

Colville National Forest Firewood Program

January 2003- January 2004
Stevens, Ferry & Pend Oreille Counties

Statistics



Total Estimated Cost of Firewood Program Administration: **\$41,400**
Law Enforcement/Rescue: **25,500**
Permit Sales & Handling: **7,900**
Maps & Information: **2,400**
Resource Administration: **5,600**

Government Cost Per Permit **\$26**

Other Agency Firewood Permit Costs:
Washington Department of Natural Resources (WADNR): **\$0/6 cords**
Bureau of Land Management: **\$11/2 cords**
Private Timber Lands: **\$10/5 cords**

Other Agency/ National Forest Seasonal or Time Restrictions:
WADNR: **Fire Season**
Bureau of Land Management: **Fire Season**
Private Timber Lands: **Fire Season**
Idaho Panhandle National Forests: **Fire Season**
Okanogan & Wenatchee National Forests: **Fire Season**
Colville National Forest: **Fire Season**

Total Number of Households: **22,479**

Heat with Wood Number of Households: **7,701**

Percent of Households that Heat with Wood: **34%**

LIEAP* Number of Households: **785**

LIEAP- Heat Solely with Wood Number of Households: **307**

Average Number Cords Burned Per Household: **4**

Open-Market Firewood Value Per Cord: **\$100-125**

Number of Commercial Firewood Permits Issued: **3**

Volume of Firewood Harvested Commercially: **67 Cords**

Firewood Permittees from Spokane and Other Counties (Outside Stevens, Ferry and Pend Oreille Counties) Number: **211**
Percentage: **13.4 %**

Total Area of Colville National Forest (CNF): **1.1 Million Acres**

Total CNF Area Open to Firewood Cutting: **126,545* Acres**

Percentage of CNF Open to Firewood Cutting: **11.5%**

Number of Firewood Cords Sold: **6,698**

Individual Permit Sale Price: **\$20**

Number of Firewood Permittees: **1,574**

Income Generated by Sale of Permits: **\$33,490**

*Acreage varies annually, depending upon number and size of timber sales closed to woodcutting

*Low-Income Energy Assistance Program

If you are a firewood cutter, you know that it takes skill, muscle and a lot of knowledge to do it right. You know there are times of the year when cutting is restricted ... because of high fire danger and hazardous road conditions. You also know that cutting trees is a dangerous job and that felling them in the wrong place--such as along highways or near campsites -- at the wrong time can endanger the lives of others. Most firewood cutters know that their actions can disturb wildlife during stressful winter months or eliminate critical wildlife snag habitat. The Colville National Forest is responsible for providing excellent firewood cutting opportunities for the public and protecting public safety. At the same time, the Agency is responsible for protecting all of the natural resources in the forest and helping you to ...

Use firewood cutting rules to your advantage



Included in this publication are the existing firewood cutting regulations of the Colville National Forest. These regulations -- created to protect the resources on National Forest System Lands and public safety -- are determined administratively by the USDA Forest Service.

Public opinion, as always, plays an important role in shaping and managing firewood cutting activities. The opinions and needs of individuals are considered by land managers to establish a policy that governs tree cutting, access and sale.

Roads In the Colville National Forest



Above: a narrow, plowed road in the Colville National Forest



Above: Signs of spring breakup include tire ruts and surface water

There are 2,610 miles of open roads in the Colville National Forest. These roads are as varied as the forest itself, constructed and maintained to meet the access needs of the public and land management objectives of the Forest Service.

Forest roads are considered "improvements" ... investments that are protected by the Agency.

The Forest Service is responsible for protecting public safety and the investments that have been made to develop and maintain public access routes. When it is necessary to do so, the Colville National Forest may close roads or entire areas to prevent accidents along roads or damages to the roads themselves.

When forest roads begin to thaw during spring "breakup", the Forest Service often closes them to protect the softening road surfaces from damage by vehicle traffic.

All types of vehicles can damage roads during breakup, from logging trucks that often weigh as much as 80,000 pounds to ATVs.

Vehicles damage soft roads by destroying the integrity of the road and causing deep ruts. If the road is not quickly resurfaced, ruts will carry water as runoff, creating deep channels in the road bed.

During the spring, the Forest Service closes vulnerable roads to all traffic until the surfaces are dry and hard enough to support vehicles.

The Agency usually requires timber sale purchasers to suspend logging activities during this time. Timber sale contracts

include special clauses that require purchasers to protect specified roads and other improvements.

Each year, less than five percent of forest roads are plowed during the winter to allow access for management activities, adjacent landowners or other agencies. Most plowed roads are main arterial routes that connect major routes and paved highways. Secondary and spur roads leading into active timber sale areas may be plowed, too. These roads are often narrow, snow-covered and icy. They are generally winding, single-lane routes without turnouts or wide berms.

Trees lining plowed, winter roads limit drivers' abilities to see oncoming traffic. Parked vehicles that block the routes are a safety hazard to logging and vehicle traffic. These roads are very hazardous to drive and extremely dangerous to park alongside.

Even though firewood cutting is allowed within 200 feet of open roads, land managers may close narrow, plowed roads in the winter.

Snowmobile or cross-country ski trailheads along plowed roads cannot be used for firewood cutting or loading because the activities block winter recreation access and can ruin established winter trails.

Maps and information about locations along winter roads that are safe for firewood cutting is available at the Colville National Forest Headquarters in Colville (509-684-7000) or at any ranger district office.

Many other factors also influence the firewood cutting policy. These factors include such things as program administration costs, wildlife habitat protection, amount of use, road conditions and conflicts, logging activities, and policies of adjacent national forests.

This publication will help you to understand some of these other factors so that you, as an owner of the Colville National Forest, can help us fashion a firewood cutting policy that will ensure "Resources for the Benefit of All."



Firewood

Cutting in the Colville National Forest

The Colville National Forest Firewood Policy

1990-2004



Colville National Forest Firewood Cutting Regulations

Firewood permittees are required to meet the following conditions when harvesting firewood from the Colville National Forest. These conditions have been in effect since 1990 and are listed on each permit that is issued. The permittee must:

-Have a valid firewood permit, firewood map and load tickets* in possession.

-Keep motorized vehicles on existing roads that are open to the public. Firewood cutting vehicles must not block traffic or impede firefighting or emergency vehicles.

-Remove all litter and trash from cutting site. Remove cutting debris and slash from roads and ditches and scatter in the forest.

-Comply with all fire requirements and restrictions to prevent wildfires. Comply with fire precaution level restrictions. Permittee must carry:

- power saw in good repair with spark arrester with .023" or less size screen,
- long-handled shovel with an 8" blade (size 0), and
- fire extinguisher greater than 8 ounces in weight.

-Cut firewood in lengths less than 7.5 feet (unless otherwise approved by Forest Service).

-Display load tickets for each 1/2 cord of firewood being transported from the cutting site. The month and date must be punched from all tags attached to a load.

-Cut only dead wood. Cut no trees that are signed as wildlife or transect trees. Cut no standing western redcedar trees. Western redcedar may be cut from down trees in lengths less than 16 inches. Do not cut trees that have been marked with paint.

-Cut firewood in areas shown as "open to firewood cutting" on firewood maps that are provided with the permit.

-Cut firewood within 200 feet of established roads. Established roads do not include closed roads. Cut no firewood near paved roads or highways.

-Cut no firewood within 300 feet of fish-bearing streams. Cut no firewood within 150 feet of other flowing streams, ponds, lakes, reservoirs and wetlands.

-Cut no firewood from log decks unless they are signed open.

-Cut up to 12 cords of firewood per household per year. Permittee must purchase a minimum of four cords per permit at \$5 per cord (\$20 minimum purchase).**

-Repair all damage to natural features or improvements resulting from permittee's activities.

*Requirement established in 2001

** 12-cord maximum/household & \$20 permit established in 2003

Colville National Forest Firewood Provisions for Low-Income Households and Disabled Firewood Cutters and People who Heat their Homes Solely with Wood

Periodically, the Colville National Forest will designate "free use" firewood areas, where the public may cut firewood, without having to pay the cost of a woodcutting permit. These areas may include trees that have been blown down by wind storms, closed logging units with an abundance of slash, or piles of unmerchantable, small-diameter trees that have been removed during precommercial thinning operations.

The Forest Service, on occasion, provides firewood to Northeast Washington Rural Resources where low-income or disabled woodcutters can receive assistance in meeting their fuelwood needs.

The Forest Service, upon approval of a district ranger, will permit the elderly or disabled to have a third party cut their firewood for them on the current permit system.

The public may contact the Colville National Forest at 509-684-7000 for information about free-use areas or third-party firewood permits.

Dear Friend of the Colville National Forest --

A big part of managing the national forest is managing the use of its resources. This means the Forest Service must inform the general public and the users of national resources about how specific uses affect the forest, water, soils, improvements and many other "inhabitants" that also use the forest. The Forest Service relies upon the responsible actions and cooperation of resource users to ensure the values of national forests are used wisely and conserved for future generations.

Firewood cutting is a permitted and regulated use of the forest that impacts many other resources owned by the public. At low levels of use, there is little impact to the national forest. When increased or concentrated use causes negative impacts to mule deer winter range or cavity-nesting animals and birds, roads, or other uses, something has to be done to minimize damages.

Most of the time, negative impacts caused by woodcutting can be reduced by dispersing the use over a greater area or by temporarily closing an area to firewood cutting until the resource values are restored. In some popular wood cutting areas, it may take 100 years to replace large snags that have been depleted by overharvest.

The public is an important partner in helping the Forest Service decide how to best manage resource conflicts. Prescribed management actions are useless without the cooperation, understanding and agreement of resource users. Public opinion is extremely important to me in all actions taken by the Colville National Forest. I use public input along with scientific research, inventories, field data and recommendations of resource specialists to decide the best course of action.



Public opinion varies widely on the issues of firewood cutting. Some people are concerned about the cost of the program to taxpayers who do not cut wood to heat their homes. Others are concerned about the resource impacts. New problems have developed over the past decade that involve use conflicts between wood cutting and outdoor recreation, a major source of revenue for many communities in northeast Washington. Still others are concerned about impaired air quality caused by wood burning. I must listen to all opinions in order to make the best decision about public resources.

This publication will help you to understand the Colville National Forest's wood cutting policy. The existing policy does not include any seasonal or time period restrictions at this time. Firewood cutting in the National Forest was prohibited from December 1, 2003 to March 31, 2004 to resolve several budgetary, resource and conflict problems. This restriction was not written into the existing policy and I am sorry for any inconveniences this closure may have caused you. I will review the effectiveness of closing the national forest to firewood cutting during this period of time along with other factors before I decide how the Colville National Forest will manage its firewood cutting program in the future. My final decision may include some restrictions to protect roads and wildlife during certain seasons.

A Letter From Rick Brazell,

Forest Supervisor of the Colville National Forest

I encourage you to learn as much as you can about the firewood policy, the issues surrounding the policy and about the many natural resources that you, as an American citizen, own. I am available to answer any of your questions and will be counting on you to tell me your ideas about firewood cutting.

I also want to reassure you that I will listen to you. I have been listening to the public for 25 years and I stand by my successful application of public opinion and scientific research findings to every decision that I have made. I, too, heat my home with wood and have been a firewood cutter and permittee for 30 years. It is not my intention to close the Colville National Forest to firewood cutting, but to simplify and improve the program for you, your communities and all natural resources in the forest.

You can make a difference in the quality of land management in the Colville National Forest. It is your forest and I invite you to participate in developing policies that determine use of its resources. I want to thank you for your interest and help.



In the Colville National Forest Snags

Dead, standing trees make great firewood because the wood is dry and easy to split. They don't have many nuisance branches or needles to saw away. A large, dead western larch can yield several cords of split firewood.

It can also yield food -- in the form of beetle larvae -- and housing for a host of wildlife species that live in the Colville National Forest.

Trees in the forest die at different ages from a variety of factors. After cataclysmic wildfires or devastating insect epidemics, thousands of dead trees -- or snags -- may be left standing on the landscape along with a few survivors in patches that are lucky enough to escape death.

Generally, trees in the forest die singly or in small groups as a result of localized wind or weather events, environmental stress from competition for water, sunlight or nutrients, or genetic defects that make them more vulnerable to insects and diseases than their healthier neighbors.

Once dead, these trees become hosts to hundreds of wood-boring insect larvae that provide a dinner buffet to more than 100 species of foraging birds, amphibians and mammals in northeast Washington. These wildlife species rely upon an abundance of dead snags in different stages of decline and which are well-distributed in the forest.

Insects generally kill trees by transmitting a disease, eating foliage or by girdling the tree by extensive tunneling beneath the bark.

The length of time dead trees stand varies.

Thin-barked, dead trees, such as lodgepole pine, subalpine fir and Engelmann spruce, provide food for wildlife for a short time until the wind and sun dry them out. The lack of moisture in these trees



For more information about snags, go to www.fs.fed.us/r6/nr/wildlife/animalinn

discourages the development of rots, so they become "hard snags" that topple over as entire trees, weakened at their stump where soil moisture allows the tree to rot.

Large, thick-barked trees like ponderosa pine and western larch will stand dead for a long time. The bark acts as an insulator to wind and prevents the wood inside the tree from drying quickly. Because the wood stays moist, it will often begin to rot. The rot causes weak areas to develop along the bole of the tree where breakage occurs. The tree falls apart from the top down.

Without their tops to keep rain and moisture out of the heartwood, these snags rot even faster inside. These partially-rotted trees -- or soft snags -- are like hotels to cavity nesting birds such as pileated woodpeckers. The shell of thick bark provides a stable framework for a complex of excavated holes that the animals use for shelter and protection.

A dead tree, depending upon the species, generally starts out as a hard snag and can become, over time with adequate moisture, a soft snag (unless it falls over).

Approximately 8 to 10 large (greater than 10 inches in diameter), hard and soft snags per acre, in a variety of states of decomposition, are needed on the average across the Colville National Forest to meet the needs of animal species. After the trees fall over, they continue to provide habitat for birds, small mammals, amphibians and other animal species. These downed logs also protect watersheds by soaking up rain and slowly releasing it, over time, into streams ... without the sediment. They finally decompose and enrich the soil.

Even though dead trees make great firewood, they are essential components of the forest ecosystem that land managers must monitor and protect to ensure an adequate supply is available for birds and wildlife today and tomorrow.



Above: snags; pileated woodpeckers

Winter Range

In the Colville National Forest

There is nothing more comforting than the warmth of a wood stove during the bitter-cold winter months in northeast Washington. Imagine what it would be like to live outdoors in the winter without any source of heat at all.

Winter cold and snow drive elk and deer from high-elevation habitats into the protected drainages where they can gather on their winter ranges to escape wind and deep snow and attempt to find enough food to nourish themselves.

The ungulates go into the winter "fat" with lots of energy reserves, but sometimes not enough. Even though they do not have the same metabolic requirements in the winter as they do during the fall rut, they must maintain their body temperatures at a certain level.

With low energy reserves, these animals cannot travel long distances or through deep snow. In order to survive through the winter, they must be able to find food within short distances (under 600 feet) from protective cover. Habitat that provides both cover and food in a good spacial arrangement is called "winter range."

Winter range in the Colville National Forest is generally located on sunny, south or southwest-facing slopes that support open forests of ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir. The sun shines or winds blow through the open stands, keeping snow at a manageable depth for deer and elk and exposing grasses and browse species such as rose, willow, serviceberry and ceanothus. They can find further protection in adjacent draws under denser stands of cedar, grand fir or Douglas-fir.

For does and elk cows, living in even the best of winter range can be



very difficult because they are also pregnant. What little extra energy they receive from foraging is spent on the developing fetuses that, if conditions warrant, will be born in the spring. Additional stresses from disturbance by humans that cause the animals to flee increases the amount of precious energy they use and decreases their chance of making it through the winter or carrying the calf or fawn to term.

Roads allow people easy access to winter range. When plowed open for recreation, sight-seeing or woodcutting, these roads become the least preferable areas for ungulates. As most low-elevation valley bottoms have been developed or are used for agricultural purposes, deer and elk must settle for less productive forest lands above. When they compete amongst each other for the best forested and secluded winter range, the elk usually wins; displacing mule deer to areas along roads where they are subjected to higher stress.

Winter range habitat in the Colville National Forest is managed to reduce or minimize human disturbance during winter by regulating open road densities. At times, firewood cutting access must be restricted in winter range, even if roads are plowed open to avoid the prolonged presence of humans and noise in this critical habitat.

If possible, the best times for accessing winter range areas for fuelwood is in the early summer, prior to fire season, when browse is abundant and nutritious and animals can better handle the stress of disturbance.

For more information about elk and deer winter range, visit the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation web site at www.rmef.org.

Above: elk; prescribed burn in Colville National Forest winter range reduces fuels, stimulates browse production and maintains open, parklike conditions

