Can hazard trees be removed from critical areas or critical area buffers?

Vegetation within critical areas and critical area buffers is generally protected; however, according to SMC 16.15.050(8)(b), a hazard tree can be removed immediately if it presents a clear emergency situation and the tree must be removed to prevent an imminent danger or hazard to persons or property. If this is clearly the case, then the tree should be snagged to a safe height and removed portions of the tree should be dropped into the critical area and/or surrounding protected buffer area where they can provide woody structures for wildlife habitat. Tree removal methodology should be designed to minimize intrusion into, and impacts to, the critical area and surrounding buffer areas. Any critical area or associated buffer areas that are disturbed by tree removal must be restored with any damaged vegetation replaced through replanting of similar native vegetation types and densities following tree removal. The removed tree must be replaced by replanting of two to four native trees (four trees if the tree to be removed is greater than 9 inches diameter at breast height (DBH), two if the tree to be removed is smaller than 9 inches DBH) to mitigate for the loss of the removed tree.

If it is not a clear emergency situation, a Clear and Grade permit should be submitted prior to removal of a potential hazard tree that is located in a critical area or critical area buffer. The Clear and Grade permit can be obtained at the City's front permit counter or via the following link: http://www.ci.sammamish.wa.us/files/document/7444.pdf

The Clear and Grade permit is free for removal of three or fewer trees. The City will only approve a permit for tree removal in a critical area or associated buffer if it can be shown that the subject tree poses an imminent risk of damage to persons and/or property. Hence, the application must include a letter from a certified arborist that describes their findings with regards to whether or not the tree poses a safety hazard and should be removed. The arborist's letter should also include native replacement tree suggestions and should describe recommended tree removal methodology and any needed restoration. As with emergency tree removal, the hazard tree should be snagged to a safe height and removed portions left where they can provide habitat. As well, tree removal must be conducted in a way that minimizes intrusion into, and impacts to, the critical area and surrounding buffer areas. Any critical area or associated buffer areas that are disturbed by tree removal must be restored with any damaged vegetation replaced through replanting of similar native vegetation types and densities following tree removal. The removed tree must be replaced by replanting of two to four native trees (see above) to mitigate for the loss of the removed tree.