



United States Department of Agriculture

Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest 2017 Annual Report



**USDA
Forest
Service**

**Pacific
Northwest
Region**

**Okanogan-
Wenatchee
National Forest**



Photo by Larry Miller, USFS

Message from Forest Supervisor

As we pause with winter's arrival and reflect on what's been accomplished on the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest throughout 2017, it's time to share a summary of those accomplishments with those that make it all happen across this 4-million-acre landscape.

Throughout this year's annual report, you'll see examples of the outstanding work done by our Forest Service employees, partners, cooperators and volunteers with much assistance from local community members, elected officials, permittees and visitors to sustain this vast forest – a forest essential to the cultural, economic, physical, and environmental well-being of central Washington and beyond. I believe that our progress hinges upon our continuing efforts to be good neighbors, partners in wildfire management and forest restoration, and inclusive of the communities we serve.

Our priority continues to be placed on restoration of fire-adapted ecosystems. Wildfire suppression during August and September saw five major wildfires on the Forest, and we were grateful for the help of many Type 1 and 2 Incident Management Teams, Washington Department of Natural Resources, local fire districts, and other county, state and federal agencies during those fires. Expanding the pace and scale of restoration efforts including

thinning small-diameter trees, increasing the use of prescribed fire and other fuel reduction activities across larger landscapes remains our focus. We've appreciated the strong support and good work of several collaborative stakeholder groups helping us work toward success in the many projects we've undertaken.

We believe deeply in the importance of natural resources and our shared stewardship responsibility to take good care of these lands. We can't and don't try to do this alone, and look forward to your continuing help. As we celebrate the progress of 2017 and look forward into 2018, I'm reminded that there is still much work to be done. We've sought to find the greatest good for the greatest number over the long run – for over 100 years – and we will continue to do so. However, finding that greatest good is complex and frequently controversial. Nothing new about that – but there is a greater sense of urgency than ever to provide sustainable recreation, restored landscapes, healthy watersheds, economic stability and meaningful relationships. I thank you for your passion for these lands and ask that you join me in that long view – in the belief that we must provide for future generations while meeting today's needs.

– **Mike Williams**
Forest Supervisor

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**The vast possibilities of our great future
will become realities only if we make
ourselves responsible for that future.**

– Gifford Pinchot



Restoration Project to Improve Water Quality; Support Local Jobs

“The project is a step forward in returning the forest to health while meeting current and future public needs.”

***–Kelly Lawrence,
Naches District Ranger***

Within the Little Crow watershed northwest of Naches, the sound of running chainsaws is becoming synonymous with the song of restoration and forest health. Those chainsaws are part of much needed thinning planned under a 2017 decision to help restore the Forest while preserving access for users across more than 700 acres. Currently the entire watershed is unhealthy; at risk of destructive megafires, insect outbreaks and continued fish decline.

“We are experiencing destructive megafires and disease outbreaks like never before,” said Naches District Ranger Kelly Lawrence. “After hearing from more than 60 folks, I am confident the Little Crow project strikes a good balance. The Huckleberry decision is the first of many to come for this area.”

Key features of the project include restoring native shrub habitat on more than 700 acres through a combination of prescribed fire and mechanical thinning. Additionally, nearly six miles of roads would be improved to reduce sediment, improving water quality, by replacing culverts and controlling erosion hotspots. The project is also projected to generate more than \$700,000 dollars in timber value at the mill and support more than 160 jobs.

USDA Forest Service Strategic Plan

Sustain Our Nation’s Forests and Grasslands;
Strengthen Communities; Provide Abundant Clean Water; Mitigate Wildfire Risk



Silviculture and Botany

- 35 million board feet of timber sold, supporting approximately 520 jobs
- 14,016 cords of firewood sold
- 2,784 acres of seedlings planted to reforest burned areas
- 2,064 acres of watersheds restored using timber sales
- 80,000 native trees and shrubs planted at Holden Mine
- Collected 86 pounds of native seeds

Adaptive Management Keeps Campgrounds Open; Strengthens Community

Near the community of Cle Elum, the smell of campfire smoke rises into the star-filled night above the popular Salmon La Sac Campground as life-long memories are being made; memories that connect the people to a life-long love of the outdoors. But those opportunities may have not happened at all in 2017 if not for community supported, adaptive management and planning. This plan involved hiring volunteer campground hosts; training a group of veterans specializing in disaster relief to help clean up campgrounds; working with a local college to hire students; and reaching out to former concessionaire employees to increase understanding and help ensure good customer service.

After two decades of concessionaire management, Salmon La Sac and 10 other high-use campgrounds and recreation areas successfully sported a new look during the summer of 2017; the look of local Forest Service employees managing the campground for the first time in more than 20 years. Together with the community, all recreation facilities opened on time and remained open longer into the fall season.

“Together with the local community, we built a good path forward,” said Cle Elum District Ranger Michelle Capp.

USDA Forest Service Strategic Plan

Deliver Benefits to Public; Strengthen Communities

“We strove to deliver a high standard of recreation opportunities as we balanced costs and services.”

***– Michelle Capp,
Cle Elum District Ranger***

Recreation Impacts

- **The Forest contributes to more than 2,000 jobs in recreation in local communities, contributing approximately \$89 million in annual income.**
- **Across Washington, outdoor recreation generates:**
 - \$1.6 billion in state and local tax revenue**
 - \$7.1 billion in wages and salaries**
 - \$22.5 billion in consumer spending**

Sustainable Trails; Deer Conservation Align in Number Two Canyon Project

Just four miles southwest of Wenatchee, the Number Two Canyon area is a popular destination for an evening trail run or a weekend bike ride. However, years of unmanaged use have resulted in miles of user created, unsustainable trails and deteriorating forest conditions. For more than four years, analysis was conducted in the Canyon area to determine its condition and health. And in early 2017, a decision was finalized to balance recreation with wildlife habitat needs. Currently, almost six miles of user-created trails are in need of rehabilitation to stabilize soils and reintroduce native vegetation. Additionally, there is a need for sustainable, local recreation access near the growing community of Wenatchee.

“Together with our local partners, we can work across public and private lands for a unique and comprehensive trail system,” said Wenatchee River District Ranger, Jeff Rivera.

As a part of this effort, trails would tie into the existing Chelan Douglas Land Trust Sage Hills/Horse Lake Reserve Trail System to more effectively serve the community. Hikers, equestrians, trail runners and mountain bikers alike would have access to an additional 30 miles of safe, sustainable trails. Elk and deer habitat would be fully protected with more than 200 acres designated as key habitat. With the analysis and decision complete, implementation work is already beginning and will be phased over several years and incorporate numerous volunteers and partners.

USDA Forest Service Strategic Plan

Sustain our Nation's Forests and Grasslands;
Conserve Open Space; Strengthen Communities;
Deliver Benefits to the Public

“Sustainable trails will allow us to meet the needs of our community today and into the future”

***– Jeff Rivera,
Wenatchee River District Ranger***

Recreation and Special Uses

- Approximately 3 million visitors a year
- Over 5,880 miles of trails
- 8 Wilderness areas totaling 1.5 million acres
- 4 downhill ski areas
- 133 developed campgrounds
- 5 recreation rental cabins
- 682 recreation residences



Workshop Fosters Resilient Rangelands and Relationships

Near the Canadian border, livestock graze where a meadow meets the edge of a ponderosa pine forest. As the grazing season draws to a close in the fall, they are again drawn to the sweet, blue grasses often found near forest openings or along riparian areas. Today, their search is redirected as a new exclosure protects this section of the creek from potential stream bank destabilization while still providing much needed access to water. This exclosure is only one of many examples of adaptive rangeland management solutions jointly developed by the Forest and local permittees in 2017 in the Tonasket area.

Yet this success story started on rocky ground as the 2017 field season highlighted sharp disagreements about grazing utilization methods and monitoring results from the previous year. A step in rebuilding those relationships and re-establishing effective communication was to co-host with the Western Cattleman's Association, Public Lands Council, and Natural Resource Conservation Service a monitoring workshop where interested parties could interact with range specialists while performing hands-on

monitoring that met protocols where livestock grazing occurs on National Forest lands. Once on site, more than 80 livestock producers, trusted rangeland monitoring experts, and Forest Service employees engaged in lively discussions about effective monitoring methods and provided initial training in protocols used to monitor utilization for different site types.

While more work remains to be done, this collaborative workshop was a crucial step in the path toward good working relationships and common understanding of the rangelands closely woven into the fabric of the local community for multiple generations. Ultimately, more than 6,300 head of livestock were successfully turned out across nearly 40 active range allotments in 2017.

"We will continue to partner with local ranchers and their families who love and care for these rangelands," said

Tonasket District Ranger Matt Reidy.



USDA Forest Service Strategic Plan

Exchange Natural Resource Expertise; Advance Knowledge; Sustain Our Nation's Forests and Grasslands; Strengthen Communities.

"Open communication of shared knowledge is important for taking good care of the land for current and future generations."

***— Matt Reidy,
Tonasket District Ranger***



Entiat River Valley; Silver Falls Reopen

On a bright, spring morning, a Forest employee quietly unlocks a gate in the Upper Entiat River area. The metal bar swings open without fanfare or the flashing of cameras. But this is not simply another road re-opening after winter. The opening of this gate heralds the resilience of the forest and community after back to back, intense wildfire years. Between the 2014 Duncan Fire and 2015 Wolverine Fire, the majority of the upper Entiat River area had burned, impacting over 70 miles of trails, 25 miles of roads, campgrounds, and trails including the iconic Silver Falls.

In seeking to balance recreation access and public safety, the Forest partnered with local citizens as well as county emergency management to review the hazards burned areas often present after a wildfire. Together they utilized deliberate risk analysis tools to help develop a plan that limited risks where the option and resources were available. In a staged re-opening, trails, campgrounds and roads were once again opened to the public in 2017 after three years of closure.

A gem of this reopening included the beloved Silver Falls; a very popular 140-foot high waterfall cascading over granite boulders amidst stands of lush conifers. This spring and summer Forest Service trail crews partnered with the Northwest Youth Corps and AmeriCorps to replace three bridges along the trail to the top of Silver Falls.



“These youth crews have followed in the footsteps of CCC-era crews who constructed much of the original trail, including the layered rock walls and trail stairs,” said Entiat Ranger District Recreation Resource Specialist Jon Meier.

USDA Forest Service Strategic Plan

Exchange Natural Resource Expertise; Mitigate Wildfire Risk; Deliver Benefits to the Public

“We will be dealing with megafire impacts for many years to come, but this effort highlights how we can adapt to those impacts and become more resilient together.”

***– James Simino,
Entiat District Ranger***



Partnerships Support Backcountry Trail Access

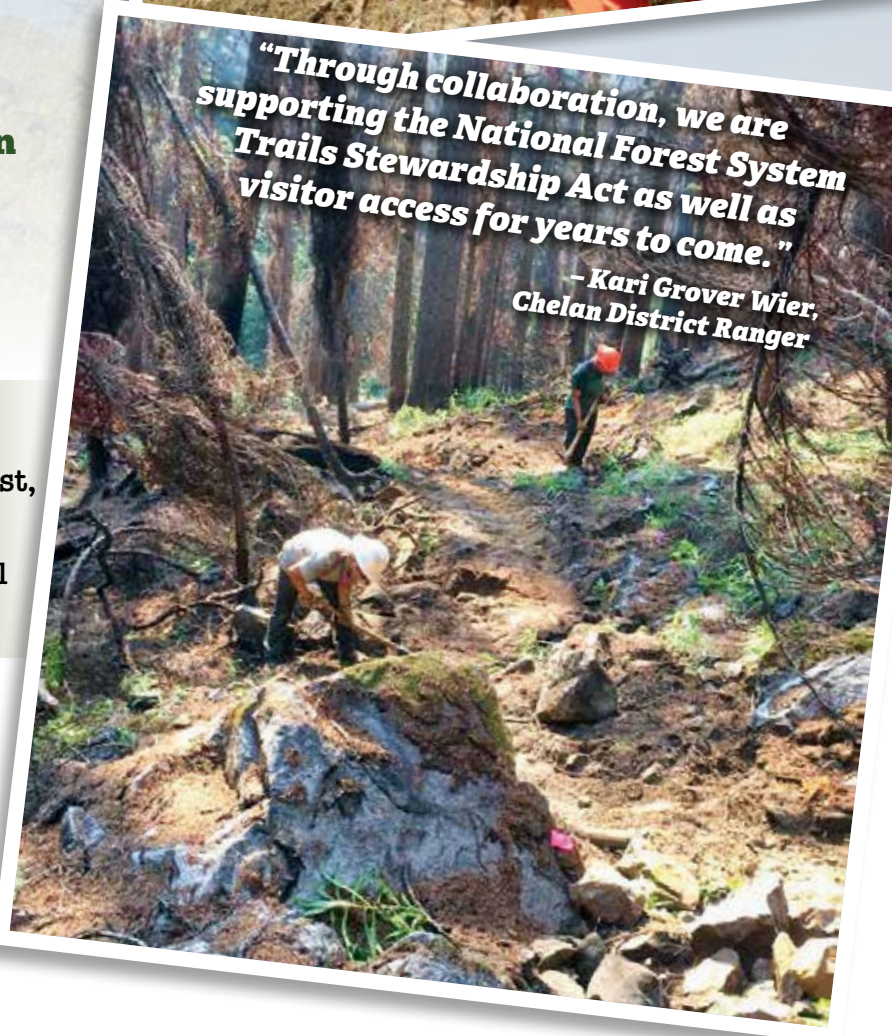
High above Lake Chelan, a volunteer with the Washington Trails Association continues the backbreaking task of clearing a fallen tree with a cross-cut saw. It will take hours to clear this single tree from the Lakeshore Trail, hours of much needed maintenance work. This effort is one of many to sustain access to a rugged and remote backcountry through a network of beloved 'up-lake' trails that wander along the lakeshore and through alpine passes. Like most trail systems, these trails need routine maintenance and upkeep on a scale possible only through partnerships that bolster existing Forest trail crews. In 2017, strategic partnerships resulted in an additional 8,600 hours of trail maintenance and over 254 miles of improved trail on the 'uplake' system.

USDA Forest Service Strategic Plan

Deliver Benefits to the Public;
Connect People to the Outdoors;
Exchange Natural Resource Expertise

Volunteers and Youth

- 74,000 volunteer hours across the Forest, worth \$1.8 million dollars
- 14,000 youth engaged in environmental education and outdoor learning



"Through collaboration, we are supporting the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act as well as visitor access for years to come."

*- Kari Grover Wier,
Chelan District Ranger*



Veterans, Community Partner with Forest to Reduce Wildfire Risk

In early June, the sound of chainsaws whir near the top of McClure Mountain near the community of Twisp. Calls echo back and forth as members of Team Rubicon buck fallen trees and haul woody material into piles to be burned in later years. Hour by hour, their hard work slowly transforms dense, overgrown brush and tree stands into a thinned, wildfire resilient forest. Their mission is to reduce the wildfire risk to critical communication infrastructure atop McClure Mountain; essential equipment used by local law enforcement, fire districts, emergency services, utilities, and more.

“During the wildfires of 2014 and 2015, critical infrastructure atop McClure was threatened,” said Mike Liu, Methow Valley District Ranger.

“The community rallied and supported this high priority project through grants, volunteer hours and donations.”

Back on the mountain, the veterans of Team Rubicon complete another acre of the 150 acres of clearing work and thinning planned for this summer. Their efforts are part of a robust partnership between the Forest, volunteers, and the community to address long-term wildfire preparedness needs and an outcome of lessons learned from wildfires like the Carlton Complex in 2015. In a win-win, the Team was seeking a project that would keep their disaster response skills sharp and provide training to volunteers while benefiting public lands.

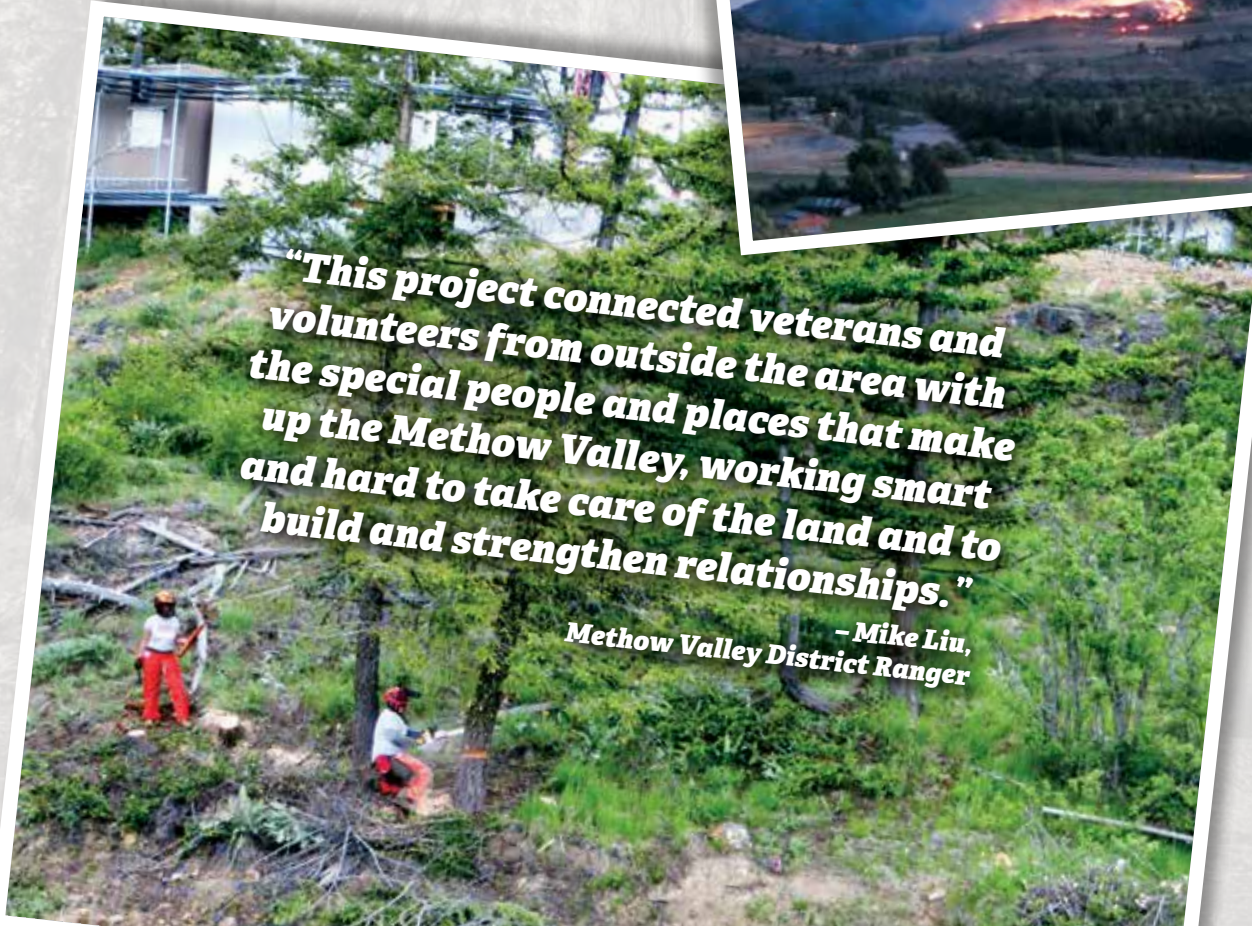
USDA Forest Service Strategic Plan

Mitigate Wildfire Risk; Strengthen Communities;
Promote an Inclusive Culture



“This project connected veterans and volunteers from outside the area with the special people and places that make up the Methow Valley, working smart and hard to take care of the land and to build and strengthen relationships.”

***– Mike Liu,
Methow Valley District Ranger***



Expanding Good Fire Use Across State; Protecting Communities

East of Tonasket, a large smoke column rises above the tree tops as a helicopter and ground crews work a fire burning along the forest floor. As the end of the day nears, firefighters are pleased with this fire. After all, it's helping to restore the forest and better protect communities – it's good fire. Excluded from the ecosystem for nearly 100 years, frequent, low-intensity fire is essential for healthy forests and better protected communities.

“Prescribed fire is one of the best tools we have to limit the size and intensity of future wildfires,” said Acting Deputy Forest Supervisor Al Watson. “After a summer of fires that threatened communities, it can be hard to think of anyway fire is good, but at the right time and the right place, fire is a powerful tool for good.”

As good fires burned this fall, fire managers from nine different agencies and partners came together in central Washington to learn and train in prescribed fire through a formal training exchange (TREX) for the first time in state history. Sponsored by the Fire Learning Network, TREX is a unique opportunity for fire personnel from across the region to learn about prescribed fire, land management, the wildland urban interface and smoke management across agency boundaries.

“We are proud to partner with the Forest Service and others in a new chapter of fire management in Washington State,” said Public Lands Commissioner Hilary Franz.

This collaborative approach allowed sharing of experience and learning across geographies and agencies as well as improving wildfire response and conservation practices over time.

USDA Forest Service Strategic Plan

Exchange Natural Resource Expertise;
Mitigate Wildfire Risk; Advance Knowledge;
Excel as a High Performing Agency

“In this era of megafires, TREX is an all hands, all lands approach that brings us together across federal, state, tribal, and private boundaries.”

**– Al Watson,
Acting Deputy Forest Supervisor**

Photo by John Marshall

Fire Management

- 16,700 acres of hazardous fuels treated
- Managed 70 wildfires totaling 224,007 acres
- Flew 624 aircraft missions
- 20,000 Forest personnel days spent on wildfire incidents with 540,000 miles driven
- Incident Management Teams on Forest for 1,026 days
- 133 miles of roads/trails approved for Burned Area Emergency treatments
- Hosted 36 wildfire prevention events



Tribal Collaboration Enhances Native Fish Restoration; Recreation

For decades to come, large wood structures will rise out of the Bumping River near the community of Naches as they sustain habitat for native fish. Their journey into the river began nearly two years ago, as a late fall windstorm swept through the Bumping River area. In its aftermath, approximately 150 large trees, up to 40 inches in diameter, had toppled within the Soda Springs Campground damaging a historic Civilian Conservation Corps constructed shelter and prompting a closure for public safety.

In an effort to embrace the opportunity this natural event provided, an idea was born to improve conditions for native fish while simultaneously working to reopen the campground. Relocating toppled trees into the river, would help create critically important habitat for threatened steelhead and bull trout and clear blowdown. The idea and funding needs were then embraced by the Yakama Nation, creating a shared stewardship opportunity that supported restoration in new and successful ways. Two years and \$85,000 later, five log jams now rise out of the river, six miles of stream have been restored, and the Soda Springs Campground is once again open to Forest visitors.

USDA Forest Service Strategic Plan

Sustain Our Nation's Forests and Grasslands;
Conserve Open Space; Provide Abundant Clean
Water; Exchange Natural Resource Expertise;
Promote an Inclusive Culture



"This project is a great example of how tribal partnerships and creative thinking can improve restoration and recreation – turning a terrible windstorm into a win-win."

**– Kelly Lawrence,
Naches District Ranger**



Climbing Ranger Program Supports Recreation Community, Safety

At the toe of Colchuck Glacier, a 2,000 foot vertical rock wall beckons climbers with high alpine, technical climbing in the heart of the Cascades. The Backbone Ridge route up the face includes eight pitches requiring belays and sections of simul-climbing with protections set as climbing progresses. Like many other popular areas in the Alpine Lakes Wilderness, this route is patrolled by Forest Service employees – specialized Climbing Rangers to be exact. Now in its fifth year of successful operation, the Climbing Ranger Program is a uniquely grant funded program designed to balance recreation opportunities with ecological and social concerns in a fragile ecosystem.

“These rangers partner with the larger climbing community in everything from education to improved mapping to assisting with search and rescue,” said Les Monosco, Recreation Officer for the Wenatchee River Ranger District.

“We are there to serve people and care for this land from community events to technical rescues.”

***– Les Monosco,
Recreation Officer
Wenatchee River Ranger District***

On a busy Saturday in July, rangers were conducting a routine patrol midway up the Backbone Ridge route when another climber called down that their partner had been struck by rock fall and was injured. Immediately, the rangers began assessing the situation and determined they could safely reach the injured climber and provide a basic medical assessment while also coordinating with county search and rescue. Lacerated, but with no sign of spinal injuries, a careful plan was devised to assist the injured climber and their partner up the route and down Aasgard Pass. This plan successfully provided for the safety of all involved while mitigating high risk helicopter rescue, technical descent concerns, and length of time until medical care could be obtained.

USDA Forest Service Strategic Plan

Deliver Benefits to the Public; Connect People to the Outdoors; Excel as a High Performing Agency



Beavers Building the Forest of Tomorrow Today; Providing Clean Water

On a bright May morning high above the Methow Valley, a battered pickup truck drives slowly up a single track dirt road on the Forest carrying precious live cargo. The road ends at a trailhead in the Lightning Creek watershed where crews will hand carry two beavers another mile to a release site. As the beavers slide into the water after their long journey, volunteers cheer the repair of a broken link in the ecosystem of the North Cascades.

“After more than a century of absence, we are understanding more and more about the overwhelmingly positive benefits beavers provide to this landscape,” said Forest Wildlife Biologist Kent Woodruff.

Nearly trapped to extinction in the early 1800s, beaver built dams naturally slowed spring snow melt, held precious water on the land longer, decreased sediment, and helped to create complex habitat for chinook salmon and bull trout. Those wetlands are missing today from many places they once occupied across the landscape. Methow Beaver Project partners are working to fix that, utilizing beavers to help build the resilient and healthy forest of tomorrow, today.

“A single beaver colony can store millions of gallons of water in headwater wetlands,” added Woodruff. “Since 2008, more than 300 beavers have been released in 30 of the 47 subwatersheds in the Methow sub-basin resulting in hundreds of acres of restored wetland habitat.”

USDA Forest Service Strategic Plan

Sustain Our Nation’s Forests and Grasslands;
Conserve Open Space; Provide Abundant Clean Water; Advance Knowledge

“Cleaner water, more rapid fire recovery, improved native fish habitat, and reduced flood impacts are all benefits we are seeing.”

Kent Woodruff
Forest Wildlife Biologist



Wildlife and Habitat

- 119,913 acres of terrestrial/wildlife habitat restored or enhanced
- 6,278 acres treated annually for noxious weeds and invasive plants
- 16 miles of stream improved
- 8,752 acres surveyed for threatened, endangered, sensitive and survey and monitor species

Forest Health; Community Protection

Key Factors of Light Project

12 miles east of Tonasket, a beloved forest rises above the calm blue surface of Bonaparte Lake in the cold winter air. Countless generations of forest visitors have used this area to swim, hike, camp and connect with nature. Standing on the western shore of the lake, Tonasket District Ranger Matt Reidy sees a critical opportunity to restore a forest in decline and protect federal, state and private lands at the same time.

“Decades of full fire suppression, bark beetles, western spruce budworm and Dwarf mistletoe have taken their toll on this dense, overstocked forest,” said Reidy. “Now is the time to act – thousands of acres are ripe for destructive fires or additional insect and disease outbreaks.”

Signed in 2017, the 8,600 acre Light Restoration Project decision includes thinning, prescribed burning, stream bank stabilization, treating invasive grasses, replacing undersized culverts and providing sustainable forest access. Thinning, combined with prescribed fire, will restore forest conditions that were historically more open, improving forest health and wildlife habitat. The project is also projected to generate more than \$1.3 million in timber value at the mill and support more than 300 jobs. Additionally, more than 600 acres of old growth were identified in the project area and there are 150 acres of treatment designed to maintain Forest Plan old growth habitat.

Firewood cutting opportunities will exist wherever feasible, after non-commercial thinning operations have been completed.

“Environmental, social and economic benefits all flow from a healthy and restored forest,” said Reidy.

USDA Forest Service Strategic Plan

Mitigate Wildfire Risk; Deliver Benefits to the Public; Sustain our Nation’s Forests and Grasslands



“Working together with our community, we are on a good path forward for the Bonaparte Lake area for current and future generations.”

***– Matt Reidy,
Tonasket District Ranger***



County Partnership Helps Replace Bridge; Restore User Access

This fall at the Scatter Creek Trailhead, a group of hikers head into the Goat Rocks Wilderness area west of Naches. Their journey is made possible, in part, by the replacement of a bridge heavily damaged more than six years ago that closed access to the trailhead via Forest Service Road 1207.

Two years ago, forest employees and local county commissioners worked together to utilize Title II funds to support the much needed project. However, during the design phase it became apparent a temporary bridge would cost approximately the same as a used permanent bridge. Working with other Forest Service units, project managers were able to transport and install a used, but permanent bridge at the Miriam Creek site – reopening forest access in the fall of 2017.

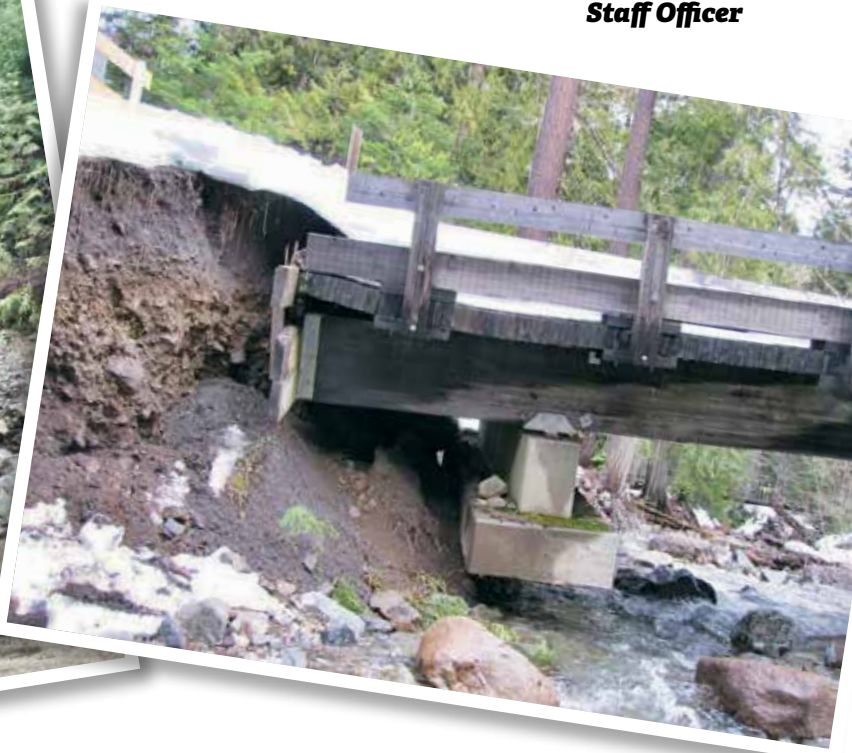
USDA Forest Service Strategic Plan

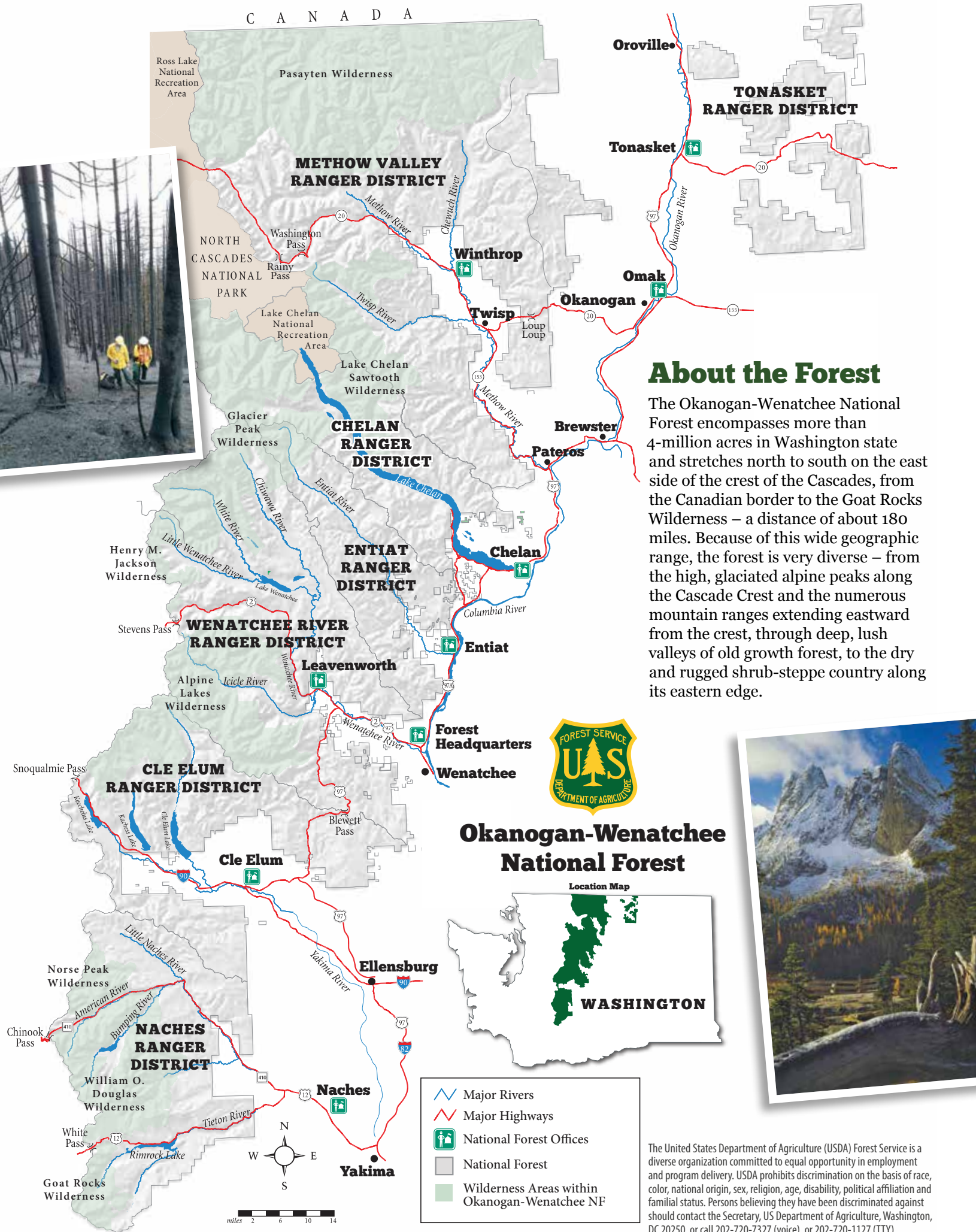
Exchange Natural Resource Expertise; Transfer Technology and Applications; Deliver Benefits to the Public



“By thinking outside the box and leveraging resources, we were able to find a long-term solution to a serious infrastructure problem.”

**– Jason Peterson,
Engineering, Minerals, Lands, Fleet
Staff Officer**









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