

Chapter 1

PURPOSE AND NEED

THE PROPOSED ACTION

The Colville National Forest (CNF) proposes to manage vegetation and hazardous fuels in the Summit Pierre planning area (see Vicinity Map A page 2). The proposed Summit Pierre Fuel Reduction project would treat about 7,700 acres to reduce hazardous fuels and improve forest health in accordance with federal regulation 36 CFR 218 and the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA). It would provide about 49,065 hundred cubic feet (approximately 25.5 million board feet) of saw logs and wood fiber to the local economy.

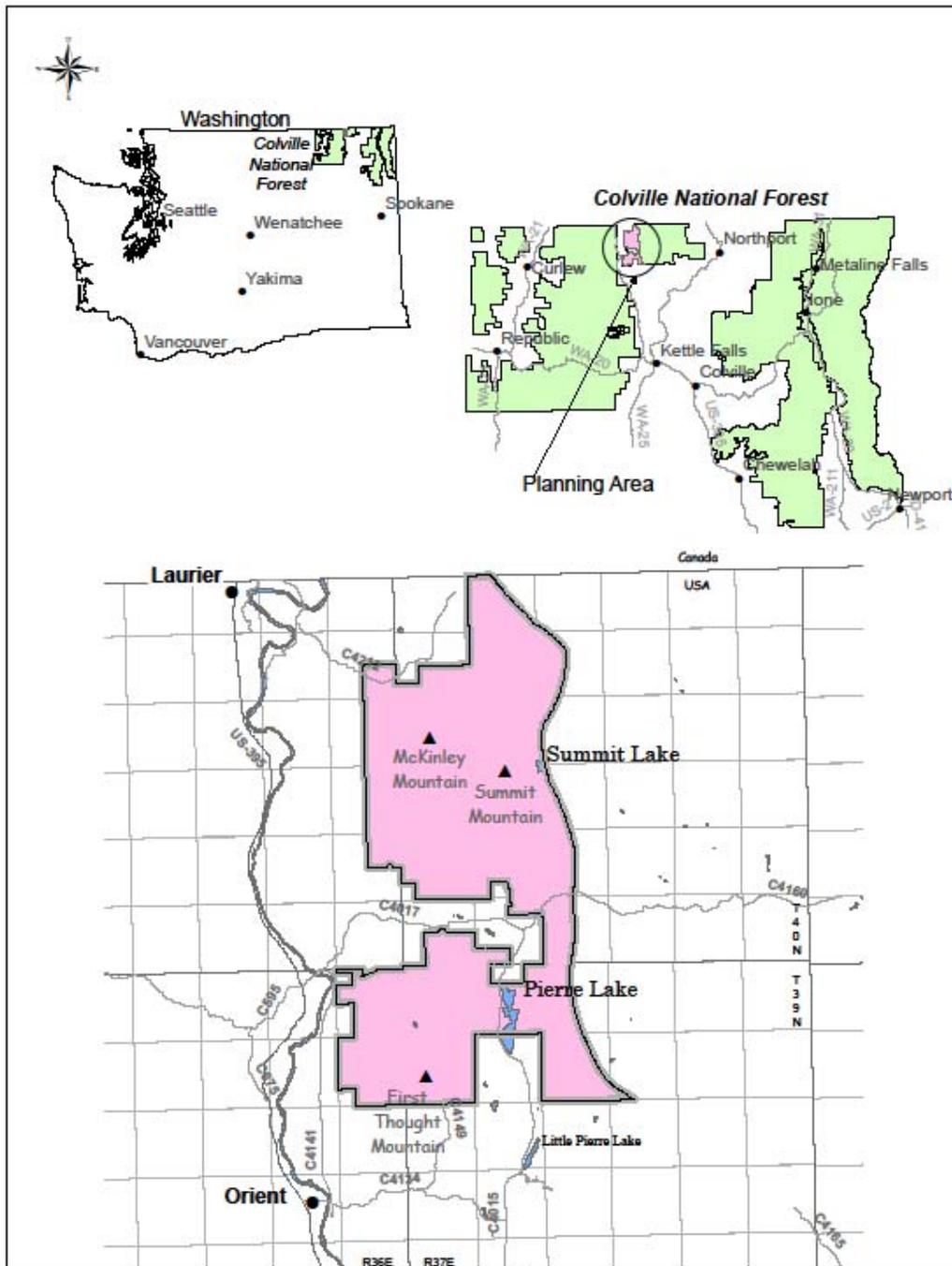
The U.S. Congress (2003) passed the HFRA to improve statutory processes for Forest Service hazardous fuel reduction projects while ensuring ties to adjacent community plans and public participation. The Summit Pierre (SP) Proposed Action is based on priorities laid out in the Lower Kettle River Community Wildfire Protection Plan (Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition 2005) and the Stevens County, Washington Community Wildfire Protection Plan (King and Bloch 2007). The project follows the general location and basic methods of treatments as described in the Lower Kettle River CWPP, section 5.2 as required in HFRA sections 104(d)(2) and (3).

The SP planning area is within a wildland-urban interface at high and moderate risk of wildfire (Lower Kettle River CWPP section 4.5.1). The SP planning area and surrounding State and private lands are this CWPP's second treatment priority partly due to concerns about fuel buildup and forest health. The CWPP recommends assessment of fuel reduction needs and implementation of fuel reduction projects for the area (section 5.3 SPA2). The Stevens County CWPP which incorporates the Lower Kettle River CWPP adds concern regarding access and egress along County Roads 4015 and 4017 (King and Blotch 2007, page 151). The Summit Pierre Fuel Reduction project was proposed in response to these concerns as they apply on National Forest System land and in accordance with the Colville National Forest Plan.

Project Location

The SP planning areas is located approximately 21 miles north of Kettle Falls, Washington; in an area locally know as the "Wedge" between the Kettle and the Columbia Rivers. It is wholly within the Three Rivers Ranger District, Colville National Forest, Stevens County, Washington. The planning area contains about 11,520 acres within the USFS Administrative Boundary, 570 acres of which are private or other government administered in-holdings not under Forest Service management. The SP planning area extends from the vicinity of Pierre Lake north to the United States-Canada border and includes portions of three watersheds: Deep Creek, East Deer Creek, and Toulou Creek.

Map A: Summit Pierre Fuels Reduction project vicinity.



Purpose and Need

This Summit Pierre Fuel Reduction project (SP project) is needed because the Forest Service has management direction to reduce the risk of crown-fire in the wildland-urban interface (WUI) and improve forest health.

Reduce the Risk of Crown-fire in the Wildland-Urban Interface

Purpose: Break up the existing fuel continuity on National Forest System lands, and reduce the risks of wildfire damage to private lands and structures.

Need: Stand conditions are such that fuel reduction methods are needed to thin and, or, remove vegetation, reduce ladder fuels, and remove surface fuels.

Discussion: There is a need to reduce hazardous fuels (surface fuels and ladder fuels), and forest crown continuity, for the purpose of reducing the risk of large, stand-replacing fires. The effect of the Proposed Action would be to: (a) decrease the probability that a future wildland fire would develop into or be sustained as, a stand-replacing or crown fire, (b) increase the ability to provide for public and firefighter health and safety during a wildland fire event, and (c) increase the effectiveness and efficiency of protecting property within the WUI.

During the past century, fire suppression has resulted in heavy ground and ladder fuel conditions, and increased tree-crown continuity in much of the Summit Pierre planning area. As these hazardous fuels have increased over time, the potential for high intensity stand-replacing fires (or crown fires) also increased. Wildfires are becoming increasingly expensive, dangerous to firefighters, and threatening to wildlife habitat, beneficial uses like water and recreation, and adjoining private land and property. There is a need to start the process of reversing this dangerous and potentially expensive trend by reducing hazardous fuel levels.

The Proposed Action would help to return the landscape condition back to one of “fire resilience.” Today, many of the most serious wildfire threats and forest health issues occur in once fire-adapted biophysical environments (forest types). These biophysical environments once did, and could again, support low-severity fires with little damage to large trees, wildlife habitat and other values. The health, resilience, and productivity of fire-adapted biophysical environments rely on periodic burning at ecologically appropriate frequencies to reduce forest fuels and maintain forest wildfire resilience. Eventually, fuels reduction treatments, like those proposed would reduce escalating fire suppression costs and recreate a “fire resilient” forest environment.

Measures: The Proposed Action would reduce hazard fuel levels and alter current stand structures to increase forest resilience and resistance to crown fires and therefore, reduce the risk of wildfire. One measure of reducing hazard fuel levels is the number of acres treated to move the forest toward forest structures similar to their historic range of variability (HRV) where trees were generally larger and spaced farther apart. Additionally, treatments would move stands toward fuel conditions that support primarily low intensity fires, this is represented by acres that are predicted to receive a lower fire regime condition class (FRCC) score after treatment. Fire fighter and public safety

would be improved wherever treatments occur along existing roads. Measures include acres of treatments in locations identified as being of concern for access and egress.

Improve Forest Health

Purpose: Improve overall forest health on National Forest System lands through active management as it relates to the forest health within the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) to have a direct influence on long-term fire prevention and fire suppression.

Need: Due to fire suppression, past management, and biomass accumulation stands are not able to function within their historic range of variability. Stand treatments are needed to reduce susceptibility to continuing insect and disease-caused mortality, promote late-successional characteristics and landscape level diversity, develop or protect horizontal and vertical forest structure, and reduce susceptibility to cyclic repetitions of stand-replacing fires.

Discussion: Fire suppression reduced the natural tree thinning action of fire in the SP planning area, resulting in denser forests. Trees growing closely together are in direct competition with each other for light, water, and nutrients (inter-tree competition). When resources become scarce, as in dense stands or under drought conditions, the trees themselves become less vigorous and more vulnerable to insects and diseases. The resulting increase in insect and disease caused tree mortality adds to the already heavy fuel load. Through use of commercial and pre-commercial harvests, coupled with other fuel treatments, tree density and hence inter-tree competition would be reduced. This in turn would increase forest vigor and resistance to insect and diseases and slow the continued fuel build-up.

As the forests of the SP planning area became denser, this caused changes to forest species composition (amounts of different types of trees). In dense stands, only trees that can tolerate shaded forest conditions, like Douglas-fir and western redcedar, reproduce successfully. The forests we see today have more Douglas-fir and fewer shade intolerant species like ponderosa pine and western larch than historically occurred. Because mature ponderosa pine and western larch have the ability to survive low intensity ground fires, favoring them over shade tolerant (and less fire intolerant) species would, over time, create more fire resistant forests.

Forest structure (size and arrangement of trees) in the planning area has changed over time from stands dominated by large trees in a single-story arrangement to multi-storied and to more uniform stands of smaller trees. These changes largely occurred due to historic forest practices, fire suppression, and insect and disease caused mortality. Thinning from below would move multi-storied stands with large trees toward a single-story stands with large trees, conditions more reflective of historic structure. Consistent with the Eastside Screens (page 7), there would be no net loss of forest structure with large trees. Thinning in dense stands without large trees would reduce inter-tree competition and speed the rate at which smaller stands grow into large tree dominated stands.

Measures: Dense stands would be treated to reduce inter-tree competition, increasing vigor, and resistance to damaging wildfire, crown fire and insects and disease. Treatments would also favor species resistant to insect and diseases. The measure used is the percent of stands identified as having high and moderate risk to insects and diseases proposed for treatment, and acres of canopy fuel treatment.

DECISION FRAMEWORK

Based upon the effects of the Proposed Action as they relate to the purpose and need, the responsible official will decide:

- *The specific areas if any, that will be treated to reduce fuels and/or improve forest health to support the reduction of flammable conditions.*
- *The specific activities that will take place on the areas selected for treatment. These specific activities include the silviculture prescriptions, logging methods, and fuel treatment methods.*
- *The associated actions that will be included such as road construction, reconstruction, post-activity road management, noxious weed treatments and specific provisions such as Best Management Practices and Design Elements.*
- *The monitoring that will be done during and after project implementation.*

MANAGEMENT AND DIRECTION

Healthy Forest Restoration Act

On August 22, 2002, President Bush established the Healthy Forests Initiative, directing the Departments of Agriculture and the Interior, and the Council on Environmental Quality, to improve regulatory processes to ensure more timely decisions, greater efficiency, and better results in reducing the risk of catastrophic wildland fires. The Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA) is the central legislative component of the Healthy Forests Initiative and was signed into law in 2003 by the 108th Congress. The HFRA provides improved statutory processes for hazardous-fuel reduction projects on certain types of at-risk National Forest System (NFS) lands and also provides other authorities and direction to help reduce hazardous fuel and restore healthy forest and rangeland conditions on lands of all ownerships.

More information regarding the HFRA is available at the following web site:
http://www.forestsandrangelands.gov/Healthy_Forests/index.shtml

Colville National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan

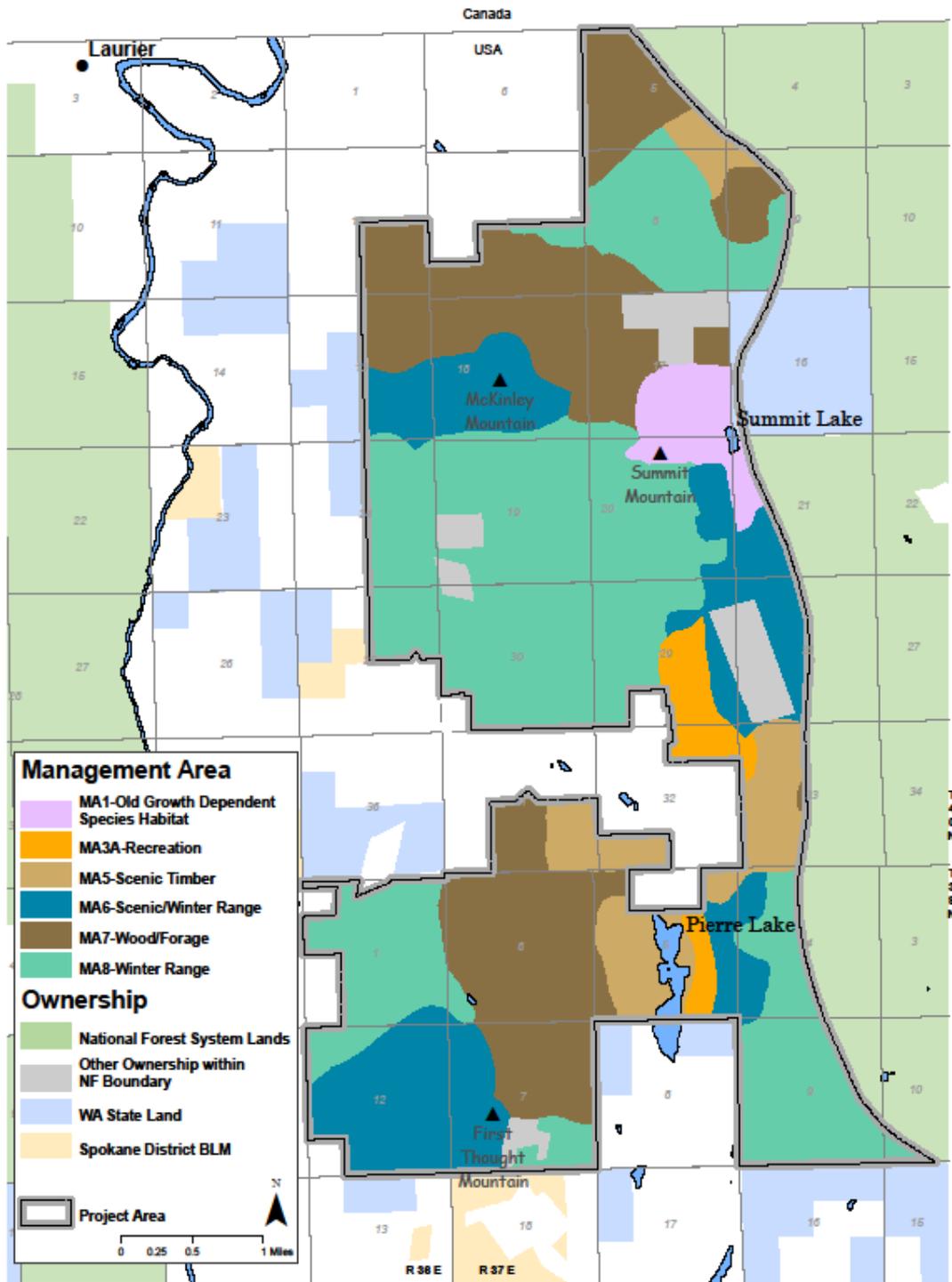
The Colville National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) is the guiding management direction for the Summit Pierre Fuels Reduction project. This Environmental Assessment incorporates the Forest Plan by reference and is tiered to the Forest Plan's Final Environmental Impact Statement (USDA Forest Service 1988). The Forest Plan contains standards and guidelines and management area designations and prescriptions that apply to the entire Colville National Forest, including the SP planning area. Impacts of programmatic decisions contained in the Forest Plan are disclosed in the Forest Plan Final Environmental Impact Statement. For distribution of management areas within the planning area refer to Map B, page 7. A written description of the management areas follows.

- **Management Area 1** (354 acres) Emphasis is old growth dependent species habitat: The goal is to provide essential habitat for wildlife species that require old growth forest components and contribute to the maintenance of diversity of wildlife habitats and plant communities
- **Management Area 3A** (313 acres) Emphasis is on recreation: The goal is to provide roaded and unroaded recreation opportunities in a natural appearing setting.
- **Management Area 5** (839 acres) Emphasis is scenic/timber: The goal is to provide a natural appearing foreground, middle, and background along major scenic travel routes while providing wood products.
- **Management Area 6** (1,882 acres) Emphasis is scenic/winter range: The goal is to provide a natural appearing foreground, middle, and background along major scenic travel routes while providing for big game winter range management.
- **Management Area 7** (2,853 acres) Emphasis is wood/forage: The goal is to manage to achieve optimum production of timber products while protecting basic resources.
- **Management Area 8** (4,648 acres) Emphasis is big game winter range: The goal is to meet the habitat needs of deer (mule deer west of the Columbia River) and elk to sustain carrying capacity at 120 percent of the 1980 level, while managing timber and other resources consistent with fish and wildlife management objectives.

Inventoried Roadless Areas

No Management Area 11, congressionally designated Wilderness or Research Natural Areas, existing Inventoried Roadless Areas, or proposed Inventoried Roadless Areas occur within the SP planning area.

Map B: Summit Pierre Fuels Reduction Project Management Areas



Forest Plan Amendments

The Forest Plan includes amendments that are also management direction for this project and include.

- Regional Forester's Forest Plan Amendment #2 entitled *Revised Interim Management Direction Establishing Riparian, Ecosystem and Wildlife Standards for Timber Sales* (USDA Forest Service 1995a). This amendment replaced the interim ecosystem standard and the interim wildlife standard from Regional Forester's Forest Plans Amendment #1. In this interim direction, the Regional Forester directed National Forests in eastern Oregon and eastern Washington to maintain, and, or enhance late and old structural stages (LOS) in stands subject to timber harvest. Forest Plan Amendment #2 is hereafter referred to as the "Eastside Screens."
- *Inland Native Fish Strategy* (USDA Forest Service 1995b). This amendment replaced the interim riparian standard from Regional Forester's Forest Plans Amendment #1. The Inland Native Fish Strategy is hereafter referred to as "INFISH."
- Regional Forester's October 11, 2005 amendment to forest plans in Region 6, *Preventing and Managing Invasive Plants*, (USDA Forest Service 2005a). This management direction includes invasive plant prevention and treatment and restoration standards intended to help achieve stated desired future conditions, goals, and objectives.

National Forest Management Act

The National Forest Management Act (NFMA) includes provisions applicable to all projects and requires the following: (a) resource plans and permits, contracts and other instruments shall be consistent with the Forest land management plan; (b) insure consideration of the economic and environmental aspects of management, to provide for outdoor recreation, range, timber, watershed, wildlife, and fish; and (c) provide for diversity of plant and animal communities. All of these considerations and requirements are addressed in this EA and the various resource reports in the project analysis file. Therefore, project actions are consistent with these provisions of NFMA.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Section 104(e) of the HFRA requires agencies to provide notice of the project and conduct a public meeting when preparing authorized hazardous-fuel reduction projects. Section 104(f) encourages meaningful public participation during preparation of authorized hazardous fuel reduction projects. Local involvement is critical when planning projects, setting project priorities, and allocating resources at the local level. The general public, and other agencies and governments were invited to participate and comment on several occasions, via letter or during public meetings. In addition to three public meetings, a total of 36 public comment letters, emails, or conversations were received. For a list of people who submitted oral or written comments, see Chapter 4 of this document.

Tribal Consultation

Letters inviting consultation were sent to the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, the Spokane Tribe, and the Kalispel Tribe of Indians on June 14, 2007. These same governments were contacted with the Opportunities letter, public meeting notices, and Scoping letters described below. A letter was received on October 30, 2008 from Randy Abrahamson, Spokane Tribal Historic Preservation Officer requesting an on-site meeting. Additionally the letter indicated that there were cultural sites in the area and that the Tribe had determined that there is a potential “Adverse Effect” of the project. Follow-up conversations included emailing a legal description of the planning area and mailing hardcopies of the planning area map.

A follow-up fieldtrip attended by both the Forest and Project Archeologists and Mr. Abrahamson was held May 19, 2009. At this meeting the project was described in more detail and a few proposed treatment areas visited. Upon conclusion of this meeting, Randy Abrahamson, and the Spokane Tribe Archeologist stated they no longer felt the Proposed Action had a potential to create an “Adverse Effect” and they would submit a follow up letter to that effect. No letter was received, but a follow up phone conversation (August 31, 2009) confirmed there would be no affect.

Public Participation

The Summit Pierre Fuels Reduction Project was first listed in the January 1, 2008 edition of the Colville National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) and has appeared in the SOPA every three months since that date. This was followed with an Opportunities letter mailed June 20, 2008 to 168 members of the public and other government agencies outlining the opportunities for fuel treatments in the planning area and asking for input in developing the project. The mailing included a map of the planning area and potential treatments, a description of the project objectives, and some general information regarding the planning area. It also outlined how the public can participate in the Summit Pierre planning process and that comments would be used to develop the Proposed Action alternative.

July 29, 2008, the District hosted a public meeting at the Fire District Training Center located on US Highway 395 approximately 12 miles south of the planning area. Notice of this meeting was mailed to 171 members of the public and other agencies, plus it was posted at 12 stores and post offices located near the planning area. The meeting roster was signed by 30 members of the public. Discussed at this meeting was a general outline of the project objectives followed by power point presentations regarding the biogeography of the area, and fuel and silviculture treatments. A question and answer period followed. Distributed at this meeting were a map of all the potential opportunities for fuel reductions within the planning area and a list of facts about the area (same as in June 20, 2008 letter). Comment forms and information regarding how to participate in project development were also supplied.

On September 5, 2008 a scoping letter was mailed to 188 members of the public and other agencies. This letter described the Proposed Action, the purpose and need for the actions, how the public can participate in the process, and notification of the up coming fieldtrip. A planning area map was enclosed. A legal notice was published September 10, 2008 in the *Colville Statesman-Examiner*, the newspaper of record for the Three Rivers Ranger District opening the scoping period for the project. This notice briefly outlined the Proposed Action and again gave direction for participation in the planning process including a comment period of 45 calendar days from the date of publication. The official scoping period ended October 27, 2008.

The public fieldtrip to the planning area was held on September 27, 2008. In addition to mention in the scoping letter, notice of this fieldtrip was posted at 11 stores and post offices near the planning area. Eleven members of the public or other agencies attended. The fieldtrip highlighted the need for treatments in some stands and allowed the public to ask questions regarding these treatments. Three stops were made within the planning area.

Thirty-three comments, letters, emails, and verbal communications were received over a period of six months beginning with the June 2008 opportunities letter. All comments were reviewed by the District Ranger or his acting, upon receipt. Due to the many comments with questions regarding effects, a follow-up letter was sent to 58 members of the public and other agencies that had expressed interest in the project either through attending a public meeting or through submitting comments. This letter mailed November 19, 2008 described how comments were reviewed, tracked, and used to modify the Proposed Action or analysis.

All comments were placed in the project file where they were reviewed by the writer editor, Planning Team Leader, and Forest NEPA Coordinator for issue statements. A draft summary of the issue statements was sent to the IDT December 10, 2008. Also upon receipt, electronic and some written comments (transcribed) were posted to the Summit Pierre electronic file, accessible to all team members. These comments and the issues identified in them became the basis on which modifications were made to the opportunities, and potential effects analyzed.

A final public meeting was held again at the Fire District Training Center on June 25, 2009. The meeting date and location was announced in the *Colville Statesman-Examiner* newspaper, via a mailing to over 200 members of the public and other agencies, and by posting at various public locations near the planning area. It was attended by 15 members of the public, as well as several members of the IDT. At this meeting the Proposed Action was described in detail and followed by a question and answer period. No new issues were identified at this meeting.

On September 08, 2009 a letter was sent to all public participants that the EA was available for review and that the project was entering a 30-day Objection Period during which individuals with standing could choose to enter an objection with the Regional Forester. The legal notice beginning this process started on September 09, 2009 with a notice in the *Colville Statesman-Examiner*.

Stevens County Participation

Participation in regards to fuels management, wildfire concerns, and Stevens County began during development of the Stevens County, Washington Community Wildfire Protection Plan. Three employees of the Colville National Forest participated in Planning Committee Meetings and, or responded to elements of the Plan's preparation beginning in May of 2007.

After the release of the SOPA January 1, 2008, the District Ranger alerted Stevens County Commissioners that the Colville National Forest was moving forward with the Summit Pierre project (January 8, 2008, Stevens County Courthouse). This meeting was also attended by Ferry County Commissioners and a representative from the local Senator's office. The District Ranger followed up with a reminder of the pending project to Commissioner Merrill Ott at a meeting in Troutdale, Oregon held February 11-13, 2008. County Commissioners, the Stevens County Conservation District, and Stevens County Public Lands Advisory Committee were also sent copies of the Opportunities letter distributed in June, 2008.

These communications were followed with two presentations, one at the July 16, 2008 Stevens County PLAC meeting at which the Project Team Leader described the project and its status. The group was generally supportive and requested information regarding on going collaboration with other groups. This was followed with a meeting held July 21, 2008 at which the District Ranger handed out the SP opportunities map and alerted the Stevens County Commissioners to the up coming public meeting. A Stevens County Commissioner attended the meeting and the follow up field trip. The scoping letter dated September 5, 2008 was sent to each Stevens County Commissioner and the Public Lands Advisory Council (PLAC). No responses were received.

A request was made by the Stevens County PLAC for notes taken at collaboration with NEWF Coalition and the public meetings; they were sent September 5th and September 8th respectively. A follow up letter was received (dated December 19, 2008) requesting any additional notes from collaborative meetings with NEWFC. Replies were sent

January 9 and February 11, 2009 containing all comments and meeting notes to date. At a subsequent PLAC meeting, the Project Team Leader outlined the NEPA process and distributed a NEPA document timeline. She gave an update on where the SP project was in the planning process and highlighted the opportunities that were available for the County to participate. County Commissioners were invited to the following public meeting but declined to attend.

Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition Participation

The NEWF Coalition (Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition), a non-profit coalition of environmental and industrial groups participated in a collaborative process with the Colville National Forest on the SP project. Currently, the Colville National Forest and the NEWF Coalition agree to employ during project planning a collaborative process with defined steps (Version 16 dated 10/23/2006). Those steps culminate in NEWF Coalition supplying a written statement indicating their level of support (high, medium, or low) for the Proposed Action.

The collaboration process included meetings or conference calls held with the IDT and the NEWF Coalition April of 2007, and April, July, October, November, and December of 2008, and February and July of 2009. At these meetings the NEWF Coalition was invited to become familiar with the existing conditions, desired conditions, and planning area, and to give input regarding their concerns. GIS layers (covers) of the project were supplied to the NEWF Coalition at various points throughout the planning process. Before-and-after treatment prescription tables along with thinning guidelines were provided in October 2008. The President and involved board members of the NEWF Coalition were sent the public letters described above. They attended all public meetings and the public field trip.

Points of collaboration included unit prescriptions, road management, and visual impacts, particularly in reference to units currently supporting late structure (LOS) and areas of high visibility. Identified issues stated below include those raised by the NEWF Coalition as well as other publics.

Other Agency Participation

Copies of all letters described above were mailed to the International Boundary Commission, United States Environmental Protection Agency, and Washington State Departments of Ecology, Fish and Wildlife, and Natural Resources. Comments were received from the Washington State Department of Natural Resources and the US Environmental Protection Agency. These comments were reviewed for issues and incorporated into the Proposed Action.

PUBLIC ISSUES

As outlined above, issues raised by the public, NEWF Coalition, and other agencies and governments were screened to identify those that relate to potential impacts within the control of the Forest Service and scope of the SP project. Issues identified by the District Ranger were used in the Proposed Action development and are tracked throughout this document. They are listed below. Numbers correspond to those in Chapter 2, table 2.18, page 58 where they are discussed and design elements that relate to the concern are listed. A list of all commenters can be found in Chapter 4.

Economics

1. Concern that the Proposed Action would not generate enough revenue to pay for all the proposed treatments.

Fire and Fuels

2. Concern with the risk of prescribed fire escaping and/or reaching private land.

Heritage

3. Concern that the Proposed Action would negatively impact native plant gathering or other cultural sites.

Hydrology

4. Concern that the Proposed Actions would negatively affect water quality and quantity for domestic users adjacent to the Forest.
5. Concern that the proposed treatments and road work would negatively affect water quality.
6. Concern that the proposed treatments would affect water quantity through general forest cover reduction, an increase in demand for water from small trees versus large, and increased Equivalent Clearcut Acres (ECAs).

Late and Old Structure Forests

7. Concern that the Proposed Action would negatively affect late and old structure forests.

Noxious Weeds

8. Concern that the Proposed Actions (use of roads and slash pile burning) would cause spread of noxious weeds.

Public Health and Safety

9. Concern for public safety due to logging truck traffic during treatment activities.
10. Concern that the proposed prescribed fire use would have negative impacts to air quality.

Riparian and Fisheries

11. Concern that the proposed activities may compromise natural and man made barriers, or increase the number of road/stream crossings which would increase cattle access to streams and result in negative effects to riparian habitat.
12. Concern that road reconstruction may increase access for recreation users to sensitive riparian areas which may result in negative impacts.
13. Concern for cumulative effect of the Proposed Action on the attainment of INFISH objectives and habitat occupied by native fish species.

Transportation

14. Concern that the proposed road closures would limit access to public land by land managers, fire fighters, and recreation users.
15. Concern that the proposed physical decommissioning of Pelky Creek roads could cause negative effects to the watershed.
16. Concern that the proposed road construction and reconstruction would increase access to adjacent private lands. This was specifically in reference to road 1500010 road accessing east of Pierre Lake. Other concerns were regarding access needs where none was apparent except across private land.

Visual Quality

17. Concern that proposed concentrations of irregular shelterwoods would cause a detrimental visual effect.
18. Concern that the Proposed Action would result in negative aesthetic effects. These comments refer to both spacing and numbers of trees left in a stand, partially burned piles, and to effects of skid trails. Particular mention was made of units 2460079 and 2460009.

Soils

19. Concern that the proposed activities, particularly where organic matter and down wood is removed, would negatively affect soil productivity and soil organisms.
20. Concern that the proposed activities would increase detrimental soil conditions.

Wildlife

21. Concern that the proposed activities would cause the spread of noxious weeds which would impact biodiversity.
22. Concern for the potential to impact endangered, threatened or candidate species listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), their habitats, as well as State listed sensitive species.
23. Concern that the proposed activities and their timing would negatively affect wildlife reproduction, habitat, snags, migration corridors (including to Canada), and management emphasis areas. Concern that activities would not sufficiently benefit ungulate food sources.