# NEWS RELEASE

Pacific Northwest Region - Colville National Forest
765 S. Main Street, Colville, WA 99114, www.fs.usda.gov/colville

**Contact: Franklin Pemberton, 509.684.7177** **May 18, 2016**

# *Burned Area Restoration Continues on the Colville National Forest*

**Colville, WA (May 18, 2016)** - Spring is in full swing. As the snow recedes burned area restoration crews take to the mountain slopes. In their packs are tree seedlings—thousands of larch, ponderosa, and western white pine—bound for burnt areas on the Colville National Forest. Other specialized crews are applying straw and wood mulch from a helicopter to stabilize soils.

2015 was the worst fire year Washington State has experienced. Reforesting projects are in effect in nearly every burn area, pushing planting and burned area response crews to their limits. After the snow melt there is only a small window before the soil becomes too dry for seedling success and before the early summer rains fall. “We’ve been chasing snow all year” says Jose Contreras, President of Ramos Reforestation. On the Colville National Forest that window usually appears in late April or early May when soil temperatures hover in the low to mid-50s.

In the fire adapted ecosystem of the Colville National Forest reforestation techniques, such as mulching form the air or hand planting seedlings, stabilizes soil, increases tree species diversity, and creates stand resilience against drought, disease, and fire. In burned areas where there is very little vegetation competition an ideal opportunity arises to reintroduce a species that was wiped out nearly one hundred years ago - the western white pine.
Historically found across the Inland Northwest along the Northern Rocky mountains of northeastern Washington, north Idaho, and western Montana, the western white pine was decimated by white pine blister rust. This five-needled pine is ideally suited for the environment of the Inland Northwest. Western white pine is more resistant to many native insects and diseases than tree species currently on these wetter sites. Reduced to five percent of its historic range, researchers have been breeding and replanting western white pines resistant to white pine blister rust over the last thirty-five years. Along the burnt slopes of the Renner and North Star Fires the Colville National Forest will plant 43,500 western white pine seedlings from the Forest Service operated J. Herbert Stone Nursery in Central Point, Oregon.

Other than western white pine, approximately 35,000 ponderosa pine and 25,000 western larch seedlings will be planted over roughly 500 acres of fire damaged National Forest.
In 2017 the Colville plans on planting roughly 1,000 acres, and in 2018 their goal is approximately 2,000 acres.

**-MORE-**

Each tree is planted by hand. As the crews scale the ashy slopes each member carries a hoedad, a specialized heavy-duty replanting tool, and roughly 200 tree seedlings at a time. A typical crew plants an average of 20 acres a day—more than 6,000 trees. It is no easy task walking up and down steep slopes all day with a heavy hoedad and a heavy bag of trees. Replanting crews enjoy the work, but admit it is exhausting.

In addition to planting seedlings, crews have been busy stabilizing the soil and working to minimize the impact of summer storms on soils and roads. These crews are part of a Burned Area Emergency Response Team (BAER). These crews are continuing the work that was begun last fall before winter weather set in. Visitors will see helicopters applying straw and wood mulch to stabilize soils and provide a stable climate for grass and shrubs to take hold. In addition, crews will be working to stabilize roads and trails, removing roadside hazard trees and assessing and cleaning out culverts to prevent road failures.

As a reminder, many of our burned areas are open but with restrictions; please check with your local ranger station before you head into a burned area for current conditions.

**-END-**

*The mission of the US Forest Service is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations. Recreational activities on our lands contribute $14.5 billion annually to the U.S. economy. The agency manages 193 million acres of public land, provides assistance to state and private landowners, and maintains the largest forestry research organization in the world.*

*Photo by Mackenzie Wilson, U.S.F.S.*