

Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition Blueprint for the Colville National Forest

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. Where is the Colville National Forest?

A. The Colville National Forest encompasses 1.1 million acres in the upper Columbia River watershed just east of the Okanogan River in northeast Washington. Where the Columbia River enters the U.S. it cuts a gateway through the rugged and heavily glaciated western Rocky Mountains, creating the Kettle River Range to the west and Selkirk Mountains to the east. Because these mountains lie between the Rockies and the Cascades, they are home to a diversity of wildlife and trees found nowhere else in Washington.

Q. What is the Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition?

A. The Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition was formed in 2002 to demonstrate the full potential of restoration forestry to enhance forest health, public safety, and community economic vitality. The Coalition is a local, citizen-led cooperative effort that brings together mill workers, conservationists, business owners, recreationists, loggers, foresters and representatives of county government. The coalition is working to develop a management plan for the area that sustains jobs, restores our forests, protects wildlife and wilderness, and ensures outdoor recreation opportunities for everyone. For the last five years, the Coalition has worked together successfully on over twenty projects to reduce fire risk, improve forest health, and enhance wildlife habitat.

Q. What is the “blueprint” for the Colville National Forest

A. The Coalition has developed a *blueprint* for the long-range management of the Colville National Forest that seeks to find a balance on the landscape and promote a variety of management activities including:

- Prioritizing fuels reduction work near homes and communities between public and private lands where responsible forestry would be the primary management objective
- Developing a sustainable source of jobs and logs for local mills
- Treating unhealthy forests to enhance wildlife habitat and speed the development of old forest characteristics,
- Protecting roadless areas to maintain their wilderness values, including clean water, solitude and as a refuge for wildlife.

Q. Why has the Coalition developed the Blueprint?

A. A decline in forest health due to past mismanagement; an increase in the risk of hotter, more intense fires; expanding and competing recreational needs; and shrinking agency budgets and staff all require that the community come together around a sound, effective management plan for the Colville National Forest. The Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition recognized the urgency in this situation and took the initiative to begin that conversation in order to ensure that we not only maintain healthy forests and wildlife in the future, but also our traditional way of life that depends on them.

Q. What do the details of the Blueprint entail?

A. The Blueprint outlines three different management zones:

- 1) **Responsible Management Areas** covers approximately one-third of the forest near homes, communities and along forest roadways. It would be managed to reduce and maintain low fire risk and provide a sustainable timber harvest with a minimum of new road construction using methods that conserve soils, water, and wildlife habitat.

Prescribed fire may be used in the responsible management area in some circumstances to reduce fuel loads and to reestablish dry forest plant species. Where appropriate, trail maintenance and construction will be part of project goals.

- 2) **Old Forest Restoration Areas** where thickets created by past management and fire exclusion are thinned to protect old trees and speed the recovery of old forests and the important wildlife habitat they provide. The Coalition has identified approximately one-third of the forest that would benefit from restoration.

Prescribed fire will be used to reestablish and maintain natural fire regimes and where appropriate to reduce fuel loads after thinning. No new permanent roads would be constructed unless they are beneficial to wildlife and aquatic species, and where appropriate, trail maintenance and construction will be part of project goals.

The overall objective in these restoration areas is to enhance wildlife habitat and improve ecosystem function by restoring natural processes and resiliency, which will improve watersheds, wildlife habitat, and opportunities for recreation.

- 3) **Wilderness** encompasses approximately one-third of the forest. Management objectives are to maintain or restore wilderness characteristics, the heart of which is contained in sixteen Inventoried Roadless Areas. These lands provide secure wildlife habitat for lynx, grizzly bear, mule deer and elk, as well as outdoor recreation opportunities for people, and a balance to the managed, more roaded landscape.

These three areas together provide an important balance between providing wildlife habitat; restoring healthy, fire resilient forests; providing an array of recreation opportunities; and developing sustainable, local jobs in the woods.

Q. How does the blueprint address climate change?

A. Trees and forests help affect climate change and global warming by removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and converting it during photosynthesis to carbon, which they then "store" in the form of wood and vegetation, a process referred to as "carbon sequestration." The blueprint promotes responsibly managed forests that are not cleared, but thinned. These forests can continue to act as a carbon "bank" storing and absorbing carbon out of the atmosphere. The blueprint also provides a sustainable supply of wood fiber to local mills. Wood, unlike materials such as plastics, aluminum or cement, continues to store carbon and does not require large amounts of fossil fuels during manufacturing.

Q. Restoration of old growth forest is an important objective; how is the Coalition's blueprint addressing that?

A. Old growth forests were logged for over a century and are a rare sight out in the woods these days. One of the rarest old growth forests are *low-elevation* dry ponderosa and mixed conifer forests of larch and Douglas fir. Fire exclusion in these forests has put them at risk of fire. Thinning out small trees and reestablishing a natural fire regime will restore a healthy balance in these forests. Development of old growth characteristics in wetter forests can be speeded up by thinning areas previously logged and replanted. In both cases the objective is to retain and restore old growth forests. There is broad support in the community for bringing back our big old trees and the wildlife that depend on them.

Q. Why do we need to designate Wilderness now?

A. Increasing development and population are putting pressure on our last wild forests:

- Less than 3% of the Colville National Forest is currently designated as Wilderness (the Salmo Priest Wilderness), representing less than 1% of all Wilderness in the state. Only 4.4% of the continental United States is wilderness – 60% of this is in Alaska --an area about the size of South Dakota.
- Wilderness is a “savings bond” for future generations, ensuring that our grandchildren will be able to enjoy the same type of wilderness experiences we have enjoyed in our lifetimes.
- Wilderness designation provide for quality backcountry hunting, fishing, hiking, and equestrian opportunities, even as more and more modern motorized and mechanized recreationists push farther into once difficult to access wild forests.
- Wilderness provides the highest level of security to our primary sources of clean drinking and irrigation water.
- Wilderness challenges the human spirit. It is a part of our natural heritage, providing a primeval experience and a link to our frontier past in a computerized age of rapidly expanding urbanization and development.

Q. How does the blueprint provide stability to local mills?

A. The blueprint provides a predictable land base from which a sustainable flow of wood products will be produced. The Coalition will also continue to work collaboratively to help ensure adequate funding is available to prepare projects. Because projects are based on a balanced, collaborative approach, they will gain broader public support and move through the public process much more quickly, resulting in more wood getting to the mill in a timely way. By reducing the fire risk near homes and communities while maintaining a healthy, natural-looking forest, these projects can provide multiple benefits to the community in a truly sustainable way.

Q. How does the Blueprint affect my private property?

A. The Blueprint only addresses public land management and does not affect private lands, other than to reduce the chance of wildfire spreading from public lands to private lands and by protecting the quality of agricultural and municipal water supplies coming off of the national forest.

Q. Are there interests involved in the collaborative process other than the Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition?

A. Yes. The Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition has been working with the Colville National Forest and updates local government officials regularly. The Coalition has also formed a recreation committee that is recommending new trails and working on addressing other recreation needs on the forest. Participants include non-motorized recreation groups, motorized recreation (single-track, ATV, Jeep), mountain bike, ski, whitewater, sportsmen, and equestrians, although these recreation stakeholders have not all endorsed the Coalition's Blueprint. The Coalition has also been working with other regional, state and national conservation organizations, loggers, millworkers, and business interests. These groups are being kept up to date on the Coalition's work, and the forest planning process.

Q. What is the coalition planning to do with the Blueprint?

A. This summer the Coalition will be hosting presentations and community meetings to solicit feedback on the initial Blueprint and develop a more thorough plan. Following community involvement and input, the Coalition will incorporate feedback, and seek authorities to establish restoration and responsible forestry zones, designate new wilderness, and provide funding to pay for new recreation facilities including trails, community wildfire protection and forest restoration.