



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 15-065: OKANOGAN COMPLEX FIRE FOREST
MANAGEMENT

Description of Proposal:

During August 2015, the Okanogan Complex Fire burned over 300,000 acres through public and private land through sagebrush steppe, meadow, and dry forest cover types. The Sinlahekin, Scotch Creek, and Methow Wildlife Areas of the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife Lands Complex each had large management areas burn, resulting in damaged infrastructure, loss of habitat, and standing dead and scorched forest.

Following wildland fire or fire outside the historic range of severity with high mortality rates, dry mixed conifer and pine forests are at a heightened risk for mortality from post-fire stress, beetle infestations, accumulations of large woody debris, and other issues that may lead to the long term loss or repeated degradation of forested habitat. The Okanogan Complex Forest Management Project proposes to address these forest issues via a timber sale. Areas where using ground based logging equipment is feasible (approx. <40% slopes) a prescription will be applied to:

- Favor better survivorship and release trees from less vigorous competitors to increase resource availability
- Protect surviving trees by reducing the severity of bark beetle infestation
- Reduce long term large woody debris accumulations that lead to loss of access and habitat for grazing species
- Reduce safety and access issues for recreational and commercial uses
- Protect surviving trees and regeneration by reducing long term fuel loading outside the historic range of variability

Prescription**:

- A. Low/ Mixed Mortality: Conifer-dominated sites, where live conifers remain following the Okanogan Complex Fire. Retention density will be 20–40 basal area (sq.ft./acre) or 15-20 trees per acre (TPA). Leave tree selection will be focused on the following:
1. Retention of pre-fire suppression age class conifers
 2. Remove smaller, dead, and/or less likely survivors for 1-2 driplines (min. 20 ft.) from healthier live trees
 3. The following attributes will be assessed for best possible post-fire survivor trees:
 - i. Ponderosa pine highly favored
 - ii. >30% live canopy Ponderosa, >60% live canopy Douglas-fir (live canopy from top down)
 - iii. Minimal root burn-out, char at bole (cambium alive)
 - iv. Larger diameter- correlated to thicker, fire-resistant bark
 4. Retain trees in spatially heterogeneous pattern
 5. Retain live trees that provide wildlife value: trees with forks, broken tops, or large branch platforms for habitat as Wildlife Retention Trees (WRTs)

B. High Mortality: Conifer-dominated sites, where live conifers are do not remain or are in low densities following the Okanogan Complex Fire. In these areas live conifers and 5 snags per acre will be left as Wildlife Retention Trees (WRTs). Leave tree selection will be focused on the following:

1. Wildlife value (platforms, cavity nesting, etc.)
2. Structural stability
3. >10" diameter at breast height (DBH)

C. Aspen sites:

1. Retain 100% of pre-fire suppression age class conifers
2. Lower density within 50 feet of aspen site of live trees (-10 TPA)
3. Dead WRTs minimum still retained.
4. No hardwoods shall be cut as part of the timber harvest, but may be cut and left if they pose a hazard.

**Any trees that pose a risk to existing public infrastructure: roads, campgrounds, pullouts, etc. that have recreational, operational, etc. use will not be retained. This includes dead trees, and live trees with less than 30% live canopy.

Fuels:

Debris from timber harvest operations (limbs, tops, etc.) will be left in place after harvest. The area will be allowed to a rest period to heal from the impacts of the Lime Belt fire for several years. Then the area will be treated with prescribed fire on a regular schedule that represents the historic fire disturbance interval. If whole tree yarding is utilized then the slash will be piled at the landings and burned in the fall or winter. All slash burning will be completed as per Department of Natural Resources and Department of Ecology regulations.

Regeneration:

Due to availability of live green trees in and around the project area, WDFW will seek to utilize natural regeneration to restock the stand. Planting may be necessary to meet WDNR Forest Practices standards. Long term, to maintain the desired historic range of stocking and structure, WDFW will continue to seek funding for future forest health and prescribed fire treatments.

Proponent/Applicant: Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW)

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Location of Proposal, including street, if any: The timber sale units cover approximately 300 acres and are located in the Sinlahekin and Scotch Creek Wildlife Areas in Okanogan County in the transition from sagebrush steppe to forested foothills (see attached maps). The species composition is predominantly Ponderosa pine, with a component of Douglas-fir on the steeper, wetter slopes within the units. Precipitation falls primarily as snow.

The project lies within portions of the following sections (Willamette meridian):

Township 35N, Range 25E, Sections 12, 13

Township 35N, Range 26E, Sections 6, 7

Township 36N, Range 25E, Sections 16, 21

All activities are on WDFW owned and managed land. Refer to attached maps for distinct project activity areas, topography, roads, etc.

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 rules². 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 January 12, 2016**.

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/sepa_comment_docs.html
- Fax to (360) 902-2946;
- Mail to the address below.

Responsible Official: Dan Doty

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 Dan Doty at the address, e-mail, or fax number above; you can also call him at (360) 902-8120.

DATE OF ISSUE: December 29, 2015

SIGNATURE:



Footnotes

1. RCW 43.21C.030(2)(c)

2. WAC 197-11-340(2).