



## Forest Health Advisory Committee Meeting Notes

**December 6, 2022**  
**9:00 AM – 12:00 PM**

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**Present:** Kevin Arneson, Mike Anderson, Jen Watkins, Shana Joy, Michael Norris, Terra Rentz, Mike Kuttel Jr., Richard Tveten, Ashley Blazina, Amy Ramsey, Darcy Batura, Brian Spradlin, Shasta Ferranto, Garrett Meigs, Chuck Hersey, Dave Cass, Aleksandar Dozic, Andrew Spaeth, Elaine Oneil, Zach St. Amand, Derek Churchill, Michael Case, Will Rubin, Deb Kelly, Chad Davis, Paul Dahmer, Alex Smith, Guy Gifford, Allen Lebovitz, Josh Anderson, Patrick Haggerty, Dave Werntz

### **Environmental Justice and Forest Resilience Work Group Recommendations**

Ashley Blazina shared a presentation about the FHAC Environmental Justice Work Group and the recommendations developed as part of our on-going work to develop an Environmental Justice and Forest Resilience Implementation Plan.

The presentation started with an overview of “Who are the stakeholders?” and the inherent implicit and explicit bias that is present in our work. To tackle environmental justice we need to get to the “why.” Why don’t we see more people of color involved in this work? The perspective of stakeholders and partners vary based on our lived experience and our vantage point.

Providing opportunities to listen to and learn from affected communities is an important way for DNR and our partners to support the needs of communities. As it relates to forest health, organizations that have surveyed affected communities have found that wildfire smoke and human health impacts are often one of the most important links identified. The language that we use and how we describe the potential impacts is important, and we need to work together to develop a shared language.

Community assets such as people and human resources, equipment, cultural knowledge, and other resources are part of our consideration of how communities may engage and opportunities to advance environmental justice and forest resilience. As partners and institutions, we also bring our own values and perspectives to the conversation. Our orientation may be more focused on the past or the present, we may be more focused on certain aspects of our relationship to the environment, and we may be more hierarchical or autonomous.

A few key takeaways to consider in advancing this work include being additive, not repetitive; understanding who the stakeholders are and what the community assets and challenges are; understanding and listening to community concerns. See attached slides for additional information.

The group reviewed the FHAC Environmental Justice Work Group recommendations that were developed and sent out the full FHAC at the end of June. The recommendations were also presented at the September 2022 quarterly meeting.

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Committee member discussion:

- The principles are good and are focused on people, which is important. Listening and learning is important, but it needs to be translated into action in order to be effective. People are a part of nature and we should incorporate people into how we think about and manage our natural resources.
- Value-orientation method may be helpful to evaluate our assumptions and figure out where there may be areas of agreement.
- The memo include a number of general recommendations that are important, especially two-way communication. Listening is important, but is hard to implement and really utilize. The memo is general enough to provide the committee with the flexibility to pursue this in whatever way is most helpful. As we approach this moving forward it will require more learning about the communities we are working with and being responsive to their needs. Over time hopefully we will be putting more flesh on the bones.
- DNR program intent is to be specific in how we respond to these recommendations. The memo makes clear that when DNR is making investments through HB1168 we should include holistic and thorough consultation. That is something we want to strive for, but will likely need help to figure out exactly what that looks like. Implementing these recommendations may take time be an iterative process.
- The memo is a strong start and a great place to build from. Impacts from wildfires and the forest health crisis disproportionately affect communities of color. We can't expect that the same approaches we use in one community will necessarily work in another community. Building strategies for implementation with communities is going to be important if we're going to be successful.
- It will be important to share lessons learned about what is working in our community engagement work.
- The geospatial recommendation suggests that DNR should invest in the collection of data so that the agency and partners can make more equitable decisions in the future.
- The recommendations are broad and challenging to think about how to apply in a project-level setting. Sometimes when we hear the concerns of communities they don't align with the best available science or our management direction. It's unclear when it's an issue of environmental justice and when we may need to make a decision to move forward with a project because it is what's best for the land or to effectively reduce wildfire risk.
- The amount of outreach and energy put into community engagement and outreach should be commensurate with the potential benefit or impact to the interested communities and stakeholders.
- Regulation should be effectively mitigating harm to people. The group briefly discussed the interaction between these recommendations and the potential for harm. For example, if we are burning piles, the smoke impacts are based on air quality standards, not on the affected community.
- Data may be imperfect, but utilizing data to inform projects and investments are important as we try to visualize and evaluate different values and interests. Data is not always used for the purpose it was intended and we may want to consider how to refer back to the intended use of the data in the evaluation process.
- The data in question is primarily demographic and socio-economic data, but also include environmental factors such as air quality. So, the data referenced in the memo includes those potential data.

Committee Chair, Terra Rentz, shared a redline version of the recommendations based on the feedback of the group today. An introductory statement was added to the beginning of the memo. Language was amended and added to the recommendations to provide flexibility and clarify the intent of the recommendations.

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There was a process suggestion to ask the Forest Resilience Division staff to review the recommendations and consider how they may be operationalized. DNR staff will review the recommendations and come back to the committee in February with an updated draft document.

### **Community Wildfire Defense Grants**

Guy Gifford, Assistant Division Manager in the Wildfire Division at DNR, provided an overview of the Community Wildfire Defense Grant program.

The new grant program was established by Congress to help states implement community wildfire protection plans (CWPPs). The Forest Service is the lead agency and established the program and first round of funding, which was held over the late summer and fall of this year. DNR helped the Forest Service administer the program and solicit applications in Washington State. Grants generally fall into two categories 1) update or create a community wildfire protection plan or 2) implement actions identified in a community wildfire protection plan that is less than ten years old. This is the first program established specifically to help support implementation of CWPPs.

In order to be eligible, communities must be identified as “at-risk” based on a wildfire risk assessment. Eligible communities must have a CWPP or a Hazard Mitigation Plan with a wildfire extension. Projects such as home assessments, defensible space creation, staff support, building code updates, prescribed fire training, and vegetation and fuels management are allowable expenses. Projects are required to identify a 25% match. Low-income communities were not required to provide matching funds as part of the new grant program.

Washington State partners submitted 45 applications and approximately \$54M in requested funding. This is second in the country, behind California. The average request in Washington was \$1.3M. If awarded, the funding is available to be spent over five years. There were 18 applications focused on updating community wildfire protection plans. Of the 45 applications, 27 requests were for action items to help implement actions identified in the local community wildfire protection plan. Kittitas and Okanogan Counties had the largest requests with a strong focus on forest health thinning and fuels reduction. Edelweiss is a unique application to help address fire hazard and promote forest health. There was a pilot project to help implement logging of commercial size material, but given logging costs and haul distances the project doesn't pencil out. The funding request for Edelweiss is for \$2M to accelerate implementation of additional projects near homes and infrastructure to protect the community.

The applications are being graded and ranked. Western States applications will be finished ranking by December 9, 2022, then they will get combined into a west-wide pool and standardized scoring across all states. Funding should become available early in the next year.

Round two of grant applications will become available in late spring 2023. The goal is to have as much funding come to Washington as possible. DNR will be conducting webinars and helping to raise awareness and provide technical assistance for applications.

A member of the committee shared that when applicants submitted directly to the federal government the application process provided an opportunity to include maps and appendices to the application, but the state application process did not allow for those attachments to be included. Guy shared that DNR and partners are aware of this issue. There will be an after action review and this is a topic that will come up in that conversation about how to continue to improve the application process.

See attached slides for additional information. Guy Gifford can be reached at Guy. [Gifford@dnr.wa.gov](mailto:Gifford@dnr.wa.gov).

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### **HB1168 Work Group**

Terra provided a brief update on the joint work group. The work group was established in partnership with the Wildland Fire Advisory Committee (WFAC).

The work group has been meeting regularly to provide input to DNR about programs associated with implementation of HB1168. Meetings have centered around learning about the program work and pass through funding opportunities.

The next joint work group meeting is on December 15, then in-person meetings in January to finalize recommendations to bring back to the FHAC and WFAC.

Information will be provided in advance of the next FHAC meeting so members can come prepared to the discussion. All of the meetings have been recorded and will be made available to FHAC for review. Terra expressed her appreciation to the members of FHAC who have invested time and energy in the process.

### **2022 Forest Health Legislative Report**

Forest Resilience Division staff shared a presentation and overview about the 2022 Forest Health Biennial Legislative Report, as required by RCW 76.06.200. The report highlights the accomplishments of our agency and partners in implementing the 20-Year Forest Health Strategic Plan: Eastern Washington.

The report is organized into chapters and includes an overview of the Forest Health Assessment and Treatment Framework Methodology, priority planning areas, aquatic restoration, forest health partnerships, monitoring framework and monitoring results, and the appropriations request for the next biennium.

DNR scientists have assessed 37 priority planning areas covering more than 4.1 million acres in eastern Washington. In the next biennium, DNR will analyze 10 more priority planning areas. In total, there are currently 47 priority planning areas that total more than 5.2 million acres. One of the exciting updates to share is that DNR worked with the Colville Confederated Tribes, and Cody Desautel, an FHAC member, to identify the Inchelium priority planning area. The planning areas also have significant overlap with the DNR State Lands Prioritization as required by HB1711.

Recently, the Forest Service released the 10-Year Wildland Fire Crisis Strategy. The Central Washington Initiative (CWI) is one of the focal geographies in the Western US. There is significant overlap between the DNR priority planning areas and the Forest Service CWI area. DNR signed an MOU committing to leverage resources and help work towards our shared goals in the area over the next decade. The Forest Service will be investing approximately \$100 million in the landscape.

The assessment results from the first 37 priority planning areas show that there are approximately 960,000 to 1,385,000 million acres of treatment need. There is a range of treatment need based on a host factors.

Forest Health Treatment Tracking continues to record treatment data across the state, and is a primary component of our monitoring strategy. It is one way to monitor our progress based on reported treatments from landowners, but we also utilize new tools such as change detection to evaluate changes to landscape conditions over time. In eastern Washington the treatment data is summarized by ownership and displayed based on treatments that occurred between 2017 and 2022. Between January 2017 and October 31, 2022 there were 493,460 acres of completed treatments that impacted 309,556 footprint acres. There are acres that receive multiple treatments, which is why the agency is sharing both total treatment acres as well as footprint

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acres. Treatment data is contributed by landowners based on whether or not the treatment had a forest health objective. There is not consensus on how to define whether or not every stand level treatment is contributing to forest health, which is why the agency is also investing in tools such as change detection.

In addition to tracking completed treatments, DNR is also working with partners to identify planned treatments. These are projects that are covered by environmental review or an adopted plan for private lands. Since 2017 there were 820 Forest Stewardship Plans written on private lands covering 126,066 acres. The Forest Service has completed NEPA decisions that will result in 305,194 acres of treatment in eastern Washington. In the next biennium, DNR State Lands plans to treat approximately 58,000 acres.

The monitoring chapter of the report includes an overview of our 2020 to 2022 monitoring progress and accomplishments. There are numerous contributors associated with monitoring implementation of the 20-Year Forest Health Strategic Plan. Derek Churchill provided an overview of a few components of the monitoring chapter.

Change detection monitoring maps disturbance and attributes those disturbances based on the disturbance type. Since 2015, the majority of disturbance in eastern Washington is associated with wildfire. The change detection work focuses on a few of the priority planning areas, including Mill Creek in Northeast Washington. Forest structure can then be evaluated against our landscape evaluation results to help us understand whether or not the landscape is moving towards a more or less resilient condition and historic range of variability. In Mill Creek we are making progress in medium closed and medium open, and creating the conditions for medium open to grow in large open and large moderate.

Another monitoring project is focused on modeling snowpack and streamflow in the Nason Creek priority planning area. The modeling results predict that streamflow will decrease as a result of forest re-growth. Mechanical thinning, prescribed fire, and wildfire can offset declines and increase streamflow by an estimated 5%. The next pilot area will be in the Wenatchee area.

DNR is partnering with University of Washington to study treatment longevity. Treatment longevity varies based on surface fuels and canopy fuels. It also varies by treatment type. Thinning and burning results in more longevity than thinning only.

DNR partnered with Washington State Parks and Resilient Forestry to monitor the Bullfrog Forest Health Project in Palouse to Cascades State Park. Using plots and drones the project evaluated density, composition, large tree retention, spatial variability, among other factors. The data show that the project met the treatment goals established in the prescription. DNR and State Parks will utilize the results to continue to inform on-going forest health work.

See attached slides for additional information.

### **Forest Service 10-Year Wildfire Crisis Strategy**

Chad Davis with the Forest Service introduced two new team members associated with the Wildfire Crisis Strategy that was released earlier this year. In Washington, there are two new team members: Shasta Ferranto and Brian Spradlin. Shasta is based in Seattle and serves as the Regional Wildfire Crisis Lead. Brian is the All-Lands Coordinator serving in the Pacific Northwest Region of the Forest Service.

As priorities have changed, the Forest Service is seeking to deploy these staff to meet the needs of partners in the state. Shasta's team is new. The role of the team is to help the investment landscapes in the Crisis Strategy

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to be successful, which includes the Central Washington Initiative. The team is serving as a liaison to partners in the National Office. The team is also interested in developing tools and data sets. The project is supporting the two existing landscapes: Central Washington and Central Oregon. The team includes a NEPA specialists, public affairs specialist, as well as air quality, fuels, and other specialist areas. Team members sit in different program areas.

There was a news release yesterday for people to share interest in serving on a new advisory committee to update the Northwest Forest Plan. Nominations can be from communities, private sector, public agencies, or anyone else that is interested. The link to learn more is available [here](#).

The additional funding coming to the Forest Service is being invested in the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest as well as through contracts with private industry. Members of the committee are interested in understanding where the funding for the Central Washington Initiative is coming from. The vast majority of funding is from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. The Washington Office has not indicated how the Inflation Reduction Act funding may be distributed. There are other sources of funding that will come through the Forest Service and support work on other lands as well.

### **Western Washington Forest Resilience Planning**

Jen Watkins provided a brief introduction to DNR's interest in developing a Western Washington Forest Health and Resilience strategy in the years ahead. This is a priority action identified in our State Forest Action Plan. The DNR Watershed Resilience Plan for Snohomish Watershed identified a need to help conduct a forest health landscape evaluation to inform potential treatments and restoration. The drivers for a strategy and an assessment methodology will be different than what we've done in eastern WA. The Gifford Pinchot National Forest is interested in coordination on an evaluation framework for a future potential NEPA planning area in the Cowlitz Valley. Partner and committee input will be especially important as we figure out how to advance this work. Beyond our Forest Action Plan direction, there is increased interest in forest health, wildfire preparedness, and post-fire recovery following recent fires in recent years in the western Washington. This is another important factor that we want to consider and evaluate as we think about how and what to do on the west-side. We look forward to engaging the Forest Health Advisory Committee in this process over the next few years.

### **2023 Proposed Meeting Dates**

DNR is proposing the following quarterly meeting dates for the next year: February 14, May 16, September 19, and December 19. DNR is coordinating with other advisory committees to reduce the potential for scheduling conflicts. All 2023 FHAC meetings are proposed to be held from 9:00 AM to 12:00 PM. Once the meeting dates are finalized DNR staff will send out calendar invites.