

Vegetation management: The practice of tree girdling

Protecting power lines

We rely on a system of power lines to carry the electricity produced at our generating stations to homes and businesses in B.C. Managing trees and plants around these lines is important for safety and service reliability.

When trees grow towards or into power lines, they can cause power outages, start fires, or conduct electricity into the ground creating a safety hazard. We need to regularly manage trees in the areas under and around power lines.

We use professional arborists to get the job done. Our staff assesses trees that could impact power lines on a regular basis and make sure that tree and plant management has been effective. By using the best tree care practices, our power lines can stay safe, and the trees are impacted as little as possible.

What is tree girdling and why do we do it?

Tree girdling is the practice of removing a ring of bark from around the trunk of a tree. This is a way to prevent the tree from growing taller without having to remove the whole tree. The tree will grow slower, and eventually die. Over time, the tree becomes an important source of habitat for woodpeckers, bats, and other wildlife.

Girdling is one of the many tools in our vegetation management practice. It's a selective technique, which means that we only target trees that are directly in the way of conductive power lines.

Safe and healthy trees

By girdling, we can prevent many of the negative impacts of cutting down trees. The shrubs, soils, and wildlife are affected when we use industrial equipment to cut and remove the trunks and branches.

In forested areas near water sources like rivers, streams or lakes, it's important to keep as many trees as possible because roots help keep banks and slopes stable from slides and erosion.

Girdling even creates some positive effects. As the tree canopy gradually thins, it allows more sunlight through. This lets low foliage grow, creating a wildlife habitat on the forest floor for small animals, birds and bats.

Did you know?

The practice of tree girdling is preferred over tree topping—cutting off the top, or crown, of trees. When trees are topped, multiple tops can grow back in their place. This can create more problems in the future including encroachment on power lines, and breakage of these unstable tops which is a safety concern for the public.

Learn more about our vegetation management at bchydro.com/trees.

