

Summary

Meeting dates: November 13-14, 2015

Agenda item: Forest Restoration Projects: Grouse Flats, Methow and Sinlahekin/Scotch Creek Wildlife Areas

Presenter: Richard Tveten, Forest Management Team Lead

Background Summary: In June of 2015 the Department adopted the Management Strategy for the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife's Forests. Per the strategy projects are being developed to maintain or improve 1) ecological integrity, 2) habitat value for priority species and 3) reduce the risks associated with uncharacteristic wildfire, insects and disease. The first two projects rate very high per the strategy because they are at risk of burning. The third project is in a recently burned area and we are in a now-or-never situation when it comes to getting any treatment benefits. As each project will remove one than one million board feet of wood, they must be approved by the commission in accordance with the 2012 General Delegation of Authority.

These projects share the same goals of 1) restoring forest health and function, 2) improving habitat quality and 3) reducing severe wildfire risk. The projects involve both commercial and non-commercial thinning as well as fuel reduction treatments.

Project Details

Project	Methow	Grouse Flats	Sinlahekin/Scotch Cr.
County	Okanogan	Garfield	Okanogan
Acres treated	655	430	Up to 400
Estimated volume removed in millions of board feet (MMBF)	3.1	3	Less than 3.2
Number of larger leave trees per acre	30-40	30-60	Still developing 5-10 in >90% mortality areas 15-25 elsewhere
Leave tree species (In order of preference)	Ponderosa pine (>90%) and Douglas fir	Ponderosa Pine, Western Larch, Douglas fir	Ponderosa pine and Douglas fir
Large/old tree protection	Leave all trees >125 years old, plus larger, more vigorous trees	Leave larger, more vigorous trees	Leave all live large trees in intensely burned areas.
Spatial diversity	Leave small clumps and gaps, dense pockets (1/4-1/2ac.) and Openings (up to 2 ac.)	Leave small clumps and gaps, dense pockets (1/4-1/2ac.) and Openings (up to 2 ac.)	Distribution options for leaves trees limited by the fire

Project	Methow	Grouse Flats	Sinlahekin/Scotch Cr.
Snag protection /creation	Leave existing, prescribed fire will create more.	Leave existing, lots already present due to disease.	Most trees are dead. Larger snags will be left so that large tree densities are in the historic range of variability
Roads	Largely rely on existing roads. A few short spurs will be built but double that mileage will be abandoned.	Largely rely on existing roads. 2.8 miles of temporary roads will be opened then abandoned.	Minimal road work.
Timing	2016 through 2017	2016	Early 2016
Insect and disease issues	Mistletoe and root rot. Thin infected trees more heavily.	Mistletoe and root rot. Patch cut 30 acres of fir and plant pine.	Many of the remaining live trees will likely die.
Fuel Treatment	Prescribed fire (grant funded)	Pile burning or prescribed fire if feasible	Remove medium sized trees. Tops will be drug to lands for firewood or slash burning. Small tree fuels will have to be treated later
Priority species	Mule Deer	Mule deer and Rocky Mtn. elk	Mule deer

Logging equipment will be ground based, likely feller-bunchers and rubber tired skidders. As much winter work as possible will be conducted on snow and frozen ground, but summer operations will be necessary.

All streams and wetlands shall be protected according to Forest Practices standards, and no harvesting will occur in buffers.

Policy issue(s) you are bringing to the Commission for consideration:

Responsible land stewardship through appropriate forest management and habitat rehabilitation.

Public involvement process used and what you learned:

WDFW will follow the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) public review process.

Action requested:

Approval of the proposed commercial thinning projects.

Draft motion language:

I move to approve the proposed timber harvests projects as presented.

Justification for Commission action:

In **Grouse Flats** this action will 1) reduce impacts of disease due to root rot and mistletoe, 2) improve forest health by reducing stocking and allowing existing trees to maximize growth, 3) reduce fire risk by removing excess fuels and fire ladders, and 4) improve long-term wildlife habitat for deer and elk.

In the **Methow Forest** this action will 1) improve wildlife habitat quality for mule deer and other wildlife, 2) continue work outlined in approved RCO grant, 3) address forest health concerns, and 4) reduce wildfire risks related to public safety and habitat quality.

In the **Sinlahekin/Scotch Creek** post fire project this action will help restore biomass levels and help break the cycle of stand replacing fires so that a healthy, resilient is again possible.

Communications Plan:

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