

# VEGETATION MANAGEMENT PLAN

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**Chugach Electric Association**





## Introduction

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Chugach Electric Association's mission is to provide safe, reliable and affordable power. We strive to accomplish this mission while providing superior service and using only sustainable practices. Vegetation management, frequently called tree clearing, is one of the ways we execute our mission. Vegetation management is a critical component in the delivery of safe and reliable electric service. When combined with other programs we employ to maintain our lines, equipment and electric system we are able to ensure that electricity is there whenever you need it, 24 hours a day, 365 days per year.

Vegetation management is even more critical now, as Anchorage and many other areas in Alaska are facing increased wildfire threats. The Anchorage Hillside is littered with dead, Spruce Bark Beetle killed trees, and every summer fire officials worry about the danger of a fire taking off, threatening people and homes. In the summer of 2019, both the Kenai Peninsula and the Matanuska Susitna Valley suffered major wildfires that burned structures and electric power infrastructure.

Chugach employs both internal and contracted vegetation clearing capability to meet the vegetation management goals. Chugach's clearing contractor is Carlos Tree Service (CTS) and will be referred to throughout this document.

This management plan includes:

- Objectives for clearing
- Clearing challenges
- What is cleared
- Notifying members of clearing activities
- Danger Trees
- Frequently asked questions
- Guidelines for planting and landscaping away from power lines and electrical equipment



## *Objectives for clearing*

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Clearing helps provide safe and reliable power not only for our members, but also for our employees. A clear right-of-way (ROW) significantly reduces the number of outages while allowing our line crews to access power lines, identify the source of an outage, and make repairs quickly and safely. Properly maintaining Chugach's ROW is also required by the National Electric Safety Code. When it comes to clearing utility easements, Chugach utilizes best practices in vegetation management and has been a Tree Line USA utility since 1999.

The Chugach Vegetation Management Plan aims to:

- Ensure safe, reliable, affordable electric service
- Consider associated costs for clearing and maintenance and the impact on members
- Support arboricultural practices to provide healthy trees
- Effectively communicate with members on vegetation management and provide resolution to member concerns
- Balance the rights and responsibilities of property owners and Chugach, ensuring all members are treated equitably
- Respond to member concerns and disputes in a timely manner
- Provide safe working conditions for Chugach employees



## *Clearing challenges*

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**Access** – Fences, sheds, and plants close to electrical equipment are a safety hazard to Chugach employees and create longer restoration times. Chugach employees and contractors regularly inspect facilities and will leave a door hanger or contact members by phone if there is landscaping or structures impeding access. Members will be asked to remove the obstruction.

**Weather** – The weather in Alaska presents unique challenges not seen in many other areas of the United States. Wind conditions in the Anchorage area cause extensive damage to the electrical system in a very short period. Wind coupled with wet ground conditions cause many trees to be blown over each year. Snow and ice buildup on trees cause many trees outside of Chugach's easement to lean into power lines causing more outages.

**Vegetation health and growth** – Alaska's short summers with long daylight provide rapid growth for much of the vegetation. This is an important consideration when developing our clearing cycles and knowing when we will need to revisit an area for clearing. There are also other vegetation health issues such as the Spruce Bark Beetle which has infested area spruce trees in the last several years. Our clearing crews have prioritized clearing beetle kill danger trees that pose a threat to our power lines and electrical equipment.





## ***What is cleared***

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Chugach currently operates over 2,400 miles of power lines and clears on a 3 to 4-year cycle to effectively maintain and provide reliable service. Regarding distribution lines, which are normally found in residential areas, the entire easement is cleared which is generally 20 feet total centered on the overhead or underground lines. Regarding the larger transmission lines, clearing can extend 100 feet total centered on the overhead or underground lines.

Chugach clears roughly 250 miles of right-of-way annually.

### **Clearing includes:**

- Trees within the easement
- Trees blocking access to overhead or underground easements
- All trees and vegetation that could come in contact with lines and equipment (both overhead and underground)
- Remove all trees that present an unacceptable risk to Chugach overhead lines
- All guy wires and switch grates are cleared of vegetation.

### **Fences and other structures in the right-of-way**

Fences and structures built in the ROW require a letter of non-objection from Chugach, otherwise they are subject to removal by Chugach as part of the clearing process. Replacement of such structures must be located outside the ROW and will be the responsibility of the homeowner.

For information on obtaining a letter of non-objection from Chugach, please call Land Services at (907) 762-4781.

## ***Notice of clearing activities***

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Chugach has both an internal tree trimmer workforce and enlists Carlos Tree Service. Members are notified of clearing activities either by mailer, door hanger or an employee contacting you directly. The form of notification depends on the area being serviced and the access to the right-of-way.

The right-of-way is cleared to Chugach specifications which is ground to sky the full width of the right-of-way. Members with vegetation management questions/concerns can call the following numbers depending on their area.





## ***Danger Trees***

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Members are often concerned about trees outside of the right-of-way that look like they could fall into power lines or electrical equipment. These are called “danger trees.”

The definition of a danger tree is a structurally unsound tree, located on or off the right-of-way, that could come into contact with power lines, equipment, or facilities. Chugach will safely take down danger trees that are within 10 feet of the easement. Danger trees further outside of the easement will be individually assessed.

Please call the Chugach Danger Tree Hotline at (907) 762-7227. Somebody will come out to evaluate the situation and act if appropriate.

Members are not charged when danger trees are cut down, and Chugach appreciates the assistance of our members to help us identify trees and vegetation that may pose a threat to the safety and reliability of our electrical system.



Danger trees will be brought safely to the ground and left for the property owner to cut up or dispose of.

## ***Frequently Asked Questions***

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***Q: Can I prune and cut my own trees to keep them from interfering with power lines?***

A: No. It is required that only qualified individuals perform any activity that may bring an individual or equipment close to high voltage overhead energized lines or equipment.

***Q: Can Chugach just top my tree off (also known as crown reduction) to keep it from interfering with power lines?***

A: Topping off or crowning trees is not recommended as a cost effective or safe way to keep vegetation away from power lines. Topping the tree or reducing the crown can also negatively impact the tree’s health.

***Q: What happens to the debris when the trees are cut down in the right-of-way?***

A: The wood from trees in the right-of-way is not hauled away. Depending on the situation, the crew will chip, mulch, or stack the wood for use by the homeowner. Stumps are not removed.

As mentioned above, danger trees outside of the right-of-way will be safely taken down and left for the homeowner to cut up or otherwise dispose of.





***Q: I want to plant trees and/or landscape in my yard. What can I plant and where can I plant it without interfering with utility easements?***

A: Chugach follows the Right Tree, Right Place guidelines which outline various tree species and shrubs that can be planted based on their maximum growth potential that will also minimize conflicts with the utility line. Planting in the utility easement can make it difficult for Chugach or other utilities to gain access and maintain their facilities.

### ***Guidelines for planting***

