

# Young forest



Many of our roadsides were pasture only a generation ago. As such, some roadside forests can be crowded with small and young trees, many of which are not tolerant of shade and have short life spans.

“Pioneer species” such as American elm, gray and white birch, pin cherry, and poplar require early maintenance and proactive management to avoid broken branches and stems. Often, these species reach out over the road or die prematurely, falling into the road during storm events. When done properly, selective tree removal can prevent future downed trees while encouraging growth of remaining long-lived trees such as sugar maples, red oaks, or beech. Additionally, thinning trees when they are small and young is less expensive and requires less large equipment and expertise than felling large trees that already present risk.



*Gray birch, a short-lived pioneer tree species on cleared land, often requires repeated maintenance to prevent broken branches.*

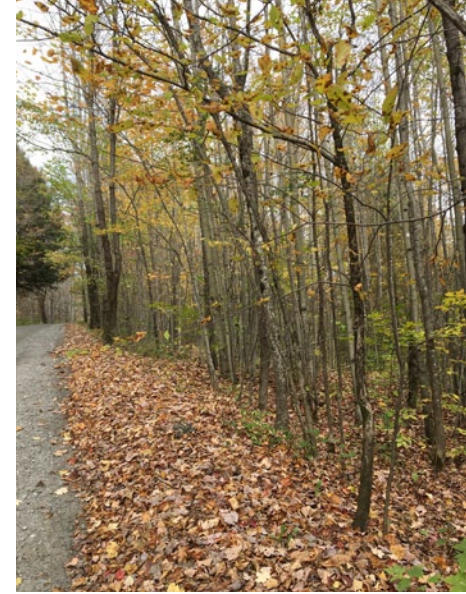
Identifying locations that may benefit from tree thinning, removal of high-risk and short-lived trees, or thinning of select understory trees helps us:

- identify species of trees that can become weak within a short time frame (years) and select for long-lived and shade tolerant species that grow into mature roadside canopy trees.
- learn where previous roadside tree clearing has created ongoing tree maintenance issues.
- plan for thoughtful tree removal during road construction.

## Recommendations

Learn about how **established silvicultural practices** like selective thinning (also called [treescaping](#),<sup>1</sup> described on pages 11–13 in the *Roadside Vegetation Management Manual for Rural Road Crews* by Harry Chandler and the Vermont Woodlands Association) can benefit our roadside forests.





**ABOVE LEFT** Hedgerows of young trees block wind, provide canopy cover, and create privacy for neighboring landowners. Careful thinning of select trees can maintain privacy while supporting growth of healthy, disease-resistant trees away from road edges.

**ABOVE RIGHT** Crowded young trees along rural roads are a common scenario in New England. Neighboring landowners and municipalities can selectively remove some trees and preserve others that will provide long-lived roadside canopy.

Consult a forester to identify **young roadside forests where the removal of some trees may release other trees from competition**. Ensure that released trees do not block a clear line of sight for drivers utilizing the road at the posted speed limit.

**Identify trees that are obscuring scenic views**. Consider if removal of these trees may benefit nearby trees that are not obscuring views, reduce complexity in future road construction or maintenance, or improve the experience of road users.

**Note the location of species prone to breaking** (e.g., birch, aspen) and **areas of shade-intolerant or diseased or infested trees** (e.g., black cherry or pin cherry, elm or ash) growing into the right-of-way, particularly along steep road curves. Monitor their health and create a plan for their removal, particularly in preparation for or after [storm events](#).<sup>2</sup>

**Identify immature tree canopy dominated by small, thin beech trees** (often called “beech thickets”). Work with the neighboring landowner and a forester to look for beech trees resistant to beech bark disease and identify techniques to manage these thickets to promote mature canopy trees.

**Consider creating a municipal tree ordinance or policy**<sup>3</sup> that specifies which trees require a public hearing for removal, particularly with regard to tree diameter, health, species, and placement on the road. At present, state statutes lack clarity regarding rights and responsibilities surrounding tree removals in some areas.

## Resources

1. Chandler, Harry and Vermont Woodlands Association, *The Roadside Vegetation Management Manual for Rural Road Crews* (2000), p. 11–13, [bit.ly/RoadsideVegetationManual](#).
2. “When a Storm Hits,” Arbor Day Foundation, [bit.ly/WhenASTormHits](#).
3. Vermont Urban & Community Forestry, *Tree Ordinances and Policies*, [bit.ly/VTUCF\\_TreeOrdinance](#).