



**Forest Health Advisory Committee**  
Quarterly Update and Meeting Summary  
September 9, 2020

Forest Health and Resiliency Division has hired **Terra Rentz** as our new Division Manager. She joins us from the Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife, where she worked as the former Ecosystem Services Division Manager. Originally from Alaska and with stints in Washington D.C. and upstate New York, Terra has been dedicated to stewarding our natural resources her entire career, first as an environmental educator, then as a technical wildlife biologist, and now as a policy and management professional. Please join us in welcoming Terra to her new role!

**Wildfire Update**

Wildfire and Forest Health Liaison, Allen Lebovitz, provided an update to the committee. A historic wildfire event is underway in Washington State and across the Northwest. There are numerous active large wildfires burning in Washington, Oregon, and California. As a result of the current situation all DNR managed recreation sites are closed to the public and no fires of any kind are allowed. The cause of many of the wildfires is still under investigation, but not many lightning strikes were observed or recorded. For additional information members of the committee are encouraged to contact Allen directly.

**Legislative Priorities Update**

On August 20, 2020, Forest Health Advisory Committee members met with leadership at DNR to discuss the agency's potential 2021 budget and policy priorities. Amanda Jahshan shared an update on additional stakeholder feedback that has been conducted since that time and key considerations and changes that have resulted from that feedback. There are additional requests related to recreation and conservation corps, additional \$6M in state lands replacement, implementation funding for management of Teanaway Community Forest management, and an anticipated re-introduction of urban forestry bill. The DNR is working to submit 15% budget reductions across the board, but those cuts are subject to change depending on some key items related to wildfire. The DNR team is preparing an updated list of priorities, which should be available to the committee in the next week. Cynthia Wilkerson of WDFW shared an overview of policy and budget related priorities with the committee.

**2022 Priority Landscapes for Eastern Washington**

Chuck Hersey described the status of DNR led efforts related to the analysis of priority landscapes identified in 2018 and 2020 for the 20-Year Forest Health Strategic Plan: Eastern Washington. The DNR has the opportunity to identify additional priority landscapes to analyze and focus forest health work for the next biennium. There has been initial outreach conducted to partners to gather input on potential new priority landscapes. The committee reviewed a map and spreadsheet showing potential priority landscapes currently under consideration. Members of the committee suggested that given recent forest health work in Little Naches and Wedge as well as recent wildfires in Rock/Wenas that those

areas warrant further examination. Another member suggested that the Chewuch area should be a high priority and a landscape evaluation would be helpful to conduct in the near future.

Given the amount of federal lands in many of these priority landscapes there was interest in understanding the partnership between the state and federal agencies, and how state investments help leverage additional funding. Members of the committee requested that a one-pager describing those activities and benefits be summarized and put together for members of the group to share with partners and key decision-makers. WFPA, AFRC, USFS, and DNR will work together to follow up on this topic.

The group discussed the integration of aquatic restoration into the landscape evaluation process and forest health work conducted in these priority areas. DNR does not currently have the capacity, resources, or expertise to conduct that work, but could leverage the strengths of other agencies and partners to better integrate aquatic restoration in priority landscapes. The group flagged this as a topic of further conversation and discussion.

There was interest expressed in understanding how to integrate lynx habitat into forest health treatment and assessment work. Conservation Northwest, WDFW, and DNR agreed to follow up and further discuss this topic.

DNR Forest Health and Resiliency is conducting additional outreach to internal staff in state lands, regions, and forest practices, as well as outreach to external stakeholders. Feedback on the new potential priority landscapes for eastern Washington is requested no later than September 18, 2020. Feedback should be submitted to Chuck Hersey.

#### **Forest Health Treatment Tracker**

Dal Marsters, with Sitka Technologies under contract with DNR, and Jen Watkins provided a presentation and sneak preview of the Forest Health Treatment Tracker to the committee. The tracker is an important tool to help the agency and our partners monitor treatment activities in priority landscapes in eastern Washington. The agency is initially focusing the development of the tool around our 20-Year Forest Health Strategic Plan: Eastern Washington. This version will be available to the public in June 2021.

In the future the department may expand the tool to also track forest health work in the western Washington priority landscapes identified in the 2020 Forest Action Plan. The DNR team will send out a link to allow committee members to view the current version of the tracker and feedback questions about how the tracker will be built out and used by partners.

#### **Bi-Annual Legislative Report for SB5546 and HB1784**

DNR Forest Health and Resiliency is putting together the bi-annual report to the legislature as required by SB 5546 and amended by HB 1784. The report will summarize work to date in implementing the forest health treatment and assessment framework and more recent work related to landscape evaluations, delineation of PODS and strategic fuels treatments for protection of values at risk and commercial lands, and implementation of forest health activity since 2017. The DNR team welcomes input from the committee regarding the content of the report and any specific stories that partners would like to highlight.

A member of the committee suggested that a discussion about the efficacy of fuels breaks be integrated into the report. Members of the committee also suggested that stories about wildfires, specifically cases where wildfires have burned through treatments could be helpful.

There was a suggestion that the story maps developed for legislative tours provided helpful information to include in the report. The link to the map is available here:

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/33fc92b8be08421b9c01b043f628cd7e>

### **Joint Work Group**

The Wildland Fire Advisory Committee (WFAC) and Forest Health Advisory Committee continue to seek opportunities foster meaningful partner engagement and address challenges in implementing the 20-Year Forest Health Strategic Plan: Eastern Washington, 10-Year Wildland Fire Protection Strategic Plan, and Forest Action Plan. A Joint Work Group concept paper was developed to articulate the purpose and focus of a small group that could “roll up their sleeves” and work together across the two committees to problem solve and develop potential recommendations.

The Joint Work Group could focus on a number of potential topics, such as: 2020 Wildfire Season Review, risk assessments and priority actions related to implementation of HB1784, post-fire recovery, managed wildfire and use of prescribed fire, forest health treatment impacts on wildfire behavior, workforce development and training, and identification of priority wildlife habitat in need of fire protection.

Four WFAC members volunteered to participate. Members of the FHAC that expressed interest in participating include Mark Doumit or WFPA alternate, Matt Comisky of AFRC, Cynthia Wilkerson or alternate from WDFW, The Nature Conservancy, and a USDA Forest Service representative.

### **Forest Health and Resiliency Division Updates (provided via email prior to the meeting)**

#### **Community and Landowner Assistance (Andy Tate, Assistant Division Manager)**

Summer grant season is well under way for Community and Landowner Assistance Section. The team expects to submit nearly \$3M in federal grant applications this fall for fuels reduction, wildfire education and outreach, community resilience, and forest health work across the state.

The Wildfire Ready Neighbors marketing campaign mentioned in the last update is still progressing, despite challenges posed by COVID-19. Alternative rollout methods are being determined to minimize as much risk to participants as possible. Though not yet finalized, options are being explored for postponing until conditions (hopefully) improve in the spring.

Urban & Community Forestry is currently engaged in a very successful partnership with the Washington Invasive Species Council to deliver the Urban Forest Pest Readiness Project. This project is producing tools and providing education to municipalities to help them best prepare for, detect, and respond to outbreaks of invasive insects. Many invasive insects arrive through ports of entry in urban areas, therefore a swift response by local jurisdictions is a strong defense against invasive insects becoming established in native forests.

#### **Federal Lands Program (Trevor McConchie, Assistance Division Manager)**

The Federal Lands Program continues to support federal partner targets and goals through use of the Good Neighbor Authority. There have been five non-commercial fuels reduction projects awarded with another two in process, totaling approximately 2,200 acres of federal lands treated to date. In addition,

since its inception the program has now has 36.5 MMBF under contract, which will bring up to \$8.0 million dollars over the next 3-4 years to these forests for restoration projects such as road improvements, removing fish passage barriers, restoring aquatic habit, upland habitat restoration, and more. In total, the program has 46 projects in various stages, with six complete, twenty underway, and twenty planned.

For the 21-23 Biennium, the program has developed three targets that coincide with federal partner goals and agency plans:

- Complete 11,500 acres of treatments on federal lands that contribute to the 20-Year Forest Health Strategic Plan: Eastern Washington.
- Produce at least 26,000 MMBF from federal lands, statewide.
- Complete at least five projects on federal lands in Western WA designated within priority landscapes within the Forest Action Plan.

Also, attached is our program update from June 2020 (we have bid out other non-commercial projects since it was put out) and it is also available at [www.dnr.wa.gov/gna](http://www.dnr.wa.gov/gna)

#### **Prescribed Fire Program (Mike Norris, Assistant Division Manager)**

The Prescribed Fire Program continues to build momentum around key policy and operational areas including standing up programs that focus on training, assisting partners, planning, data collection, and implementation across boundaries. Staff are continuing to build the Washington Certified Prescribed Burn Manager program with plans to have our first course later in the Fall 2020 or Spring 2021. DNR staff are supporting the TREX (Prescribed Fire Training Exchange) with another program scheduled for October 2020 in the Roslyn area. Staff have completed an agreement to support the USDA Forest Service with additional resources for prescribed burning in Washington. We are also finalizing an application to the USDA Forest Service Landscape Scale Restoration program that will fund fuels work and prescribed burning in eastern Washington. Staff will participate in relevant national level prescribed fire training courses for the Winter and Spring of 2021. Fuels data collection, planning and implementation will all continue as the program grows.

#### **Planning, Science, and Monitoring (Jen Watkins, Assistance Division Manager)**

The team is preparing our bi-annual SB5546 report to the legislature, which will share our progress in meeting the goals of the 20-Year Forest Health Strategic Plan: Eastern Washington. The report will also identify additional 2022 priority landscapes and the team is currently evaluating potential additional priority landscapes in North Central and Northeast WA. The report will be submitted on December 1, 2020. We look forward to discussing these topics further during the quarterly meeting on September 9, 2020.

DNR is preparing to formally submit our 2020 Forest Action Plan to the USDA Forest Service for approval. The action plan enables the state to access federal funding, which supports critical programming such as Forest Legacy Program, Volunteer Fire Assistance (rural support to fire districts), among many other important programs. The action plan also identifies numerous links between our 20-Year FHSP: Eastern WA and 10-Year Wildland Fire Suppression Strategic Plan.

There is on-going outreach associated with implementation of HB1784. Dr. Ana Barros and Chuck Hersey at DNR, who recently led a series of partner meetings focused on the pilot areas discussed at the last quarterly meeting, are leading the effort. The pilot area presentations brought together a diverse range of partners – from fire districts to forest collaboratives and public utility districts. The meetings

reinforced the need to engage local partners in the planning and implementation of forest health and fuels treatments that will improve both landscape-level conditions and community preparedness.

Committee Coordinator, Andrew Spaeth, has been working to coordinate the activities of the Forest Health Advisory Committee with the Wildland Fire Advisory Committee, which is chaired by Allen Lebovitz. Allen is also serving in a liaison role to the FHAC and we look forward to working closely with the WFAC in advancing shared priorities identified in the Forest Action Plan.