



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 14-077: METHOW WILDLIFE AREA POST-WILDFIRE FOREST RESTORATION

Description of Proposal:

The Methow Post-fire Forest Management Project is located on the Methow Wildlife Area. The project has two focuses for treatment. The first area was part of the Methow Forest Habitat Rehabilitation Project, 120 acres of mechanical thinning that burned in mixed severities during the Carlton Complex Fire. Post-fire the project units have retained survivor trees in need of release from the overstocked mid-story. The second focus is for areas near roadsides, campgrounds, etc. where burned trees pose a possible hazard to hit targets, and therefore it is required by Labor and Industries standards, as well as by a concern for the safety of personnel and the public, to fell hazard trees. Approximately 450 acres need possible hazard tree assessment and felling, 80-100 acres of which overlays the rehabilitation project acreage.

- -To the greatest degree possible operations will be conducted on frozen ground with of a snowpack to minimize soil compaction and surface disturbance.
- -No new roads will be constructed, but some closed/ abandoned roads requiring minimal work will be re-opened and used for the duration of the project.
- -Areas disturbed by the project will be reseeded with native grasses and shrubs.

Rehabilitation Project Unit Recovery:

In areas where using ground equipment is feasible (<35% slopes), the previously planned forest restoration project will proceed with an adjusted prescription to:

- -Favor better survivorship of remaining trees and snag retention in historic densities
- -Protect surviving trees by reducing the severity of bark beetle infestation
- -Protect surviving trees and regeneration by reducing long term fuel loading,
- -Release surviving trees from less vigorous competitors
- -Release aspen stands from live overstory pine trees

The project will use thinning prescriptions based on the predetermined ecological site potential. Our sampling indicates that from 25-42% of the trees in these stands were previously dead as a result of pine beetle, and the remainder of the trees (including relic old-growth) are at risk of further beetle infestation that follows severe fire. Stand reconstruction sampling indicates that historic Ponderosa pine density in the project area was approximately 11- 30 trees per acre. This proposal will use mechanical or hand felling to reduce the density of small diameter Ponderosa pine stands from their current 400-1,500 trees per acre to 30-50 trees per acre where moderate burning has occurred and 15-20 snags per acre where severe burning has occurred (no survivors). The green leaf-tree density assumes a 30-50% post-harvest mortality due to insect damage, root rot, and fire damage, which will ultimately leave 22-26 trees per acre. At present among the survivor trees there are essentially two cohorts of Ponderosa pine trees, pre-fire suppression (> 125 yrs., i.e. old growth) and post-fire suppression (70-90 yrs). We will retain 100% of the pre-fire suppression trees and snags unless they pose a hazard, and enough of the largest of the post-

fire suppression trees to meet our target density, including snags. Prescribed fire is anticipated 5-10 years after thinning has occurred to reduce fuel loading caused by logging, hazard tree felling and natural transition of the remaining snags to downed woody fuel.

Hazard Tree Management:

In areas of extended use; roadsides, campgrounds, etc., the Carlton Complex has fire-killed and injured trees that now pose a hazard to personnel and the public. Trees in this acreage therefore must be assessed and felled if they meet hazard tree qualifications. The final decision on cutting a leave tree will be left to a certified hazard tree assessor. Hazard trees will be thinned out by a ground harvesting equipment if feasible or hand felling. Only hand felling will occur within riparian buffers. On the hazard tree acreage that is located on steep or rocky slopes (mostly roadside) where removal of trees by a cable skidder is not feasible, trees will be felled and left according to prescription.

Proponent/Applicant: Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW)
Contact: Sherry Furnari
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Winthrop, WA 98862
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Sherryl.Furnari@dfw.wa.gov

Location of Proposal, including street, if any: Within the Methow Wildlife Area; near Winthrop, Okanogan County, Washington.

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 We will **not act on this proposal for 14 days** from the date we issued the DNS. Agencies, affected tribes, and members of the public are invited to comment on this proposal or DNS. We must receive your comments within 14 days of the date of this letter. The comment period will end at **5:00 pm on November 8, 2014**.

Method of Comment:

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 any one of the following ways:

- Email to SEPAdesk2@dfw.wa.gov
- Online at the WDFW SEPA website comment link at: <http://wdfw.wa.gov/licensing/sepa/>
- Fax to (360) 902-2946;
- Mail to the address below.

Responsible Official: Lisa Wood

Position/Title: SEPA/NEPA Coordinator, WDFW Regulatory Services Section

Address: 600 Capitol Way North, Olympia, WA 98501-1091

After the comment period closes, applicants may view the updated status of this proposal on the WDFW SEPA website: <http://wdfw.wa.gov/licensing/sepa/>. Once 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 DNS or the details of the proposal, contact Lisa Wood at the address, e-mail, or fax number above; you can also call her at (360) 902-2260.

DATE OF ISSUE: October 24, 2014

SIGNATURE:



Footnotes

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

SEPA Log Number: 14-077. dns