



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 16-061: METHOW FOREST HABITAT RESTORATION

Description of Proposal:

The “North Methow” Phase of the Methow Forest Rehabilitation Project is located on the Methow Wildlife Area (MWLA) covering approx. 1566 assessed acres of forested habitat in the savannah and river lowlands predominantly in the transition between shrub-steppe and forest ecosystem types.

These areas are a high priority for forest and ecosystem health management on WDFW lands due to high-risk of stand replacing wildfire, insect and pathogen outbreaks, and current connected landscape of overstocked stands. Large scale stand-replacing wildfire has been present in and around the project area within the last 10+ years. Reducing and/or restructuring available fuels, tree density, and canopy cover in these stands will decrease the risk of stand-replacing wildfire, and improve forest ecosystem resilience to disturbance. Where feasible, the project will use thinning prescriptions based on the ecological site potential, historic reconstruction surveys, and priority to reduce negative ecosystem impacts from severe wildfire, disease and insect damage, and improve wildlife habitat. All areas, regardless of need for silvicultural treatment, will followed with prescribed fire that will include objectives to reduce logging slash, reduce fuels accumulated over time, and increase regeneration of fire-dependent plant species.

Sampling indicates that 15-42% of trees in most stands are dead or under severe stress from forest health issues, with remaining trees (including relic legacy trees) at risk of further beetle infestation, stand-replacing wildfire, or resource competition. Stand reconstruction sampling on several sites on the MWLA indicate that historic ponderosa pine density in the project area was approximately 11- 30 trees per acre or 35-50 ft²/ac basal area (see Table 1). This proposal will use commercial and non-commercial thinning to reduce the density of overstocked, dry conifer stands from the current 200-1,500 trees per acre to 25-50 trees per acre, or 40-60 ft²/ac basal area. This leave-tree density assumes a 10-30% post-harvest mortality due to mechanical damage, insects, pathogens, root rot, and prescribed fire that will ultimately leave 35-50 ft²/ac basal area. Presently there are essentially two cohorts of conifer trees; pre-fire suppression (> 125 yrs., i.e. legacy trees) and post-fire suppression/ post clear-cut logging (<=70-100 yrs). Efforts will be made to try to retain 100% of legacy trees and snags, and enough of the largest of the 70+ year cohort to meet target density in a spatially heterogeneous stand structure resembling historic fire-maintained stocking patterns.

This portion of the Methow Wildlife Area is characterized by flat to rolling benches changing to steep mountain foothills to the east. The project areas lie along the forest edge transition to shrub-steppe. Elevation ranges from 2,300 to 4,200 feet. Precipitation, primarily as snow, ranges from 14 inches to 18 inches. The predominant timber species is ponderosa pine, though mixed conifer (Douglas-fir and ponderosa pine), sites occur at more moist higher elevation sites. In commercial thinning sites, the steepest slopes (approximately 5% of the units) are between 20-35% steep with average slope < 10%.

Prescribed fire will be utilized to re-introduce crucial disturbance to the fire-dependent ecosystem, reduce accumulated natural and activity fuel loading, and minimize stand replacing fire risk.

Proponent/Applicant: Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW)
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Location of Proposal, including street, if any: Methow Wildlife Area, five miles northeast of Winthrop, Okanogan County, Washington:

Township 35N, Range 21E, Sections 1, 2, 12, 13, and 24

Township 35N, Range 22E, Sections 7 and 18

Township 36N, Range 21E, Section 35

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 October 11, 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/>
- 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: September 27, 2016

SIGNATURE:



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

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

SEPA Log Number: 16-061.dns