebody's property. You own the trees on your land, your neighbor owns his/her trees, and we all own the trees on public lands—collectively.

If there were a wood-cutter's bible, the first commandment would be: "thou shalt not covet the trees on thy neighbors' lands." The second commandment should be: "thou shalt have written permission to remove any tree or wood product from any lands other than thine own." (Note: the *Refuge Notebook* editor has complained that I tend to get a little bit preachy in my columns, and I guess this proves him right.)

Ok, so how does one go about getting access to some firewood? Well it helps if you are resourceful, tenacious and hard-working. Or, you need enough money to pay someone else to be resourceful, tenacious and hard-working. The easy way is to pay for someone to deliver firewood to your house. You can expect to pay from \$50 to \$200 per cord of wood—depending on the species and quality of the wood; whether the wood is delivered in log or firewood lengths; if it's cut in rounds or split; and whether it's unloaded in a pile or stacked neatly. A cord is 128 cubic feet or a 4' x 4' x 8' stack of wood: that's a full-sized

pickup truck bed with side racks loaded to the top of the cab.

If you don't want to pay someone else to get your firewood or you're one of those strange people (like me) who enjoy the whole process of firewood gathering (except for the sore back of course), here are some ideas about where to go:

Kenai National Wildlife Refuge [262-7021] - Personal use firewood permits can be purchased at Refuge Headquarters on Ski Hill Road in Soldotna. Permits are \$20 (non-refundable) and limited to five cords per permit, per household. Maps of the permit area off Funny River Road are provided with each permit.

Alaska State Forestry [262-4124] - The State does not have a designated area for wood-cutting, but you can cut personal use firewood on non-designated State land (not in parks, habitat areas, etc.). Dead-standing trees or dead and down wood can be cut and removed from these non-designated State lands, free of charge and without a permit. The Division of Forestry office in Soldotna has land status maps to assist you in locating areas that are State-owned and legally accessible.

Chugach National Forest / Seward Ranger District [224-3374] - Dead standing or dead and down trees may be cut and removed from the Chugach National Forest without a permit, for personal use only. Areas that are closed to the removal of wood products include campgrounds, trailheads and active timber sales. Motorized vehicles may not be taken off forest roads and highways without a permit. Contact the Seward Ranger District for more information.

Private lands - Search the local bulletin boards and the classifieds for private landowners who are selling firewood. Some are giving it away if you will fall the trees and pile the slash. A more ambitious plan would be to team-up with your neighbors and complete a FireWise Community Action Plan. Your neighborhood "team" could contact owners of vacant lots, organize work crews to cut trees and dispose of slash, or contract with a logger to cut and remove dead and

infested trees (leaving useable firewood for property owners). Some local neighborhoods have been very successful using the FireWise process. Your local fire chief, the fire managers at State Forestry and I are all willing to help you get started with a FireWise project in your neighborhood. Developing a source of firewood in your area can be an important part of the project, as well as the fire prevention aspect.

In almost ten years of public service here on the Kenai, I have worked with many people who were having trouble finding firewood to heat their homes. I know it isn't easy. But it is possible to access a sup-

ply of firewood with a little ingenuity, tenacity and effort. And please remember to be safe out there in the woods. Use proper techniques and personal protective equipment during your wood-cutting activities so you can enjoy many toasty fires this winter.

Doug Newbould is the Fire Management Officer at the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. For more information about firewood gathering on the Refuge, visit our headquarters on Ski Hill Road in Soldotna or call (907) 262-7021. Previous Refuge Notebook columns can be viewed on the Web at <http://kenai.fws.gov>.