



Colville National Forest

Forest Plan Revision Update

August 16, 2016

Public Comments on the Draft Forest Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Statement

This is our second letter addressing comments we received from the public. For this one I want to discuss some comments related to fish habitat and hydrology. The preferred alternative (P) includes draft direction related to areas along streams, lakes and other wetlands (riparian management areas) and direction called the aquatic and riparian conservation strategy (ARCS).

Aquatic and Riparian Conservation Strategy (ARCS) provides a core set of desired conditions, objectives, standards and guidelines for aquatic and riparian management for national forests to incorporate when updating the forest plan direction. It's designed to maintain and restore the ecological health of watersheds, and aquatic and riparian systems on National Forest System lands.



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The components of healthy watersheds include:

- **geomorphology** – the physical features of the watershed including type(s) of rock formations and soils
- **hydrologic pattern** – how water flows over and through the soils; what are water-related connections between different areas within the watershed
- **water quality** – the condition of the water related to things like temperature, sediment, oxygen content
- **riparian vegetation characteristics** – the types and amounts of forbs, shrubs and trees that influence what is going on in the waterways
- **habitat characteristics** – the physical features that influence development and reproduction of water-dependent species such as fish, snails and insects

One element ARCS uses to address those components is management in riparian areas.

Riparian Management Areas (RMAs) are areas along permanently flowing stream, ponds, lakes, wetlands, seeps, springs, intermittent streams and unstable sites where management activities are to maintain, restore or enhance the ecological health of aquatic and riparian ecosystems and dependent resources.

Key Points for Clarification Regarding RMAs— several public comments we received indicate that the most confusion related to ARCS is whether forest management activities, such as thinning, fuels reduction work, permitted grazing, prescribed fire, or other restoration could occur within the RMAs.

RMAs include those areas next to streams, lakes, ponds, wetlands, and other features that are managed for the benefit of riparian-dependent resources. Where disturbance or management alters water flow across the land, such as a road ditch, riparian areas filter the dirt, so clean water flows into lakes and streams.



for the greatest good

Another important feature of RMAs are the trees and shrubs. They shade the stream and help keep water and air temperatures cool. The trees fall down and create homes for aquatic animals. The leaves, branches, and needles are food for fish's favorite meal – insects. Roots stabilize stream banks and slow the rate of erosion and potential channel migration. As flood water flows over the riparian vegetation, the water slows and dirt settles out in the floodplain. Trout eggs and insects can be smothered by dirt or sediment.



Healthy RMAs provide for clean water



Stream bank and fish habitat restoration



Vegetation plays a key role in stabilizing banks and maintaining low water temperatures

Riparian management areas are **NOT** buffers and do not prohibit management activities, but management in RMAs should move RMAs toward desired conditions. Since RMAs are designated by width rather than riparian function or existence of riparian vegetation, there is often upland vegetation on the outer width edge of RMAs where forest health and fuels treatments would benefit the function of riparian areas.

The desired condition is for riparian management areas to reflect a natural composition of native plants and animals (of all sizes & types) and a distribution of physical, chemical, and biological conditions appropriate to natural disturbance regimes affecting the area.

The draft Forest Plan includes several objectives that promote active management and restoration within RMAs, including moving upland vegetation within RMAs in both key and non-key watersheds toward **historic range of variability**¹ on 1,700 acres within 15 years of plan implementation. This is not a limit, so if circumstances allow, the forest could do more restoration than what is listed under Forest Plan objectives.

I hope this provides better clarity to what is proposed in the draft plan related to what management can happen near streams, lakes and wetlands. If you have any questions about this information, please **contact planning team** members listed below.

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¹ **Historic range of variability** is a method to look at past patterns of how species and size classes of trees were distributed across the landscape.

Frequently Asked Questions

Must projects help move aquatic and riparian habitats towards desired conditions for these habitats?

Yes, projects that may affect aquatic and riparian habitats would be designed to help move these habitats towards desired conditions, through coordination and consideration of other land use needs.

How will riparian and aquatic habitats be managed?

All alternatives include desired conditions, objectives, standards and guidelines to address riparian conditions and fish habitat. Alternative P (preferred alternative) includes direction from the Aquatic Riparian Conservation Strategy.

What kinds of watershed restoration actions are proposed and how will watershed conditions be improved?

The Draft Revised Forest Plan does not describe specific actions that will take place, but describes objectives for improvement in watershed, soil, riparian, and aquatic habitat conditions. Activities that could occur within riparian management areas include (but aren't limited to) pre-commercial thinning, streambank stabilization, placing instream structures (e.g., large woody debris), and replacing or removing culverts. Forest vegetation conditions are expected to improve in all alternatives and this contributes to improved watershed conditions. The analysis in the DEIS suggests that decreasing sediment delivery and the hydrologic effects of roads will improve overall watershed conditions.

What types of activities are not allowed in RMAs?

Similar to current management direction—the following activities are not allowed in RMAs: scheduled production timber harvest (however, timber harvest as a restoration tool is allowed), motorized play areas, saleable minerals, surface occupancy of leasable minerals, above ground infrastructure associated with special use permits (including communication sites, energy development, or utility lines), firewood collection for personal use.



Overtime a catch basin for a culvert can erode away to a point where it creates a barrier to fish migration or an impact to other aquatic species. Correcting these issues is one type of restoration work the forest undertakes.

Comment Reading Room

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<https://cara.ecosystem-management.org/Public//ReadingRoom?Project=45826>

