



State of Washington
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

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Main Office Location: Natural Resources Building, 1111 Washington Street SE, Olympia, WA

DETERMINATION OF NONSIGNIFICANCE (DNS)

Name of Proposal: DNS 24-046: 4-0 RANCH FOREST RESTORATION

Description of Proposal:

The 4-0 Ranch Forest Restoration project is intended to improve ecological integrity ratings, habitat for multiple wildlife species, and forest health on the Chief Joseph Wildlife Area. Special emphasis for this project is placed on improving the fire-resiliency for mule deer habitat.

Approximately 422 acres of overstocked forest stands on 8 units will be commercially thinned to more closely resemble the historic range of variability found in fire-dependent forests on the west slopes of the Blue Mountains before 1880 CE. This will include a reduction in stocking levels to approximately 21 trees per acre on drier sites (e.g. south aspects, ridgetops) to 25 trees per acre in area with more available moisture (e.g. north aspects, protected draws). All the commercial thinning units will be marked with orange paint to denote retention trees.

Portions of the project area were burned with mixed severity wildfire within the Cougar Creek Fire 2024 footprint. Parts of the project area that had higher severity burns will see a post-wildfire restoration specific forest health prescription. In all units, the thinning prescription will use a combination of Individual, Clumps and Openings (ICO) techniques and stocking/spacing strategies. The following criteria will be used during the leave tree selection process:

- Species preference, in declining order: western larch, ponderosa pine, and Douglas-fir.
- Leave “unique” species that are limited to microsites within the stand.
- All hardwood species will be automatic leave trees.
- Retain trees with good growing characteristics (good crown ratios and relatively free of pathogens and/or insect damage).
- Retain defective trees with unique characteristics (trees with cat faces, “wolfy” crowns, large limbs, broken tops, etc.) for Wildlife Reserve Tree (WRT) recruitment.
- In general, attempt to leave a residual stand with post-treatment stocking levels of between 21 and 25 trees per acre. It is important to note that these guidelines are only intended as a spatial reference starting point. Residual tree density will adapt to account for changes in timber type and microsite conditions.
- Polygons ranging from 1 to 10 acres will be retained within each treatment unit and will not be harvested. The location of these leave clumps will scattered throughout each unit and will provide a representative sample of stocking levels ranging from open meadows and dense stands of overstocked timber.

Additional elements of the proposal may include:

- Slash disposal where debris from timber harvest operations (limbs, tops, etc.) will be piled and trailed at landings in preparation for burning. Slash burning will be carried out after the timber harvest operation has been completed. All slash burning will be completed as per

Department of Natural Resources and Department of Ecology regulations.

- Pre-commercial thinning/slashing: All units will be re-evaluated after harvest operations have been completed to assess the need for further reductions in stocking levels of seedling and/or sapling size timber.
- Close and/or abandon selected roads, at the discretion of the local Wildlife Area Manager, after project completion.
- Prescribed broadcast burning in selected units dependent upon management needs and available funding.

The goal of future treatments will be to continue restoring forest stand structure and species composition within the historic range of conditions found on these sites before 1880 CE, when natural disturbance regimes like frequent, low-severity wildfires were the primary ecological disturbance agents.

As part of this proposal, most roads used for access and timber hauling will be existing grades that were constructed when these stands were harvested in the past. New construction of spurs maybe necessary to access project areas. Some of these roads may be abandoned to Washington Forest Practice standards at the discretion of the local Wildlife Area Manager. This work will include installing undrivable water bars, spreading slash and debris over the road prism, and grass seeding with a mix of native species.

Proponent/Applicant: Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW)
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Location of Proposal, including street, if any: This proposal is located on the 4-0 Ranch Unit of the Chief Joseph Wildlife Area in Asotin County. The units are located in parts of Sections 27, 34, 35 Township 7 North, Range 43 East, WM as well as in sections 2, 3, 10 Township 6 North, Range 43 East, WM. See attached project maps for the location of individual units.

Lead Agency: Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW)

WDFW has determined that this proposal will likely not have a significant adverse impact on the environment. Therefore, state law¹ does not require an environmental impact statement (EIS). WDFW made this determination of nonsignificance (DNS) after we reviewed the environmental checklist and other information on file with us.

We issued this DNS according to state rules.² Agencies, affected tribes, and members of the public are invited to comment on this determination. We must receive your comments within 14 days of the date of this document. The comment period will end at **5:00 pm on October 15, 2024**.

Method of Comment:

SEPA documents related to this proposal can be reviewed at the WDFW SEPA website at: [SEPA documents available for public comment | Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife](#).

The following procedures shall govern the method to comment on agency SEPA proposals. Comments received through these procedures are part of the official SEPA record for this proposal. You can submit your comments through one of the following ways:

- Online at the Public Input comment portal for this proposal: [4-0 Forest Restoration](#)
- Email to: 4-0ForestRestoration@PublicInput.com

Responsible Official: Jamie Lee

Position/Title: Acting SEPA Responsible Official and SEPA/NEPA Coordinator, WDFW Director's Office

Address: PO Box 43200, Olympia, WA 98504-3200

After the comment period closes, applicants may view the updated status of this determination on the WDFW SEPA website: [Final SEPA documents | Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife](#). After the status is posted as final, applicants and permittees may take action on the proposal. When a proposal is modified or withdrawn, notice will be given in accordance with state law.¹

If you have questions about this determination or the details of the proposal, or have difficulty with the Public Input comment portal, contact Lisa Wood at: SEPADesk2@dfw.wa.gov.

DATE OF ISSUE: October 1, 2024 **SIGNATURE:** *Jamie Lee*

Footnotes

1. RCW 43.21C.030(2)(c)
2. WAC 197-11-340(2).

SEPA Log Number: 24-046.dns

Individuals who need to receive this information in an alternative format or language, or who need reasonable accommodations to participate in WDFW-sponsored public meetings or other activities may contact the Title VI/ADA Compliance Coordinator by phone at 360-902-2349, TTY (711), or email (Title6@dfw.wa.gov).