

Woodland Owner and Maple Producer Response to Hurricane Irene

September 1, 2011

Peter Smallidge, NYS Extension Forester

607-592-3640, pjs23@cornell.edu www.ForestConnect.edu

Steve Childs, NYS Maple Specialist

607-255-1658, slc18@cornell.edu www.CornellMaple.edu

Mike Farrell, Uihlein Maple Forest Director.

518-523-9337, mlf36@cornell.edu, www.CornellMaple.info

Cornell University Cooperative Extension, Department of Natural Resources, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY.

On Sunday August 28, 2011, much of eastern NY was exposed to severely strong winds and heavy rains. Thousands of owners of private woodland properties and maple production facilities may have experienced some amount of damage. Some sugarhouses in low lying areas might have suffered flooding. Three simple guidelines will help owners of rural property take appropriate action. The guidelines are similar to those recommended following the 1998 ice storm in the northern forests: safety first, seek professional assistance, and take time to make informed decisions.

Woodland owners and maple producers who go into their woodlots and sugarbushes need to prioritize safety. Numerous circumstances might compromise owner and producer safety. First, in the next several weeks, tree tops and branches that might have been broken, but not fallen, will eventually fall from the upper canopy. Second, many owners and producers will need to use a chainsaw to clear trails, tubing systems, and collect firewood from downed trees. Using a chainsaw requires the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) such as cut-resistant chaps and a logger's helmet. Using a chainsaw also requires personal protective behavior (PPB) such as avoiding high risk situations, analyzing downed wood for tension, and participating in appropriate chainsaw training such as Game of Logging. Third, trees and branches that fell during or after the storm are often twisted and under tension. These trees under tension require extra skill to safely cut and utilize.

Woodland owners and maple producers should seek assistance from trained professionals about their woods and the best response to correct and respond if there was damage from the hurricane. Foresters are trained to develop and implement woodland or forest management plans. These plans describe the property in terms of the owner's objectives. The plan also provides an annual work schedule of suggested tasks. Given the potential for damage created by the storm, the work schedule previously in place may need to be adjusted. If damage is extensive, foresters can inventory the extent of damage and administer a sale to salvage some value. Loggers, particularly those participating in NY's Trained Logger Certification, are trained to safely and efficiently cut, skid and buck logs to

optimize the value acquired from the harvest. Loggers should know how to cut and skid to minimize damage to the residual trees. Loggers will also know how to work with foresters to install best management practices that protect soil and water quality. Foresters will know the best process to select a logger and develop a timber sale contract, if a sale is the best course of action. Information on finding foresters and loggers is also available in the publications section of www.ForestConnect.info

Finally, owners and producers may feel a strong need to take immediate corrective action in regard to storm damage. However, while the impacts of the storm are visually dramatic, other than potential safety or priority access issues, there are few if any woodland and sugarbush situations that require immediate action. Owners and maple producers should review their management plan, work with their forester to inspect the extent of damage, and discuss the actions that are appropriate for the property and owner's objectives. Owners should be wary of anyone offering their services to immediately solve some problem or feel the need to make a hasty ill-informed decision. Maple producers should evaluate the extent of damage to their sugarhouses, tubing systems or trails used to collect sap buckets. If tubing systems are damaged, this might be a good time to review the new Maple Tubing Manual available through the Cornell Maple Program at www.CornellMaple.info or directly from Steve Childs.

There are some additional special considerations for maple producers. The extent of damage to tubing systems and production facilities should be documented to allow producers to access financial assistance that might become available through FEMA. Producers should consult a local FEMA representative about the potential and process for financial assistance. Foliage loss at this time of year has minimal if any impact on sap production next spring. Similarly, breakage of small branches will not adversely affect sap production or tree health. If large branches are broken, collecting sap in spring 2012 probably won't appreciably affect the likelihood of survival of the tree. Many sugarhouses are located in lower topographic areas or near streams to facilitate sap collection. These lower areas may have been flooded. Special concern exists to make sure the building structure is safe and stable, particularly the foundation and electrical service. Stainless steel items should be thoroughly cleaned. Porous materials, such as filters, should be replaced.

Woodland owners and maple producers who aren't sure how to get started can contact their local office of Cornell University Cooperative Extension (www.cce.cornell.edu) or their local private lands forester from the Department of Environmental Conservation (<http://www.dec.ny.gov/about/27790.html>).

Cornell Cooperative Extension in NYS provides equal program and employment opportunities.