Standing Operating Procedure (SOP) for Safe Use of Picks, Pulaskis (Forester Axe), Shovels, and Post Pounders

1. PURPOSE. The purpose of this SOP is to outline steps to be followed for the safe use of picks, Pulaskis, shovels, and post pounders in the field.

2. SCOPE. Includes procedures for use of picks, Pulaskis, shovels, and post pounders in the field.

3. RESPONSIBILITIES.

   a. Natural Resource Management Supervisors: Review procedures with Natural Resource Management Staff to ensure understanding and compliance during safety briefings.

   a. Natural Resource Management Staff: Execute operations with hand tools in accordance with SOP.

   b. Failure to comply with this SOP may result in disciplinary action.

4. PROCEDURES. Read all instructions carefully before using a pick, Pulaski, shovel, or post pounder. All users of these tools should observe the following safety precautions:

   a. Do not use a pick, Pulaski, shovel, or post pounder when you are fatigued. If you are uncomfortable or not confident in using a Pulaski, shovel or post pounder don’t use it.

   b. Do not use a pick, Pulaski, shovel, or post pounder that is damaged, or is not completely and securely assembled.

   c. When using picks, Pulaskis, or post pounders always clear the work area of material that could deflect the tool causing loss of control and potential injury. For post pounders, this includes low hanging branches, fencing, ropes etc. Be sure to push away any fencing well away from the post pounding area. This can be done by placing one’s knee and foot against the panel or a co-worker can hold the fence panel well away from the pounding area.

   Your body should be distributed evenly on both legs with feet comfortably spread apart to retain balance, the body should be relaxed and free to pound or swing and bend at the waist and knees. When working on slopes or uneven ground pounding posts, try to place one’s body on the upslope side of the t-post and tie oneself off as needed. This will allow for better leverage for pounding and for easier removal of the post pounder off the t-post. If you are lower than the post pounder when pounding, the worker must have both hands on the center of the post pounder when pounding.

   d. Use Personal Protection Equipment: Snug fitting clothing, protective gloves, and eye protection are highly recommended. For post pounding, a helmet, eye and ear protection are all required. For post pounding work, bystanders should also be wearing eye and ear protection. For Pulaski work, eye protection is required.

SOP No. 8 Safe Use of Picks, Pulaskis (Forester Axe), Shovels, and Post Pounders
Created 11/2007, Revised 03/2017
e. Keep the handles and gloves dry and clean. For post pounders, a safety lanyard is recommended when working in steep areas.

f. Keep a 5 meter radius around all individuals working with picks, pulaskis, or shovels. Bystanders will be kept out of the work area. When working on slopes with post pounders, give a word of warning when removing the pounder off the post in case of slippage, especially when staff are below the pounding area. When using a Pulaski always determine a retreat path from the falling tree.

g. When swinging a pick or Pulaski:

(1) Do not overreach, do not cut above shoulder height.

(2) Strike at such an angle that the follow-through will not approach body parts (i.e. shins).

(3) Grasp the handle with hands close together near the end of the handle; with the right hand as the leading hand closer to the pick head. Position the left foot slightly closer towards the work for proper balance. Bring the pick over the right shoulder, bending the right elbow as the right hand slides up the handle towards the head. On the down swing, let the right hand slide down the handle towards the left hand. At the end of the swing the right hand will be next to the left hand.

h. Carry a pick, Pulaski or shovel by handle near blade. When hiking, carry tool at hip level. If on a slope, carry tools in the hand on the down slope side. Never carry picks, Pulaskis, shovels, or post pounders behind neck or over shoulder. Post pounders can be carried on backs if safely and securely attached to backpacks or carriers.

i. When swinging a pick or Pulaski be aware of the opposite side of head. Always keep in mind that it is a double-sided tool.

j. When swinging a pick or Pulaski ensure that swing path is clear of possible obstructions that may redirect the tool.

k. Be aware of the substrate when using a pick or Pulaski. As soil is loosened, clear away the accumulation as needed. Be careful of bounce back. Do not use the Pulaski as a pry tool as the head is easily broken off with sideward force.

l. When using a Pulaski, use extreme caution when cutting small size brush and saplings, because cut, slender material may be whipped toward you or pull you off balance.

m. When using a Pulaski to cut a limb that is under tension, be alert for spring-back so that you will not be struck when the tension in the wood fibers is released.
n. Use Pulaskis for chopping branches of smaller diameters (1 in.). Use handsaws for larger jobs.

o. Replace Pulaski in sheath when not in use. Never hike with an unsheathed pulaski.

p. Maintenance.

(1) Keep pick, Pulaski or shovel clean and free of rust.

(2) Keep pick, Pulaski or shovel well sharpened. Never sharpen cutting edges all the way to the foot plate. Use light oil when storing.

(3) When sharpening the blade, exercise extreme caution. Always wear gloves and ear and eye protection when using a mechanical grinder to sharpen tools. Remove any flammable materials well from mechanical grinding area.

(4) To sharpen, secure shovel and stroke file across edge in only one direction, maintaining a consistent angle along the blade and on both sides.

(5) Inspect the post pounder daily for cracks along all welds and the top of the pounder in particular. Handles and shaft should be free of all metal burrs that could cause lacerations.