



COLVILLE NATIONAL FOREST WILDFIRE CRISIS STRATEGY INVESTMENT LANDSCAPE

Restoration of departed landscapes in Northeast Washington

Updated: Aug. 8, 2023

The Colville National Forest was among eleven landscapes identified for targeted investments during “year two” of the Forest Service’s 10-year [Wildfire Crisis Strategy](#) in 2023. The agency allocated \$2.1 million to increase the pace and scale of restoration work on departed landscapes, in turn improving improve forest health and resiliency which decreases wildfire risk to communities surrounding the forest.

As one of five investment landscapes in the Pacific Northwest, the Colville National Forest continues to be a leader in adopting cutting edge project design and partner integration, combined these two elements have led to success across the forest and adjoining lands.

The project area includes four high-risk firesheds, several wilderness areas, and watersheds, including hydropower infrastructure which powers metropolitan areas from Seattle to Yakima. Partners include Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation; Kalispel Tribe of Indians; Washington State Department of Natural Resources; Avista Power; Bonneville Power Administration; Seattle City Light

The landscape is extremely rural, largely undeveloped and is home to many underserved communities. The main economic drivers being agriculture and timber resource development. Adjacent to the Colville Reservation in northeastern Washington, communities within this landscape include Tonasket, Republic, Orient,

Kettle Falls, Colville, Chewelah, Metaline Falls, Ione, and Newport.

Critical infrastructure and values at risk in the landscape include State Route 395, 20, and 21, multiple hydropower facilities and a large biomass energy production site. Developed recreation includes a ski area, extensive trails, reservoirs, and campgrounds. Undeveloped recreation includes recreation in the wilderness areas, hunting, and winter backcountry opportunities. The landscape provides vital habitat for species listed or proposed for listing under the Endangered Species Act, including Canada lynx, grizzly bear, whitebark pine, woodland caribou, and bull trout.



The Colville National Forest includes 1.6 million acres of forest land and four high-risk fire sheds. Prescribed fires, like this one conducted with Washington Department of Natural Resources in 2023, create open space between large trees, promoting their growth while reducing the risk of higher intensity, more destructive fires. USDA Forest Service photo.

The Colville National Forest relies heavily on the health of the local wood products industry and will use stewardship contracts and partnership agreements to complete project work. The local wood products industry can support fuels treatments and stewardship contracts by processing biomass, small-diameter logs, and larger materials.

This industry can also help generate the revenues needed to pay for follow-up noncommercial work, allowing us to achieve goals for fuels reduction and forest health. Tribal, State, and local government partners will help execute contracts, augment our workforce, and maintain healthy forests at the landscape scale.

Building on relationships with Tribal Governments, the Washington State Department of Natural Resources, timber industry partners, and collaborative groups, forest staff are focused on improving the resilience of fire-adapted landscapes.

This includes reducing fuels to limit wildfire impacts and the risk of catastrophic wildfire and improve prospects for postfire recovery.

Current fuels treatment projects will be expanded to broaden the scale of active forest management. Communities and critical infrastructure will be better protected and receive better support for post-fire recovery.

INITIAL STEPS

Initial efforts will focus on treating firesheds on the east side of the Kettle Crest in Okanogan and Ferry Counties, while working with counties and local organizations to expand our capacity to complete treatments on the westside.

This work will protect infrastructure and values at risk in rural communities that are most at risk of catastrophic wildfires.

The forest plans to treat 3,000 acres in 2023 and 3,000 acres in 2024, working closely with adjacent landowners, land managers, and other partners to maximize the effectiveness of this work by ensuring it is implementing the right treatment in the right place at the right time.

Early accomplishments

The Colville National Forest and partners have produced several early successes:

- *Allocated or spent 103% of WCS funding allocated to the forest. Treated 2,000 of 3,000 target acres so far this year, including 1700 acres by spring prescribed fire.*
- *Worked with Washington State Department of Natural Resources to implement cross boundary prescribed fire for the first time in more than 20 years, and partnered with the state for an innovative Good Neighbor Authority agreement to apply herbicides to help prevent invasive plants in treated areas.*
- *The GNA partnership with WA Dept. of Natural Resources is financially self-sufficient and accounts for 10%-15% of the forest's annual vegetation management work.*

LONG TERM GOALS

More than seven years ago, the Colville National Forest began working towards a cohesive 20 Year Strategy to return departed landscapes to the historic range of variability.

The forest has enjoyed great success with its long-range strategy to date. Investments like the historical commitments being made in support of the agency's overall Wildfire Crisis Strategy are making it possible to move ever closer to our goal of a fully-restored, sustainable, and fire-, drought- and disease- resilient forest.



Fire fighters complete firing operations on the Aeneas Valley Cross Boundary Prescribed Fire project, May 2023. USDA Forest Service photo by Jeffrey Todd.