

Summary Sheet

Meeting dates: September 26-28, 2024

Agenda item: 4-O Ranch 2024 Forest Restoration Project

Presenter(s): Richard Tveten

Background summary:

WDFW was planning a 450-acre dry forest restoration project when the 20,000 Cougar Creek Wildfire burned most of the 4-O Ranch Unit of the Blue Mountains Wildlife Area Complex. Despite the fire burning about 70% of the project area, considerable restoration opportunity still exists. Thinning will reduce the excess biomass and improve future resiliency.

Staff recommendation: Complete the following projects

Remove about 1.5 million board feet from 450 acres (roughly ½ truck load/acre). WDFW will leave 20 to 30 of the best available trees per acre to improve habitat quality and put forests on accelerated trajectories to develop into resilient, fire-climax forests once again. While 70% of the project area burned, we will follow the restoration prescription that was developed pre-fire. In areas where most or all trees are dead, leave trees will be retained as snags.

The area will be treated using ground-based equipment including feller bunchers and rubber-tired skidders. WDFW will maximize the use of existing roads, skid trails and landings. Previously abandoned and new temporary roads will be abandoned at the discretion of the Wildlife Area Manager. The project will meet State Forest Practice Regulations.

Policy issue(s) and expected outcome:

This project is designed to restore ecological integrity, improve habitat quality for multiple species including mule deer, address forest health concerns, reduce wildfire risks and increase the proportion of large diameter trees.

Fiscal impacts of agency implementation:

The project will likely break assuming log prices do not fall, and fuel prices don't get too high. If the project doesn't break even, it can be subsidized with forest health funds.

Public involvement process used and what you learned:

WDFW follows the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) public review process. No comments were received.

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.
