

RESTORING FORESTS

A career as a fish and wildlife forester



Washington
Department of
**FISH and
WILDLIFE**

Meet Ben Hartmann

Ben Hartmann is WDFW's forester for the Oak Creek Wildlife Area near Naches. As a forester, he works on forest restoration projects that improve habitat for wildlife and make forest ecosystems more resilient.

Hartmann grew up participating in outdoor activities with his family and Boy Scouts of America. These experiences led him to pursue a Bachelor of Science in Natural Resources with a minor in forestry from Washington State University. After university, he knew he wanted to work outdoors in Washington. He became a forestry technician with the U.S. Forest Service. "After a season of tree marking, boundary layout, timber cruising, and wildland firefighting, I was hooked," he said. As a forester, Hartmann plans, implements, and monitors reforestation, thinning, and prescribed fire projects for the Department. He describes his work as an ongoing process because at any given point, he's working on multiple projects in various stages throughout the wildlife area.



His field work includes planting tree seedlings in areas with too few trees (usually in areas that were severely burned by

wildfire). In areas where trees and brush are overgrown, he works to thin forests by cutting with chainsaws or logging equipment. Finally, he plans prescribed fire treatments to reduce future wildfire impacts and promote understory plant diversity. Each project regardless of type, needs to be surveyed, boundaries flagged for workers, and project paperwork completed.

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Hartmann's favorite part of the job is getting to be outdoors almost every day. "It's gratifying to see a project develop and how your efforts help change the landscape," he said.

However being outside often also comes with its challenges. Hartmann said the days of unpleasant weather can make working quickly and safely difficult. Working in the mountains, the weather can change quickly so a morning of rain or snow showers may turn into a sunny afternoon. These "windows" of opportunity can make fire and thinning treatments tricky.



For those interested in a career as a forester, Hartmann recommends starting with basic outdoor essentials and survival training. The job requires a lot of fieldwork in challenging terrain and all weather conditions. Being able to orient yourself in the field and use a variety of navigation tools (map, compass, GPS, etc.) are an essential part of the job. The job also uses many gas-powered tools and equipment like ATVs, so training in small engine repair will help to keep them in good condition and troubleshoot. He highly recommends participating in restoration projects as a volunteer as a good way to get experience and get your foot in the door.