

Forest Management Update

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Summary Sheet

Meeting dates: March 16-17, 2018

Agenda item: Wildlife Areas Forest Management Update - **Briefing**

Presenter: Richard Tveten, Forest Management Team Lead, Lands Division

Background Summary:

The purpose of this presentation is to provide an update regarding management of forests on Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) wildlife areas. The *Management Strategy for the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife's Forests* was adopted in June of 2014. It provides a framework for managing the 200,000 acres of forests on WDFW lands. Approximately half of these forests are in poor condition due to widespread fire exclusion and/or harvest activities prior to acquisition. Accordingly, many of our forests are prone to uncharacteristically severe disturbances including wildfires, insect outbreaks, and disease.

In accordance with the strategy, WDFW has built a team of four foresters and roughly tripled the amount of annual thinning in dry forests. We have thinned about 5,257 acres since the management strategy was adopted. Areas treated since June 2014 are as follows:

Wildlife Area	Acres Treated	Commercial Thin	Pre-commercial Thin
Oak Creek	1,813	447	1,366
LT Murray	1,274	1,093	181
Rustler's Gulch	850	850	
Methow	581	370	211
Grouse flats	285	285	
Sinlahekin	204	104	100
LeClerc	130	130	
Sherman Creek	120	120	
Totals	5,257	3,399	1,858

We currently thin about 1.2% of our dry forests per year, which is still not enough. Prior to modern settlement 11% of dry forests burned per year on average. Since 2013, 3.9% of WDFW forests have burned per year on average. Recent fires, however, tend to be larger and more severe than the historic norm, killing rather than thinning many of our forests.

The recently approved \$5 million in 2017-2019 capital funds for thinning and burning will help us increase the scale and pace of forest restoration work. We plan to thin 4,000 acres in 2018 (60% pre-commercial). During the next several years, our main focus will be treating dry forests on the east slopes of the Cascades (Colockum, LT Murray, Oak Creek, Klickitat, Methow, Sinlahekin, and Chelan) and in the Blue Mountains (4-O Ranch and Weatherly). Additional, smaller areas of work will include oak woodland and prairie restoration in the South Puget Sound area and plantation release on the Mount Saint Helens Wildlife Area. We are nearly done with initial thinning projects in northeastern Washington and in the Okanogan. Ideally, we will maintain those areas with prescribed fire going forward.

We are currently assessing all of our forests statewide, to more clearly define management

needs. WDFW is also coordinating with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to develop a statewide prioritization system so we can plan our work more strategically in coordination with others at the watershed level. Such coordination should help us maximize funding opportunities and project benefits.

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 followed the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) public review process for the original management strategy and for all commercial thinning projects. No problems have arisen.

Action requested:

N/A – Briefing only.

Draft motion language:

N/A – Briefing only.

Justification for Commission action:

N/A – Briefing only.

Communications Plan:

N/A.

Form revised 12/5/12