

Summary Sheet

Meeting dates: January 27, 2024

Agenda item: 2024 Forest Restoration Projects

Presenter(s): Richard Tveten

Background summary:

Fire suppression and pre-acquisition logging have resulted in overstocked forests with

- 1) increased insect, disease and wildfire risks, and
- 2) less diverse wildlife habitat.

Staff recommendation: Complete the following projects

The Observatory and Middle Hutchins Phase 2 forest restoration projects on the Wenas and LT Murray Wildlife Area will thin approximately one million board feet on 354 acres and 2 million board feet on 588 acres. Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife will leave between 25 and 35 (in general) of the best available trees per acre to improve habitat quality and put forests on accelerated trajectories to develop into resilient, fire-climax forests. Forests will be treated using ground-based equipment including feller bunchers and rubber-tired skidders. Previously abandoned and new temporary roads will be abandoned at the discretion of the Wildlife Area Manager.

Policy issue(s) and expected outcome:

The projects are designed to restore ecological integrity, improve habitat quality for multiple species including elk and mule deer, address forest health concerns, reduce wildfire risks and increase the proportion of large-diameter trees.

Fiscal impacts of agency implementation:

The Middle Hutchins Phase 2 project is projected to break even. The Observatory project could lose \$100-300K depending on timber prices and contractor bids. Legislatively appropriated forest health funds, however, are available to offset any potential losses.

Public involvement process used and what you learned:

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife follows the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) public review process.

Action requested and/or proposed next steps:

Approval of the proposed Forest Restoration Thinning Project.

Draft motion language:

Motion: I move to approve the proposed commercial thinning project as presented.

Post decision communications plan:

Wildlife Area staff will notify the public regarding temporary access impacts.
