



Washington State Strategic Plan For Healthy Forests

Report to the Legislature

December 30, 2004



WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF
Natural Resources
Doug Sutherland - Commissioner of Public Lands



Doug Sutherland
Commissioner of Public Lands

December 30, 2004

Bob
The Honorable Bob Morton, *Chair*
Senate Natural Resources, Energy & Water Committee
115 D Irving R. Newhouse Building
P.O. Box 40407
Olympia, WA 98504-0407

Kelli
The Honorable Kelli Linville, *Chair*
House Agriculture & Natural Resources Committee
328 John L. O'Brien Building
P.O. Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600

Dear Senator Morton and Representative Linville:

Second Substitute Senate Bill 6144, passed by the legislature in the 2004 Session, directed me to develop a statewide plan for increasing forest resistance and resilience to disturbance agents (See 2SSB 6144, Section 3). The Act also required the involvement of the Forest Health Strategic Work Group (Work Group) in developing the plan. Further, the Act directed me to engage in discussions with federal agencies regarding their approaches to achieving healthy forests on federal lands, and to report to the legislature annually (see 2SSB6144 Section 2). The purpose of this letter is to address both issues.

I am pleased to provide you with a copy of the Washington State Strategic Plan for Healthy Forests. The Strategic Plan was developed by Department of Natural Resources staff in a process parallel to the effort of the Forest Health Strategy Work Group. The Work Group's efforts guided the development of the Strategic Plan; the Work Group discussed the Strategic Plan and had the opportunity to offer comments and suggestions.

The Strategic Plan outlines an ambitious, comprehensive and focused approach to achieving satisfactory health on the forestlands of Washington. Its implementation and effectiveness depend upon statutory changes and funding. Failure in either will profoundly affect the chances for success.

The Strategic Plan is best understood when read in conjunction with the Forest Health Strategy Work Group's report, "A Desirable Forest Health Program for Washington's Forests". I commend both to you for your consideration.

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The Honorable Bob Morton
The Honorable Kelli Linville
December 30, 2004
Page 2

As you are aware, the legislature did not provide funding to the Department to carry out the duties described in Section 2 of 2SSB 6144. That, along with the need to assign staff to work with the Work Group, greatly limited my ability to engage with federal land management agencies. Given the limited resources available to me, I decided the most effective way to engage the federal agencies was through their involvement in the Work Group. The US Forest Service, which represents a major federal land management organization, had a Forest Supervisor on the Work Group. In addition, the Region Office of the Forest Service allowed their Legislative Liaison to participate as well. The US Fish and Wildlife Service was unable to participate due to funding constraints.

Both the Work Group's report, and their budget recommendations for the 2005-2007 Biennium, and the Department's Strategic Plan recommend funding a position in the Department to engage in the activities you outline in Section 2. I agree with that and recommend you support that request.

Sincerely,



Doug Sutherland
Commissioner of Public Lands

- C: The Honorable Ken Jacobson, Chair, Senate Natural Resources, Energy & Water Committee
The Honorable Brian Sullivan, Chair, House Agriculture & Natural Resources Committee
Forest Health Strategy Work Group
Randy Acker, Governmental Relations Director



Washington State Strategic Plan For Healthy Forests

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Vision

The forests of Washington, on all ownerships, are resistant to uncharacteristic, economically or environmentally undesirable wildfire, windstorm, pests, diseases and other damaging agents, and are able to recover following disturbance.

Key Goals

PRINCIPLES

- Achieving healthy forests is a shared responsibility between the public and landowners.
- Maintain landowner options and flexibility.
- Emphasize prevention of insect and disease outbreaks, stressing that maintaining forest growth that is in balance with available water resources and climatic conditions is an important Forest Health strategy across Washington.
- Forests in managed and developed landscapes, i.e., multiple use National Forest land, state forest land, private industrial forest lands, family forest land, and forested lands in and around residential and commercial development must be managed to lower fire risk, maintain an acceptable risk of catastrophic fire, and protect public resources.

REQUIRED ACTIONS

- Provide landowners and policy makers with timely and accurate assessments of forest health conditions.
- Have systems in place to prevent, suppress, or control undesirable insect or disease outbreaks or infestations when necessary.

DESIRED OUTCOMES OF A VIABLE FOREST HEALTH PROGRAM

- Reduce loss of timber volume and value.
- Reduce risk of catastrophic fire and insect and disease outbreaks.

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- Watersheds provide water in appropriate quantities, at appropriate times, and with adequate quality to sustain human and wildlife populations and to sustain aquatic ecosystems and their associated resources.
 - Restore and protect forest productivity.
 - Sustain fish and wildlife habitat.
 - Natural processes occur at appropriate intervals or are mimicked by forest management activities.

Elements

DATA/INFORMATION

Goal: Comprehensive data and information are available so landowners, policy makers and the public can understand existing and developing forest health conditions and identify areas of greatest treatment need, and effectively communicate practical remedies to forest managers, policy makers, and the public.

Tasks:

- Determine information and data sources, gaps, and technology issues to be able to gather, interpret, and disseminate information.
- Develop monitoring systems for forest health conditions, activities performed, and the effects of those activities. Obtain assistance to devise a monitoring plan.
- Develop timely reporting systems.
- Develop and institutionalize public information and education programs.
- Improve capacity to develop and deliver landowner technical assistance.

LEGAL

Goal: An effective legal construct that recognizes landowner objectives and obligations and the role of government and educational institutions and establishes an effective, efficient program structure. The method must ensure a science-based approach with adequate due process safeguards and local input.

Tasks:

- Define roles and responsibilities of the state and landowners.
- Determine legal and program obligations of the state and of landowners.
- Hold public meetings and hearings across the state to get input on potential legislation.
- Develop a tiered approach to ensure an appropriate and effective response based on the severity of forest health conditions, with an emphasis on keeping forests healthy in the first place.
- Examine the need for a different standard for small landowners, and landowners with landowner objectives that conflict with the state's

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- forest health objectives.
- Improve coordination with other regulatory programs so that the key objectives of each can be realized without adverse effects on others.
 - Review potentially conflicting laws/regulations:
 - Communicate with Forest Practices Board on issues identified by the Forest Health Strategic Work Group that may need study and evaluation by the Board through Adaptive Management or other means.
 - Evaluate the impact of Washington's State Implementation Plan for the Clean Air Act, air quality regulations, and the state Smoke Management Plan on achieving fuels treatment and species composition and stocking goals related to forest health. Recommend changes necessary to achieve the goals of the Clean Air Act and the vision and desired outcomes of the Strategic Plan for Healthy Forests.

PLANNING

Goal: Strategic plans and operational programs exist at appropriate levels to achieve the desired results on all ownerships.

Tasks:

- Develop public acceptance of the Strategic Plan for Healthy Forests through a series of public workshops and a public information process.
- Work with landowners, managers and professional forestry organizations to incorporate and advocate forest health considerations in forest management plans.

LANDOWNER ASSISTANCE

Goal: Landowners are provided the information necessary to increase their understanding of forest health concerns, incorporate forest health protection elements in management plans, and take action appropriate to their ownership objectives. Where necessary and appropriate, financial assistance or incentives are available, particularly for family forest owners.

Tasks:

- Develop or expand institutional capacity to assimilate, develop, and deliver information to all types of landowners using appropriate technology and modern delivery systems.
- Evaluate the particular needs of each ownership class to determine the most suitable means to achieve results on the ground.
- Develop a focused program tailored to family forest owners -- consider integrating information dissemination with the SFLO.
- Maintain an aggressive presence at the federal level to assure funding of landowner assistance programs for forest health, forest management, and fuels treatment.

PUBLIC ACCEPTANCE

Goal: The media, decision makers, and opinion leaders understand, at a conceptual level, the forest health situation in Washington, and are supportive of efforts to improve the situation. There is general acceptance in the public that the long term benefits of active forest management, where appropriate, silvicultural burning and other short-term environmental effects outweigh short-term impacts and inconveniences.

Tasks:

- Develop an effective communications plan that informs landowners and managers, forest practitioners, decision makers, and the general public on the importance of healthy forests, and the practical ways of achieving forest health.
- Participate in a blue ribbon panel to investigate and quantify the market and non-market costs and benefits associated with forest health management activities.
- Develop impact analysis tools that demonstrate the short-term/long-term impacts and benefits.

COLLABORATION AND COOPERATION

Goal: A cooperative atmosphere exists across ownerships on forest health and there is a collaborative approach among private, public, and tribal landowners, forest health professionals, community wildfire protection planning groups, and other interested parties to achieve cross-boundary results. In particular, this includes having processes in place that lead to cooperative insect and disease control programs.

Tasks:

- Discuss with Tribal leaders ways, using a government-to-government approach, to develop cooperative forest health programs, control projects and information gathering and sharing.
- Improve and extend the reach of the forest health website, making it the place to go to learn of forest health issues, projects, successes, and opportunities.
- Maintain and improve the cooperative relationship and information sharing with USDA Forest Service Forest Health Protection.
- Establish state role and responsibility in federal land management decisions.
- Determine the most effective way the state can influence land management decisions on federal lands so that federal lands are managed in ways that achieve the vision and desired outcomes of the state's Strategic Plan for Healthy Forests:
 - Identify processes that provide the greatest opportunity to achieve desired outcomes at a reasonable cost.
 - Examine existing agreements to determine if they can be suitably modified to achieve the desired outcome, or if they could provide a model if not suitable.

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- Evaluate the advantages and costs of Cooperating Agency Status (CAS) on Forest Service land, particularly in light of changing Forest Service land use planning processes.
 - Develop new agreements/processes as necessary.
 - Evaluate the advisability and consequences of intervening in appeals or other legal proceedings when an adverse outcome would frustrate the intent of the Strategic Plan for Healthy Forests.
 - Monitor federal success.

ECONOMICS AND MARKETS

Goal: Markets or market substitutes are in place to partially compensate landowners for the costs involved in undertaking appropriate control activities. Tools, including tradeoff analysis tools, exist to inform landowners and managers, policy makers, and opinion leaders on the economics of achieving healthy forests on all ownerships and the trade offs of maintaining unhealthy forest conditions. Non market values of healthy forests are widely understood and accepted.

Tasks:

- Work with the Office of Community Trade and Economic Development to improve the understanding of forest health issues, barriers, and opportunities and make use of their expertise in ensuring markets or facilities are available.
- Investigate and reduce legal and procedural barriers that reduce the markets available to state lands forest health timber sales.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

Goal: There exists, within the Department of Natural Resources, universities and university extension systems, and other appropriate agencies, an integrated, viable forest health program focused on prevention, but able to deploy the three tiered approach recommended by the Forest Health Strategy Work Group. Funding is sufficient, stable, and from appropriate sources to successfully implement the Strategic Plan for Healthy Forests.

Tasks:

- Prepare a comprehensive approach, using the Small Forest Landowner Office, Forest Health Program, University and Extension System administrators, USDA Forest Service and NRCS program delivery experts, which fully integrates existing programs with any new program elements identified in this strategic plan.
- Develop staffing and budget requests, on a multi-agency basis, along with recommended funding sources, including a full range of options for the legislature to consider:
 - Core Program
 - Prevention/Control Programs

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- Emergency Response
 - Recalcitrant landowners

EXOTIC OR INVASIVE INSECTS AND PATHOGENS

Goal: Harmful exotic or invasive insects and pathogens are excluded from Washington, but monitoring is effective and when exotic organisms are detected, a rapid, effective and coordinated response occurs to eradicate or control these organisms and protect public resources.

Tasks:

- Develop an interagency exotic pest council that sets priorities for monitoring and ensures an effective coordinated response.

IMPLEMENTATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Goal: Elements of the strategic plan are prioritized, an implementation plan is developed, results are monitored and adjustments are made over time.

Tasks:

- The Department, in cooperation with universities, university extension services, landowners and communities of interest develop an implementation plan based on available funding and priorities established by the legislature, Commissioner of Public Lands, and the Forest Health Strategy Work Group.
- Easily understood measures of success are developed.
- A monitoring plan and feed back loop are developed to periodically report on progress.
- At regular intervals, the department will review the strategic plan to assess current relevance, priority, and success and will modify to keep current with changing circumstances.