

INDIGENOUS AWARENESS TRAINING FIELD BULLETIN

SPECIAL AND CULTURALLY IMPORTANT SITES

Special and culturally important sites are areas in the forest that hold important meaning to Indigenous Peoples. Forestry plans and operations must identify and protect these special and culturally important sites to respect Indigenous Peoples' rights and traditional forest-related knowledge.

WHAT ARE SPECIAL AND CULTURALLY IMPORTANT SITES?

Special sites are areas in the forest that include geologically unique or culturally important features that have significance for human activities or beliefs.

These forest sites are essential to maintaining Indigenous People's relationships with the land, each other, and their communities.

Disturbing or destroying these areas can impact Indigenous Peoples' rights, practices, traditional forest-related knowledges, and cultures.

Special and culturally important sites can take many forms, but a few examples include:

- Ceremonial locations
- Medicine or non-timber forest product gathering areas
- Locations of historically significant treaties, battles, or events
- Places that are featured in sacred cultural teachings
- Burial areas and archaeological sites
- Traditional travel, trade, or stopover routes and sites

PROTECTING SPECIAL AND CULTURALLY IMPORTANT SITES IS THE LAW

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) recognizes **Indigenous Peoples' right to protect, maintain, and access culturally and spiritually important sites.**

Canadian law also requires any land-based activity, like sustainable forest management, to respect Indigenous Peoples' rights and special sites.

Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) certification reinforces these legal requirements by requiring forest managers to have a program to identify special sites in plans and protect them in their operations.

Visit forests.org/indigenous-online-courses to learn more.

PROTECTING SPECIAL AND CULTURALLY IMPORTANT SITES IN FOREST OPERATIONS

Special and culturally important sites are identified within sustainable forest management planning through consultation with Indigenous communities. Foresters ensure these sites are identified, mapped, catalogued, and protected in forest management plans, often as confidential values. Planners and experts collaborate with Indigenous communities to develop operating practices that ensure site protection.

Even with good planning, forestry operators may still encounter unmapped special values or previously unknown culturally important sites in the field. These sites also deserve protection. **It is therefore important that forestry workers to know what to look for and do if they encounter a new potential special or culturally important site.**

[On right side, include an image of a special site with brief caption below]

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Special and culturally important sites can take many forms and are areas in the forest that hold important meaning to Indigenous Peoples.
2. Protecting special and culturally important sites during forestry operations is the law and an SFI forest certification requirement. If you are unclear how to protect it don't operate.
3. Some special sites are unknown or undocumented, forestry workers need to know what to look for and do if they encounter a new potential special or culturally important site.

TAILGATE DISCUSSION

What are some special sites or cultural values that you might see on this block or examples relevant to our area of operations?

What do you do if you encounter a new potential special site cultural value in the forest?