

# **Draft Record of Decision**

**for the**

**Colville National Forest**

**Revised Land Management Plan**

**Ferry, Pend Oreille, and Stevens Counties, Washington**

<b>Lead Agency:</b>	<b>USDA Forest Service</b>
<b>Responsible Official:</b>	<b>Regional Forester Pacific Northwest Region 1220 SW 3rd Avenue Portland, Oregon 97208</b>
<b>For Information, Contact:</b>	<b>Rodney Smoldon, Forest Supervisor Colville National Forest 765 South Main Colville, Washington 99114 (509) 684-7000</b>





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# Introduction

This draft Record of Decision (ROD) documents my decision and rationale for approving the revised Colville National Forest Land Management Plan (revised land management plan) and final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). This revised land management plan will provide guidance for future project and activity decision making on the Colville National Forest (Colville NF, or Forest) for the next 10 to 15 years. The revised land management plan replaces the previous land management plan, which was approved in 1988, and has been amended 41 times. This decision facilitates the goal of the Department of Agriculture to promote sound land stewardship in partnership with communities.

## Forest and Community Setting

The 1.1-million-acre Colville NF is located in the northeast corner of Washington State, within Ferry, Stevens, and Pend Oreille Counties. Ranger district offices are located in Republic, Kettle Falls, Metaline Falls, and Newport, and the supervisor's office is located in Colville. The Newport Ranger District is part of the Kaniksu National Forest, but has been administered by the Colville NF since 1974, and will continue to be managed by the Colville NF under the revised land management plan. Throughout this document, the terms "Colville NF" and "Forest" include the portion of the Kaniksu National Forest that Colville NF administers.

The Colville NF is considered to be part of the Northern Rocky Mountains, with the Kettle River Range on the west half of the Forest, and the Selkirk Mountains defining the eastern half. The Forest is bordered to the north by British Columbia, Canada, to the west by the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest, to the east by the Idaho Panhandle National Forests, and to the south by a portion of the Colville Confederated Tribes Indian Reservation.

The history of the Forest and surrounding communities is strongly tied to mining, homesteading, and logging. In 1821, the Hudson Bay Trading Company established a large outpost near Kettle Falls, attracting fur traders from Washington, Idaho, Montana, and Canada to the area. Miners began to filter into the area in search of gold in the 1850s, and the arrival of the Great Northern Railroad in 1892 allowed for the expansion of homesteading in the area. Homesteaders found that much of the land in the area was too rocky for farming, and discovered that timber harvest was much more profitable.

Today, Ferry, Stevens, and Pend Oreille counties are comprised mostly of small, rural communities. The largest communities in the area are Colville (population 4,800) and Newport (population 2,100), Washington. The Colville NF, established in 1907, has a long history of providing timber and other forest products in support of local community and national needs.

Two major forest products companies, Boise Cascade and Vaagen Brothers Lumber Inc., are lead employers in the area. Currently, wood products from the Colville NF contribute to about 330 local jobs in the forest products industry, and an estimated annual labor income of \$19,335,000. Most of the Forest burned in the 1920s, resulting in a large crop of trees reaching maturity in the 1990s. Thus, the Colville National Forest was able to harvest at relatively high levels during an era when other national forests were severely reducing the timber cutting. While timber harvest levels vary year by year, the Forest has sustained an upward trend in harvest volumes for the last 25 years. In the last five years, the Forest has produced an average of 55 million board feet (MMBF) each year, reaching almost 70 MMBF in 2017. Harvest volume is expected to surpass 120 MMBF in 2018.

Livestock grazing is another important part of the economy in northeast Washington. Livestock grazing on the Forest supports about 29,500 animal unit months, and contributes to about 98 local jobs, and an estimate annual labor income of \$1,524,000. Grazing on the Forest contributes directly to livestock foraging needs, and allows ranchers to grow forage on private lands for feeding during winter months.

The Forest provides a variety of motorized and non-motorized recreation opportunities, and is the recreational backyard for communities of northeast Washington and the greater Spokane area. There are approximately 4,000 miles of National Forest System roads on the Colville NF, including two Scenic Byways and one All American Road. About a third of the open roads on the Forest are open to off highway vehicles (also called mixed motorized use), allowing increased opportunities for this popular form of recreation. The trail system is composed of about 500 miles of summer-use trails, 80 miles of which are designated as National Recreation Trails, and approximately 40 miles of cross country ski trails. Many of these roads and trails were built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s.

The Forest also manages about 31,400 acres of the congressionally designated Salmo-Priest Wilderness, which is co-managed by the Idaho Panhandle National Forests. The Salmo-Priest Wilderness provides important wildlife habitat, including recovery areas for Endangered Species Act (ESA) listed grizzly bear, and the last remaining herd of woodland caribou in the continental U.S.

The east side of the Forest also provides important designated critical habitat for threatened bull trout. On the west side of the forest, the Kettle Crest has been identified as an important area for the recovery of Canada lynx in Washington.

The Forest also plays an important role in supporting hydroelectricity in the region. Waters from the Colville NF feed Lake Roosevelt on the Columbia River, which is impounded by the Grand Coulee Dam, the largest power-supplying dam in the United States. Two more hydropower projects are sited within the Colville NF on the Pend Oreille River. Boundary Dam generates one-third of Seattle City Light's power, and Box Canyon Dam supplies power for Pend Oreille County. Both dams also supply power to other western states and Canada at times of peak production.

The Colville National Forest is known for its collaborative approach and robust accelerated vegetation management program, and is recognized as a leader in the Pacific Northwest Region. The Forest actively engages in partnerships and initiatives, including Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration projects, Good Neighbor partnerships with the Washington Department of Natural Resources, Mill Creek A to Z ten-year stewardship project, and Joint Chief's projects. Involving communities in developing projects on their public lands has resulted broad support for a variety of vegetation management actions on the Forest.

## **The Revised Land Management Plan**

As required by the National Forest Management Act (NFMA), the Forest Service currently manages the Colville NF under a land management plan, approved in 1988, that guides decision-making on the Forest with respect to managing natural resources and human uses. The 1988 land management plan has been amended 41 times, and includes direction from the Inland Native Fish Strategy (INFISH, 1995) and Interim Management Direction Establishing Riparian, Ecosystem and Wildlife Standards for Timber Sales (known as Eastside Screens, 1995).



The final EIS and revised land management plan were developed according to the NFMA, its implementing regulations at 36 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) part 219; National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) (1969); the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) NEPA regulations at 40 CFR 1500–1508; and the Forest Service NEPA regulations at 36 CFR 220. According to transition language of the 2012 Planning Rule at 36 CFR 219.17(b)(3), the responsible official may elect to use the provisions of the prior planning regulations (1982 Planning Rule, dated September 30, 1982, and as amended) to prepare plan amendments and revisions. I have elected to follow the provisions of the planning regulations in effect prior to May 9, 2012, referred to collectively in this document as the 1982 Planning Rule, as this land management plan revision process was initiated before 2012. References in this draft ROD refer to the 1982 Planning Rule unless indicated differently in the citation (see FEIS Appendix D for full text of 1982 Planning Rule, also available at <https://www.fs.fed.us/emc/nfma/includes/nfmareg.html>). However, in consideration of transition time requirements identified in the 2012 Planning Rule, the revised land management plan includes a monitoring plan per 36 CFR 219.12 of the 2012 Planning Rule.

With this decision, the selected alternative will become the new Colville National Forest Land Management Plan. This revised land management plan replaces the 1988 land management plan. The revised land management plan updates the management areas, desired conditions, objectives, standards, guidelines, special areas, suitability, and monitoring requirements that will guide management of the Colville NF for the next 10 to 15 years. Compared to the 1988 land management plan, the revised land management plan increases timber volumes and outputs; designates management areas suitable for motorized access; recommends areas for consideration as wilderness; applies landscape ecology concepts instead of a fixed reserve approach; integrates watershed restoration approaches and identifies key watersheds; and identifies focal species for monitoring instead of management indicator species.

## **Nature of the Land Management Plan Decision**

The nature of the land management plan decision is outlined in NFMA. Similar to local government land-use zoning, the direction in the land management plan is used to guide future management decisions and set consistent expectations for the types of activities permissible on a forest. A land management plan provides overall guidance for the management of National Forest System lands and is based on law, science, and input from tribes, local government, State and Federal agencies, and the public. A land management plan establishes goals, desired conditions, objectives, standards, guidelines, management areas, and land suitability to assure coordination of multiple uses (e.g., outdoor recreation, range, timber, watershed, wildlife and fish, and wilderness) and sustained yield of products and services.

This land management plan decision is strategic in nature, does not make a commitment to the selection of any specific project, and does not dictate day-to-day administrative activities needed to carry on the Forest Service's internal operations such as personnel matters, law enforcement, or organizational changes. The revised land management plan's programmatic management direction will be implemented through the design, execution, and monitoring of site-specific activities such as harvesting timber, conducting a prescribed burn, or relocating a trail. The decisions for these activities will be consistent with the strategic decisions made in the revised land management plan and are subject to separate analysis under the NEPA.

## **Need for Change**

The 1988 land management plan was approved 30 years ago, well beyond the 10-15 year duration provided by the NFMA (16 U.S.C. 1604, et seq.). The need for change and subsequent revised

land management plan is an outcome of extensive collaboration with State and county governments and other Federal agencies, tribal consultation, and engagement with the public and other groups. Land management plan revision on the Colville NF was initiated based on legal requirements and significant changes that have occurred in conditions, demands, and scientific understanding since the 1988 land management plan went into effect.

The 1988 land management plan does not fully address changes that have occurred to economic, social, and ecological conditions; new policies and priorities; and new information based on monitoring and scientific research. Using the Analysis of the Management Situation (2011, 2015), and information provided through outreach to tribes, local governments, State and Federal agencies, and the public, the Forest identified five recommended needs for change from the 1988 land management plan. The needs are summarized here (see also FEIS, Chapter 1):

### ***Social and Economic Systems***

There is a need to address changed social and economic conditions and preferences in light of ecosystem capacity. The Colville NF provides a variety of opportunities for recreating, working, and practicing cultural and spiritual traditions. In turn, communities provide infrastructure and skills to support forest management. Sustainable social and economic opportunities depend on well-functioning and resilient ecological systems. During the past 20 years, economic and demographic changes have altered how people use and access the Forest. Economic shifts in markets for certain types of timber products and declines in timber harvests have caused many eastern Washington wood processors to close. Social changes include an increasing demand, largely due to population growth, for a variety of recreation opportunities on public lands. Land management plan revision is needed to address such shifts, within the capability of the available infrastructure and the ecosystem, and to address the types and extent of forest management activities that can be accomplished within projected budgets.

### ***Vegetative Systems***

Historically, frequent fires kept tree densities and fuels low. With increased fire suppression, the dominant types of tree species and forest structure has changed. In the past 10 to 15 years, fires in eastern Washington have increased with greater severity reflective of higher fuel levels and tree mortality, along with longer fire seasons. Recent studies have shown that northeast Washington is one of the areas with highest need for active vegetation management activities. There is a need to revise the 1988 land management plan to focus restoration actions in Douglas-fir dry, Northern Rocky Mountain mixed conifer, and lodgepole pine landscapes, and create conditions that are more resilient to anticipated disturbances, including fire, insects, disease, and climate change. This is especially important in Ferry, Pend Oreille, and Stevens Counties, where an average of 25 percent of homes are located in growing wildland-urban interface areas.

### ***Aquatic and Riparian Systems***

There is a need to focus efforts to improve watershed condition across the Forest. The 1988 land management plan was amended by INFISH and does not adequately integrate management direction, updated science, and watershed assessment tools. Since 1988, the Aquatic Restoration Strategy (ARS; USDA 2005), the Watershed Condition Framework (WCF; Potyondy and Geier 2010), bull trout recovery plan (USFWS 2015), and the Aquatic and Riparian Conservation Strategy (ARCS; USDA 2016) were developed to reflect management direction recommended by current research and regional, national, and interagency policy. Consistency and integration of this new research and direction on restoration, protection, and maintenance of watershed and aquatic habitat and function is needed.

### ***Wildlife Habitat***

The 1988 land management plan needs to be updated to reflect new species and critical habitat listings, and current science including species viability assessments for the Interior Columbia Basin and for northeastern Washington. Incorporating interagency direction in the revised land management plan for grizzly bear, woodland caribou, Canada lynx, and bull trout will contribute to the viability of these species and their habitats, and ensure the Forest's compliance with the ESA.

### ***Climate Change***

Recent scientific findings on climate change (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) 2014) have improved our understanding of how ecosystems have changed and are likely to change in the future. Climate change has altered, and will continue to alter disturbance regimes, including forest insects and diseases, fire, and hydrologic regimes. Future conditions may be more favorable to some undesired non-native plant, wildlife, and aquatic species (IPCC 2014). The full impact of climate change is uncertain, but integrated management direction that provides flexibility to respond to change and maintains or restores the resilience of the national forests is needed.

## **The Decision**

I have reviewed the alternatives, considered the objectives and concerns of tribal, county, State and Federal governments, public comments, national direction and policy, and internal management concerns. After considering the effects to the economic, social, and ecological environment as described in Chapter 3 of the final EIS, I have selected the primary management direction identified in alternative P. My decision approves the desired conditions, objectives, standards, guidelines, management area direction, suitability determinations, and monitoring and evaluation direction as described in the revised land management plan and under alternative P (hereafter referred to as the selected alternative) in Chapter 2 of the final EIS.

My decision carries forward areas of the Forest that have already been formally designated by special statute because of unique or special characteristics (see revised land management plan, page 94). The Salmo-Priest Wilderness, Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail, and the International Selkirk Loop scenic byway are congressionally designated areas that are also included in my decision.

My decision also carries forward areas of the Forest already designated through administrative action. The Colville NF has about 182,000 acres of inventoried roadless areas (IRA) that were designated by the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule (see page 34 below). The revised land management plan includes forestwide direction for these IRAs. Other existing administrative designations include Sherman Pass and North Pend Oreille scenic byways, research natural areas, various national recreation trails, and critical habitat designated for grizzly bear, woodland caribou, and bull trout.

The selected alternative provides for management of all of these previously-designated areas, consistent with the nature of their designation.

The selected alternative will:

- Contribute about 830 jobs and generate approximately \$36,169,000 in annual labor income to local communities in forest products, recreation, and livestock grazing industries. This is an increase of more than 200 jobs in the forest products sector;
- Increase the acres suitable for scheduled timber production by 12 percent, and replace the Eastside screens 21-inch diameter limit with a guideline that allows harvest of large trees under certain scenarios;
- Provide a diversity of motorized and non-motorized recreation opportunities, contributing \$3,556,000 annually in income from recreation related jobs;
- Allow motorized access on designated routes over approximately 75 percent of the forest in suitable management areas, and include desired conditions for road densities in focused and general restoration management areas;
- Recommend three areas for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System (61,700 acres total, or 6 percent of the forest). Current levels of existing activities (such as mountain biking and use of chainsaws) will continue to occur until Congress moves to designate these areas as wilderness;
- Establish the Kettle Crest Recreation Area management area (80,300 acres), allowing for continued variety of recreation opportunities in this popular area, and maintaining the characteristics currently enjoyed by the public;
- Integrate the Colville ARCS, modernizing direction established by INFISH in 1995, while supporting other uses, including timber harvest, grazing, recreation, and watershed restoration activities;
- Ensure viable native fish and wildlife populations and incorporate current science and interagency direction for recovery of threatened and endangered species;
- Recommend the Fire Mountain (1,457 acres) and Halls Pond (627 acres) research natural areas.

My decision is fully supported by the environmental analysis documented in the final EIS, as required by law and regulation. This decision applies only to National Forest System lands on the Colville NF. It does not apply to any other Federal, State, or private lands, although the effects of these lands and the effects of my decision on lands surrounding the Colville NF were considered.

## **Rationale for Decision**

I believe that the selected alternative provides the most balanced approach to management of the Colville NF, and provides for a variety of uses the public told me were important. My decision is based on a careful and reasoned comparison of the environmental consequences of and responses to issues and concerns for each alternative. The selected alternative provides areas for active management and timber production. Focused and general restoration management areas provide the suitable base for timber production, while other management areas allow for harvest to achieve broader restoration goals. Activities in these active management areas will move vegetation toward desired conditions for improved resiliency within the historical range of variation. My decision also provides areas with passive management and non-motorized access, such as recommended wilderness and backcountry management areas.

The revised land management plan is responsive to the diverse needs, issues, concerns, and opportunities expressed by tribes, local governments, State and Federal agencies, organizations, and the public. The revised land management plan emphasizes moving toward desired conditions and contributing to economic, social, and ecological sustainability, and promotes sound land stewardship in partnership with local communities to conserve rural character.

The revised land management plan establishes a framework for future multiple-use management, setting programmatic direction for compliance with law at the site-specific project level. Approval of the revised land management plan does not require implementation of any site-specific management actions, but rather the revised land management plan provides a framework for future decision-making.

The revised land management plan will provide direction and guidance for accomplishing the following:

### ***Contributing to social and economic sustainability***

This decision will support approximately 830 jobs in the timber, recreation, and livestock grazing industries, contributing \$36,169,000 in annual labor income. The decision will support about 537 timber related jobs, an increase from the estimated 330 timber industry jobs and \$19,340,000 in labor income that timber harvest under the 1988 land management plan supports. This decision maintains approximately 300 recreation and grazing related jobs that are provided for under the 1988 land management plan, with an estimated labor income of \$5,080,000 annually.

The revised land management plan provides desired conditions emphasizing the Forest's commitment to work with the counties, and other government agencies and publics, in order to achieve multiple use goals on the Colville NF and to contribute to social and economic sustainability in conjunction with ecological sustainability. I believe a productive working relationship between the Forest and county governments is vital for successfully implementing the revised land management plan and supporting the economic base of the counties.

### ***Restoring and sustaining landscapes***

Throughout the planning process, I heard from the public a desire to produce more timber volume to support local communities and economies. The selected alternative designates the most acres suitable for timber production than other alternatives, and allocates approximately 63 percent of the forest as suitable for scheduled timber production in focused and general restoration management areas. This is an increase in suitable timber production acres of about 12 percent when compared with the 1988 land management plan. I believe these acres represent areas where timber production is feasible, based on other resource requirements, and compatible with management area desired conditions. Another 19 percent of the Forest will be suitable for timber harvest for other resource benefit, making timber harvest a suitable restoration tool on more than 82 percent of the Forest.

There will no longer be a prohibition on harvest of trees greater than 21 inches in diameter, as mandated by the Eastside Screens, which amended the 1988 land management plan. Instead, the revised land management plan contains a guideline for large tree management and specifies a number of scenarios where large trees (defined as greater than 20" in diameter) may be harvested. These scenarios include moving stands toward their desired conditions for structural stages, to control or limit insects and disease, for fuels reduction, and for safety reasons. I believe that this guideline will protect large trees and emphasize late structure across the landscape, while allowing adequate management flexibility to respond to emerging resource issues.

The revised land management plan will use a dynamic landscape approach for providing late forest structure while allowing late structure forests to naturally shift location in response to ecological processes (e.g., wildfires). Late-successional forests may occur in various management areas across the forest. Desired conditions that apply forestwide for forest structure will be based on the historical range of variability by vegetation type, and will provide for ecological resilience to disturbances such as fire, insects and disease.

The allowable sale quantity (ASQ) for the revised land management plan is 67 MMBF per year. The ASQ represents the volume of green timber (not salvage material) that can be harvested from land suitable for timber production (focused and general restoration management areas). The annual potential wood sale quantity (PWSQ) for the revised land management plan will be 62 MMBF per year. The PWSQ represents the amount of timber and all other wood products, including firewood, that are expected to be sold during the plan period from harvests for any purpose (except salvage harvest or sanitation harvest) on all lands in the planning area, not just lands suitable for timber production. Actual volume offered in an individual year may vary due to budget or regulatory conditions. Both the ASQ and PWSQ for the revised land management plan represent a substantial increase from the 1988 land management plan, as amended by Eastside Screens. As noted above, the Colville NF has a proven ability to maintain a relatively high level of timber harvest.

The numbers used to compare the timber volume outputs for the various action alternatives received a lot of attention and comments from the public. I heard a desire from county commissioners to include an objective for a volume output larger than 62 MMBF. To respond to this request, the Colville land management plan revision interdisciplinary team (IDT) modeled objectives of 80 MMBF and 97 MMBF. The modeling exercise concluded that neither of these numbers would attain desired conditions for all forest structural stages as well as the selected alternative. This exercise is documented in the final EIS Appendix G and in the planning record.

While I have decided not to include an objective for timber volume output, I want to be clear that the PWSQ of 62 MMBF is not a cap or a target, and does not represent a limit to what the Forest may produce. I believe that the increasing trend of volume produced on the Colville NF shows a commitment by the Forest and the Region to contribute to communities and treat more acres.

### ***Providing access to the Forest***

With a large federal land base in northeast Washington, I recognize the local economic base is dependent on access and use of the Forest. I heard from county commissioners that any net loss in roads would not be acceptable. The revised land management plan does not designate or close specific roads, but includes a desired condition for a safe and sustainable access system that allows access for the public in a similar fashion to current uses.

However, the revised land management plan does contain desired conditions for road densities in focused and general restoration management areas. Roads in these areas will be evaluated at the project level with appropriate public input and resource analysis. It is important to note that this decision does not make any road designations or decisions regarding specific roads, it creates sideboards for how roads are managed in the different management areas. The revised land management plan does not open or close any roads, or change current designations for motor vehicle use on existing roads on the Forest. The Forest will continue to modify its Motor Vehicle Use Map annually to reflect decisions that are made regarding the transportation system and its uses. The revised land management plan promotes partnerships and contains direction for the Forest to work with local community interests to annually designate routes where off-highway vehicles can legally operate on Forest system roads (mixed motorized use). Routes that are currently open to passenger vehicles would be proposed at the project level to allow users to operate off-highway vehicles in the same locations. Decisions made at the project level would be reflected in annual updates to the motor vehicle use map.

I also heard concerns about access from many people who use the Forest for gathering forest products, hunting, mountain biking, hiking, camping and winter recreation. Access to these types of activities is facilitated by the Forest road system, and my decision results in approximately 75

percent of the Forest being suitable for roads and motorized use on designated routes. However, I also considered the non-motorized types of activities that people told me they valued by designating approximately 12 percent of the Forest as backcountry management areas where motorized use is not suitable.

My decision will create the Kettle Crest Recreation Area (approximately 80,300 acres). The Forest received many comments specific to the Kettle Crest and the importance of this area for its recreational, scenic, and spiritual value. This management area will emphasize and protect outstanding recreation opportunities in a semi-primitive setting while allowing continued motorized and mechanized recreation. Some commenters expressed their interest in seeing this area as recommended wilderness (as reflected in alternatives B and R). However, due to the variety of existing recreational uses and public interest in this particular area, I believe that the Kettle Crest is best managed for a range of recreational experiences, similar to the way the area is currently managed. The Kettle Crest Recreation Area will be managed in part as backcountry. Non-motorized opportunities will continue to be emphasized along the nationally designated trails at the top of the crest. Motorized opportunities will continue to be emphasized in backcountry-motorized management areas where these types of uses are already occurring.

### ***Livestock grazing***

Livestock grazing is a valuable local industry, and it is the desired condition of the revised land management plan that grazing continues to be a viable use of vegetation on the forest (see revised land management plan, FW-DC-LG-01). All management areas in the revised land management plan are suitable for livestock grazing, with the exception of research natural areas, certain administrative areas, and the Salmo-Priest Wilderness. The revised land management plan does not make allotment level decisions, such as the number of animal unit months that may graze a particular allotment. The revised land management plan will continue to provide for approximately 98 jobs related to grazing, and an associated \$1,524,000 in annual income.

My decision includes a modified version of the greenline vegetation guideline that was included in the draft land management plan. The original guideline included indicators for streambank alteration, utilization of woody vegetation, and stubble height in the riparian area. The guideline has been modified based on comments received from the public, and is now called MA-GDL-RMA-11. Annual Grazing Use Indicators. Specifically, this guideline is intended to provide more current, consistent, and objective grazing management across the Forest based on best available science; and to maintain or improve riparian vegetative and stream conditions, thereby improving the viability of Regional Forester sensitive aquatic species, contributing to the recovery of ESA listed species, and facilitating the attainment of State water quality standards over the long-term. By including this modified guideline in the final revised land management plan, I have determined that positive trends in watershed health established by management under the INFISH amendment will persist, while ensuring continued, viable livestock use on the Colville NF.

### ***Recommending areas for consideration as wilderness***

Public opinion regarding wilderness recommendation varies widely. The Forest received many comments about recommending wilderness throughout the planning process. Many people favor recommending additional areas for wilderness while many others do not agree with any new wilderness recommendations. The Ferry, Pend Oreille, and Stevens County commissioners do not support additional recommended wilderness in the revised land management plan. Although I acknowledge their concerns, I believe that a balanced approach to managing the Colville NF includes managing some areas for their semi-primitive and primitive character. These areas are important to some members of the public for the opportunities they provide for a recreational experience with a sense of solitude and self-reliance. These areas also provide unroaded blocks of

wildlife habitat with relatively little human disturbance. My decision results in 61,700 acres (approximately 6 percent of the Forest, and about 7,000 acres less than what was proposed in the draft EIS and draft land management plan) of recommended wilderness allocations. Individually, these areas are Abercrombie-Hooknose (29,300 acres), Bald Snow (17,400 acres), and Salmo-Priest Adjacent (14,900 acres) (see FEIS map packet, map 3). These areas, in particular, represent the best examples of wilderness characteristics on the Forest.

My decision allows existing inconsistent uses, identified as mountain biking and chainsaw use for maintenance of existing trails, to continue at current levels in recommended wilderness areas until these areas are considered for designation as wilderness by Congress. The revised land management plan contains direction for the monitoring of mechanized uses, as well as direction to address these uses if they cause any increase in user-created trails. Other ongoing activities, including grazing and mineral exploration, will continue to be suitable uses in these recommended wilderness areas.

Approximately 56,177 acres (95 percent) of these recommended wilderness areas are already within IRAs as identified under the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule. Currently, these areas are not suitable for scheduled timber production, timber harvest for resource benefit, roads, or motorized recreation. Managing these areas as recommended wilderness under the revised land management plan does not represent a change to the way they are currently managed.

Despite the consistency between the final revised land management plan and county land use plans, and work with the community and collaborative groups, issues persist regarding economic effects related to expected timber outputs and recommendation for wilderness designation. The social and economic section in the final EIS Chapter 3 discusses these issues. I acknowledge the Ferry, Pend Oreille, and Stevens County commissioners still dispute whether my decision will strike the correct balance between ecological protection and local economic need.

My recommendation, paired with the already designated Salmo-Priest Wilderness on the Colville NF (31,400 acres), would result in about 9 percent of the Forest to be managed as wilderness if Congress should act to formally designate these recommended wilderness areas. I believe that this approach for recommended and designated wilderness provides balance with managing for other desired conditions across the Colville NF. The Salmo-Priest Adjacent recommended wilderness area will improve the manageability of the boundaries of the Salmo-Priest Wilderness. This area also provides valuable habitat for wildlife species that benefit from quiet, unroaded environments, such as grizzly bear, caribou, and lynx. Providing the Abercrombie-Hooknose and Bald Snow recommended wilderness areas will ensure that forest users who seek a wilderness-like experience can find that opportunity on both the east and west zones of the Forest. Managing these areas as recommended wilderness does not mean that fire suppression would not occur if conditions and incident objectives determined that would be the appropriate course of action.

### ***Integrating science and direction for aquatic and terrestrial habitats***

The revised land management plan ensures viable native fish and wildlife populations as well as restoration of forest health on a broad scale including the diversity of vegetation structure across the Forest. Surrogate species are used to represent specific habitats and risk factors across the Forest, and plan components enhance viability of these species by providing favorable habitat conditions and reducing risk factors. Focal species, whose abundance, distribution, health, and trend over time and space are indicative of the functioning of the larger ecological system (USDA Forest Service 1999) are identified for monitoring consistent with 2012 Planning Rule.



The revised land management plan incorporates current science and interagency direction from recovery plans for threatened and endangered species in forestwide wildlife habitat and water resources plan components. It incorporates the 2003 winter recreation strategy and 2012 critical habitat designation for woodland caribou, as well as direction from the 1993 grizzly bear recovery plan in specific components under forestwide wildlife habitat (see revised land management plan, Chapter 2). The revised land management plan also incorporates and updates current management guidance from the Canada Lynx Interagency Agreement. Through the Colville Aquatic and Riparian Conservation Strategy (see FEIS Appendix H), which contains direction for management of riparian and aquatic areas on the Forest, the revised land management plan will contribute to conserving and recovering bull trout.

## **Net Public Benefit**

The 1982 NFMA implementing regulations (1982 Planning Rule 219.1) state that land management plans must “...provide for multiple-use and sustained yield of goods and services from the National Forest System in a way that maximizes long-term net public benefits in an environmentally sound manner.”

I have considered the many competing public desires for uses of the Forest in the context of ecological diversity and integrity, and the economic needs of the counties surrounding the Forest. My decision balances the need for resource conservation with one that contributes to the economic well-being of these communities.

I chose alternative P because, in my judgment, it maximizes the net benefit to the public by:

- Increasing contributions to economic and social needs of people, cultures, and communities while emphasizing a diversity of high-quality motorized and non-motorized outdoor recreation opportunities, as well as a road and trail system that provides access to the Colville NF;
- Emphasizing restoration of vegetation and watersheds to improve resiliency to wildfires and other disturbance while supporting timber harvest, grazing, mining, recreation, and a variety of other uses.
- Aiding in conserving and recovering federally-listed species and other species with viability concerns by incorporating updated science and recovery plans, while providing sustainable and predictable levels of products and services, such as timber and forage;

My choice also considered how the revised land management plan responded to local government concerns and objectives, public comments, internal management concerns, and national direction and policy.

## **Response to Public Concerns**

Many stakeholders shared their concerns and preferences during the collaboration and public involvement for the Colville NF land management plan revision (see page 16 for summary of public involvement). I have made my decision with due consideration of the input from those diverse stakeholders. This section describes the key concerns and comments expressed during the land management plan revision process and how my decision responds to those concerns (see also Summary of Public Participation section below). The full text of the response to public comments is located in the final EIS Appendix E.

### ***Timber harvest and volumes***

Concerns were heard from many parties about the amount of timber harvest and volumes produced by the Colville NF. These comments generally fell into the category of those who wanted to see more timber harvest and those who wanted to see less.

The ASQs of the alternatives considered in detail vary from 7.5 MMBF (alternative R) to 67.6 MMBF per year, and the PWSQs vary from 14 MMBF (alternative R) to 62 MMBF (selected alternative and proposed action). Based on the analysis in Chapter 3 of the final EIS, I have concluded that the harvest levels associated with the selected alternative will best move the Forest toward desired conditions of increased ecological and economic stability. Additionally, I have chosen to allocate 61,700 acres of recommended wilderness and 129,000 acres of backcountry to protect the values that are important to those who wanted an emphasis on recreational experiences and wildlife habitat.

Some commenters were concerned with the consideration of budget constraints developing the revised land management plan (e.g., determining the PWSQ). The revised land management plan was developed to move toward a variety of desired conditions in the various resource and management areas. The desired conditions are unconstrained by budget, but the quantity or amount of each objective was based on the assumption that future budgets stay relatively flat or decrease. Therefore, if future budget allocations increase or other funding opportunities arise, the revised land management plan allows for an increase in outputs within the ASQ as expressed as a ten-year average. The revised land management plan objectives are a projection of what the Colville NF would expect to accomplish if budgets do not increase, but they are not limits to what the Forest may achieve if an increase in staffing or budgets occurs. The objectives also do not take into account the use of special authorities, such as Good Neighbor Authority and stewardship contracts like the Middle and South Fork A-Z project.

### ***Motorized and non-motorized recreation***

Motorized use on the Forest was another key concern. Similar to the issues around timber harvest, comments about motorized and non-motorized recreation on the Forest also fell into the categories of those who wanted more of one type and less of the other.

The Analysis of the Management Situation (2011, 2015) revealed a need to diversify and improve recreation experiences. The demand for activities such as riding off highway vehicles and mountain biking on the Colville NF has increased over since the 1988 land management plan was adopted. The revised land management plan includes areas for motorized use and recreation, and areas where non-motorized experiences are emphasized. Approximately 75 percent of the Forest will be managed for motorized use. The revised land management plan emphasizes the need to work with communities to identify loop trails and routes for motorized mixed use. The revised land management plan also provides areas where recreationists can find opportunities for solitude in a more quiet, semi-primitive, or primitive setting.

Given the need to contribute to local communities and economies, I believe allowing for a variety of recreation experiences, including the motorized and non-motorized opportunities that are increasing in popularity across the region, is important to ensure that the Colville NF continues to be an attractive and exciting place to recreate.

### ***Recommended wilderness***

As described above, public views on recommended wilderness were divergent. Some commenters wanted to see more recommended wilderness, some wanted to see less, or even none. To ensure I

met my legal and regulatory responsibilities during the land management plan revision process for evaluating areas that exhibit wilderness values, I directed the IDT to again look for areas that met the criteria of recommended wilderness areas prior to the release of the final EIS. Through ground verification, the team found limited areas in the Abercrombie-Hooknose recommended wilderness that did indeed have evidence of past timber harvest. The team also addressed concerns from the mining industry regarding access to claims that led to refinement of the boundaries of the Abercrombie-Hooknose and Salmo-Priest Adjacent recommended wilderness areas. The Salmo-Priest Adjacent recommended wilderness was also adjusted to allow more flexibility to manage vegetation and fuels around the water source for the community of Metaline Falls. The team also identified additional acres adjacent to the Bald Snow recommended wilderness area that met the criteria for recommended wilderness, and adjusted the boundary of this recommended wilderness to include those acres. Overall, this exercise resulted in a reduction of about 7,000 acres of recommended wilderness in the selected alternative than what was published in the draft EIS and draft land management plan.

### ***Livestock grazing***

Livestock grazing was also a controversial topic, with some groups requesting that the Forest increase grazing, and some wanting less, or even no grazing at all. The revised land management plan only designates management areas as suitable or not suitable for grazing, consistent with the 1982 Planning Rule. All other grazing decisions will continue to be made at the allotment level.

Many commenters, including local county commissioners, were concerned about the effect of aquatic and riparian plan direction (ARCS, as described above) on livestock grazing. The greenline vegetation guideline included in the draft land management plan received considerable attention. Grazing interests expressed concern that the stubble height requirement is not implementable and that specific numbers were not appropriate for the revised land management plan.

As described above on page 11, I have worked with regional stakeholders to modify this guideline for the final revised land management plan. The final annual grazing use indicators guideline (described above on page 11; see revised land management plan, MA-GDL-RMA-11) clarifies that only those indicators and numeric values that are appropriate to the site and necessary for maintaining or moving toward desired conditions should be applied. The updated guideline emphasizes that inference and professional judgement must be made to interpret and apply the best available scientific information at the site level.

The information used to characterize existing condition and evaluate trend toward desired condition was another issue that prompted conversations with stakeholders, and ultimately led to the revised guideline. Use of the Watershed Condition Framework (WCF) in the evaluation of existing conditions was in particular a point of confusion and concern for the stakeholders that coordinated in revising the guideline. The WCF is now not specifically identified in the guideline as a driver in establishing existing condition. However, the WCF provides information that can and will be used as part of the evaluation with other specific, local information that will also play a prominent role in establishing existing condition for a specific site. I believe these are positive changes to the revised land management plan which will improve and protect habitats, and promote consistent grazing management across the region.

# Engagement with Tribes, State and Local Governments, other Federal Agencies, and the Public

## Summary of Public Participation

Early public involvement for land management plan revision began in 2004 as a combined effort with the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest, and included a series of public meetings (see FEIS Chapter 1). Workshops about the need to change the existing land management plans were held in communities throughout northeastern Washington.

Scoping of the proposed action was initiated with the Federal Register Notice of Intent to Prepare an EIS and Revised Forest Plans in 2011. After review of public scoping input and the feasibility of the combined revision process, the Regional Forester determined that separating the Colville and Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forests' revision efforts was the best way to reflect the very different issues for each forest, based on public input and resource needs.

The Colville NF released a draft EIS for the revised land management plan for public comment in February 2016. The draft EIS analyzed six alternatives, including the 1988 land management plan as the no action alternative, and the proposed action identified in the 2011 scoping.

The Forest received 926 comment letters and hundreds of postcards on the draft EIS and draft land management plan. Major themes of those comments focused on the amounts (more or less) of recommended wilderness, motorized recreation, timber harvest, aquatic and riparian management strategies, and livestock grazing. As a result, the Forest made several changes to recommended wilderness, access, motorized recreation and livestock grazing between draft and final EIS (see Response to Public Comment section on page 13 above). No additional alternatives were analyzed in detail as a result of public comment, though 16 alternatives were considered but eliminated from detailed study (see FEIS, Chapter 2).

## Tribal Consultation

Tribes are sovereign nations, meaning the Forest Service has a government-to-government relationship with them. In addition, the Federal Government also holds a special responsibility to consult with tribes over management concerns that may affect them.

Government-to-government consultation with tribal nations and staff-to-staff consultation with their resource specialists began early and continued throughout the land management plan revision process (see FEIS, Chapter 1). Coordination with tribal planning efforts, (per 36 CFR 219.7), included review of and evaluation of consistency with tribal plans, as documented in final EIS Appendix B.

The Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation borders the southwest part of the Forest. The tribe participated in government to government consultation, and provided written comments on the revised land management plan. Overall, the Colville Confederated Tribes are generally supportive of the revised land management plan. The tribes have concerns about the potential difficulties of managing fuels in the recommended wilderness and backcountry areas along the boundary of the reservation; however, they have also expressed an understanding of the balance the Forest is seeking in addressing the tribes' and others' interests associated with recommended wilderness and backcountry along the tribes' boundary, by including recommended wilderness

and backcountry management areas. The area along the boundary is primarily backcountry and focused restoration management areas where timber harvest is an appropriate tool for fuels management.

The Kalispel Indian Reservation also shares a border with the southeast part of the Forest. The Kalispel Tribe participated in government to government consultation and provided written comments on the draft revised land management plan. The tribe stated concerns about the suitability of grazing on the east side of the forest in the LeClerc watershed, their most cherished cultural landscape. The revised land management plan identifies this area as suitable for grazing, but does not make any decisions about grazing at the allotment level. The tribe also expressed an interest in including the Cee Cee Ah Creek subwatershed as a key watershed. In response, Cee Cee Ah Creek is included as a key watershed in the final revised land management plan.

The Spokane Indian Reservation is south of the Forest, but does not share a direct border. The Spokane Tribe of Indians did not provide written comments on the revised land management plan, but participated in government-to-government consultation. They expressed concern for continued protection of archaeological sites and sites of cultural significance, which the Forest is committed to by adhering to laws such as the National Historic Preservation Act. Additionally, the revised land management plan includes the desired condition for Heritage Resources to preserve, protect, or restore known Native American sacred sites and traditional cultural properties, and includes a standard for heritage program management, further emphasizing these commitments.

## Counties

Meetings with representatives from Ferry, Pend Oreille, and Stevens counties were held on a continuing basis throughout the land management plan revision process. Forest representatives met regularly with individual county board of commissioners as well as combined boards, county departments, and committees such as the Stevens County Public Lands Advisory Committee (see FEIS Appendix B). In addition, county commissioners participated in land management plan revision collaboration and workgroup meetings.

As part of the coordination effort (per 219.7) with county planning efforts, the IDT reviewed and assessed each county's comprehensive plan (Ferry County (2013), Pend Oreille County (2013), Stevens County (2008)), during development of the revised land management plan. The county land use plans describe local government goals and objectives for land management and provide opportunities for coordination between the Forest Service and the county. All elements of these plans were considered while developing alternatives for the Colville NF land management plan revision and no direct conflicts or inconsistencies were identified with topics addressed in those plans. Coordination with county planning efforts, (per 36 CFR 219.7), including review of and evaluation of consistency with these plans, is documented in final EIS Appendix B.

In 2014, the IDT held a series of study sessions with county commissioners, followed by two separate work sessions with county commissioners in fall of 2015 and fall of 2016. The purpose of these meetings was to discuss the commissioners' concerns and consider making adjustments to the revised land management plan where possible. Timber harvest levels, recommended wilderness, access, and grazing were among the commissioners' primary concerns.

The county commissioners expressed interest in a harvest level greater than the 62 MMBF<sup>1</sup> of annual timber and other wood products predicted to be harvested in the revised land management

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<sup>1</sup> This number is termed the potential wood sale quantity (PWSQ), and is associated with the

plan. The Forest has worked with county commissioners to reach an understanding that this number is a projected level of harvest subject to many conditions, and is not a cap or a target. The Forest also continues to strive to accomplish restoration goals by initiating creative, collaborative methods to increase harvest volumes and acres treated, while benefitting local communities.

The county commissioners do not support recommended wilderness. To be responsive to these concerns, modifications were made in the final EIS and final revised land management plan, reducing the final acres of recommended wilderness in the selected alternative from 69,000 acres to 61,700 acres (see pages 11-12 above). The Forest has worked to balance the county commissioners' concerns with comments from other stakeholders that wanted more recommended wilderness (see also Response to Public Comment section on page 13 above).

The county commissioners are also interested in maintaining access to the Forest and increasing opportunities for motorized use. They requested no net loss of roads on the Forest and remain concerned about desired conditions for road densities in focused and general restoration management areas. During the work sessions in 2015 and 2016, the IDT worked with county commissioners to reach an understanding that the revised land management plan itself does not close roads or make any site-specific decisions about access. Additionally, the IDT adjusted the way road densities are calculated. National Forest System roads maintenance levels 1-5 are used to calculate road density, but maintenance level 1 roads that have been hydrologically stabilized are not included (see also Rationale for Decision section, page 8)

Concern that livestock grazing may be reduced with implementation of the aquatic and riparian strategy associated with the revised land management plan was also expressed by the counties. In response, changes were made to the greenline vegetation guideline that was included in the draft land management plan. These changes highlight the flexibility of the guideline to use the best available tools to assess site-specific conditions. Forest range program managers have also worked with permittees to increase understanding of how these guidelines will be implemented (see also Rationale for Decision and Response to Public Comments sections starting on page 8 above).

In 2016 the Ferry, Stevens, and Pend Oreille county commissioners formed the Tri-county Forest Group that has engaged in the land management planning process. County government, industry, conservation and environmental groups, and motorized recreation groups are included among those who participate in this collaborative group, now known as the Tri-County Forest Group. This group provided specific language for a motorized mixed use desired condition that is included in the final revised land management plan.

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concern by county commissioners about establishment of a limitation or timber harvest target in the selected alternative. The PWSQ is the estimated annual quantity of timber and all other wood products that are expected to be sold from the plan area during the plan period. The PWSQ consists of the projected timber sale quantity as well as other woody material such as fuelwood, firewood, or biomass that is also expected to be available for sale. The PWSQ includes volume from timber harvest for any purpose (except salvage or sanitation harvest) from all lands in the plan area based on expected harvests that would be consistent with the plan components. The PWSQ is neither a target nor a limitation on harvest.

## State Agencies

Several Washington State agencies either are affected by, or affect, forest management. These include Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Washington Department of Natural Resources, and Washington Department of Ecology. The Forest held several meetings with these State agencies throughout the land management plan revision process.

In addition to information provided in coordination meetings, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and Department of Ecology submitted written comments on the draft revised land management plan. In response to these comments, the Forest worked to strengthen plan components and provide clarification on the effects of the revised land management plan on wildlife habitat and water quality.

Statewide assessments were also considered in the development of the revised land management plan, and the IDT's review is documented in the final FEIS Appendix B. The Forest worked collaboratively with the state to develop the State of Washington's 20-Year Forest Health Strategic Plan for eastern Washington, which includes the Colville NF. The revised land management plan incorporates the overarching landscape scale strategy of the State's Strategic Plan for eastern Washington, and supports the goals of protecting communities and values at risk, promoting rural economic development, monitoring and adaptive management.

The Washington State Wildlife Action Plan was used to help develop the list of species addressed in the species viability analysis. Information in the State's Wildlife Action Plan also was used to identify habitat relations and risk factors for species, development of the plan components, and assess effects of the revised land management plan on these wildlife species.

## Federal Agencies

Management of other Federal lands adjacent to the Colville NF was considered in the formulation of alternatives and their cumulative effects, including lands managed by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and Bureau of Land Management. The Forest also coordinated with U.S. Customs and Border Protection, and U.S. Air Force.

The Forest consulted with the USFWS on ESA-listed species and habitat that could be affected by the revised land management plan. A final Biological Opinion (BO) was provided to the Forest on October 26, 2017 (see section on Findings Related to other Laws and Regulations, page 27 below).

The Environmental Protection Agency provided written comments regarding vegetation management, riparian habitat, and best available science. In general, these comments were addressed by providing clarification about the programmatic nature of the revised land management plan. Specific concerns about stubble height and livestock grazing guidelines were addressed via the updates to the annual grazing use indicators guideline (see also Rationale for Decision and Response to Public Comments sections starting on page 8 above). Concerns regarding protection of large trees were addressed via a guideline for large tree management in the final revised land management plan (see page 22 below).

## Alternatives

This section describes the alternatives considered in this draft ROD in order to provide important context for the decision being made. The Colville NF analyzed six alternatives in detail: no

action, the proposed action, and four alternatives developed in response to issues raised by the public. These alternatives are described in detail in Chapter 2 of the final EIS.

Alternative development was driven by the need for change, as described above. The primary difference between alternatives is in how the management areas with different emphases were distributed across the landscape to address one or more of the revision topics, such as timber harvest or motorized access.

All action alternatives represent, to varying degrees, the principles of multiple-use and ecological and economic sustainability. The alternatives provide basic protection of forest resources and comply fully with applicable laws, regulations, and policies. In addition, all action alternatives would:

- Meet the purpose and need for change or address one or more significant issues;
- Provide sustained multiple uses, products, and services in an environmentally acceptable manner (including leasable and locatable minerals, timber, livestock forage, and recreation opportunities);
- Retain existing designated areas (e.g., wilderness areas, scenic byways, national scenic trails, see table 1 below);
- Retain all existing permitted activities and facilities;
- Protect heritage resources;
- Recognize the unique status of American Indian tribes and their rights retained by trust and executive order with the United States, including consultation requirements;
- Conserve soil and water resources and not allow significant or permanent impairment of the productivity of the land;
- Provide protections for riparian areas;
- Contribute to the recovery and viability of terrestrial and aquatic wildlife and plant species;
- Maintain air quality that meets or exceeds applicable Federal, State, and/or local standards or regulations;

In addition, a monitoring strategy and the following plan components are included in all alternatives: desired conditions, objectives, standards and guidelines, and suitability of uses. The plan components are defined in Chapter 1 and described in detail in Chapters 2 and 3 of the revised land management plan.

## **Alternatives Considered in Detail**

In addition to the no action alternative and the proposed action, the Forest Service developed four action alternatives, which respond to the needs for change and issues identified by the public, which are briefly described below. Acres listed for each alternative description are approximate.

### **No Action Alternative**

The no action alternative reflects current management direction under the existing 1988 land management plan, as amended. It provides the basis for comparing the existing condition to the proposed action and the alternatives.

- This alternative includes direction from INFISH and Eastside Screens amendments. Harvest of trees over 21-inches in diameter would continue to be prohibited;



- Scheduled timber harvest would be suitable on 52 percent of the Forest. Incidental timber harvest for specific resource benefit would be allowed on an additional 31 percent of the Forest. The ASQ for the plan area under the Eastside screens would be 18 MMBF. The PWSQ volume would be 41 million board feet (MMBF), with an estimated wage contribution of \$19,335,000.
- Planned ignitions (prescribed fire) would continue to be suitable on 97 percent of the Forest (outside of congressionally designated wilderness). Unplanned ignitions (wildland fire use) would be suitable on 90 percent of the Forest;
- There would be no recommended wilderness under the no action alternative. The Salmo-Priest Wilderness is and would continue to be congressionally designated (31,400 acres);
- Approximately 11 percent of the Forest would be managed for non-motorized recreation opportunities;
- Would include riparian habitat conservation areas (RHCAs) and the priority watershed network established under INFISH. It would manage toward the eight riparian goals established under INFISH.

## Proposed Action

The June 2011 proposed action was developed to address the need for change, and considered early public participation that began in 2003. The emphasis of this alternative is to apply active vegetation management in a dynamic landscape approach to increase vegetation resilience and move the landscape toward desired conditions. Landscape ecology concepts would be applied to provide for ecological resilience to disturbances, including the effects of climate change. New science related to the recovery of terrestrial and aquatic threatened and endangered species would be applied.

- Vegetation requirements in Eastside Screens would be addressed with desired conditions to be within HRV by stand size class. Down and coarse wood and biological legacies are addressed in a similar manner. The Eastside Screens 21-inch diameter limit would be replaced by structural stage and wildlife habitat direction;
- Scheduled timber harvest would be suitable on 63 percent of the Forest. Timber harvest would be allowed for other resource benefit on an additional 20 percent of the Forest. The ASQ would be 67.6 MMBF, and annual PWSQ volume would be 62 MMBF, with an estimated wage contribution of \$31,224,000;
- Planned and unplanned ignitions would be suitable on 100 percent of the Forest;
- An additional 101,400 acres of wilderness would be recommended (including the Kettle Crest). Existing inconsistent uses (such as mountain bike and chainsaw use) would continue in recommended wilderness management areas until such time as designated as wilderness by Congress;
- The proposed action would adopt the 2008 ARCS, replacing INFISH with a long-term strategy that uses best science and aligns species and water quality recovery plans. It would focus on desired conditions for aquatic and riparian function and watershed condition. The proposed action would include a key watershed network, replacing the priority watersheds established under INFISH.

## Alternative P (selected alternative)

Alternative P is similar to the proposed action in the overall vegetation management approach and outputs, as well as backcountry recreation management approach.

- Vegetation requirements in Eastside Screens would be addressed with desired conditions to be within HRV by stand size class. Down and coarse wood and biological legacies would be addressed in a similar manner. The 21” diameter limit would be replaced by structural stage and wildlife habitat direction, and a guideline for large tree management;
- Scheduled timber harvest would be suitable on 63 percent of the Forest. Timber harvest would be allowed for other resource benefit on an additional 19 percent of the Forest. The ASQ would be 67 MMBF, and annual PWSQ volume would be 62 MMBF, with an estimated wage contribution of \$31,224,000;
- Planned and unplanned ignitions would be suitable on 100 percent of the Forest;
- An additional 61,700 acres of wilderness would be recommended (not including the Kettle Crest). Existing inconsistent uses (such as mountain bike and chainsaw use) would continue in recommended wilderness until such time as designated as wilderness by Congress. No new motorized or mechanized recreation opportunities would be allowed;
- Approximately 80,300 acres would be managed as the Kettle Crest Recreation Area. This management area allocation would protect outstanding recreation opportunities in a semi-primitive setting while allowing continued motorized and mechanized recreation opportunities;
- Alternative P would increase riparian protection through plan components developed under the Colville ARCS, and expand the key watershed network by including Cee Cee Ah Creek as a key watershed.

## Alternative R

Alternative R was developed to address concerns from conservation groups, and emphasizes a large-scale reserve approach for late-successional forest structure and a passive management approach to reach desired conditions.

- Eastside Screens 21-inch diameter limit on cutting live trees would be retained. Down and coarse wood and biological legacies would be addressed per Eastside Screens direction;
- Scheduled timber harvest would be suitable on 12 percent of the Forest. Timber harvest would be allowed for other resource benefit on an additional 70 percent of the Forest. The ASQ would be 7.5 MMBF, and annual PWSQ volume would be 14 MMBF, with an estimated wage contribution of \$6,692,000;
- Planned and unplanned ignitions would be suitable on 100 percent of the Forest;
- An additional 209,000 acres of wilderness would be recommended (including the Kettle Crest). Existing inconsistent uses (such as mechanized, motorized, and rental cabins) would not be allowed to continue in recommended wilderness. Approximately 24 percent of the Forest would be suitable for non-motorized recreation opportunities. Backcountry and backcountry motorized management areas represent 2 percent of the Forest;
- Alternative R would use a similar aquatic strategy approach as the proposed action alternative through incorporation of a modified version of ARCS (2008). It would include a key watersheds network.

## Alternative B

Alternative B was developed based on recommendations from the Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition, and points of consensus with public workgroups. It is designed to address the concerns of multiple constituencies in one alternative by balancing land allocations between areas

emphasizing active management (timber management zones) (43 percent), a mix of active and passive management (restoration areas) (31 percent), and passive management (recommended and designated wilderness) (23 percent). Where plan components were not identified by the collaborative group, the 1988 land management plan (no action alternative) would provide plan direction (remain unchanged).

- Eastside Screens 21-inch diameter limit on cutting live trees and the large-scale reserve approach for late-successional forest structure would be retained. Additional plan components would limit timber harvest in late-successional structure to dry plant association groups only;
- Scheduled timber harvest would be suitable on 37 percent of the Forest. Timber harvest would be allowed for other resource benefit on an additional 46 percent of the Forest. The ASQ would be 13.9 MMBF, and annual PWSQ volume would be 37 MMBF, with an estimated wage contribution of \$17,428,000;
- Planned and unplanned ignitions would be suitable on 100 percent of the Forest;
- An additional 220,300 acres of wilderness would be recommended (including the Kettle Crest). Existing uses that are inconsistent with wilderness values (such as mechanized and motorized uses, and rental cabins) would not continue in recommended wilderness management areas;
- Approximately 24 percent of the Forest would be suitable for non-motorized recreation opportunities. Backcountry and backcountry motorized management areas represent 1 percent of the Forest;
- Alternative B would retain and integrate INFISH, including the priority watersheds, and continue management of RHCAs similar to the no action alternative.

## **Alternative O**

Alternative O would balance land allocations, similar to alternative B, between areas emphasizing active management (Responsible Management Areas) (39 percent), emphasizing a mix of active and passive management (Restoration Areas) (34 percent), and emphasizing passive management (backcountry and recommended/designated wilderness) (25 percent). Where plan components were not identified by the collaborative group, the 1988 land management plan (no action alternative) would provide plan direction (remain unchanged).

- Eastside Screens 21-inch diameter limit on cutting live trees and the large-scale reserve approach for late-successional forest structure would be retained. Additional plan components would be included to limit mechanical restoration treatments (timber harvest) to a one-time entry;
- Scheduled timber harvest would be suitable on 33 percent of the Forest. Timber harvest would be allowed for other resource benefit on an additional 49 percent of the Forest. The ASQ is 12.2 MMBF, annual PWSQ volume would be 38 MMBF, with an estimated wage contribution of \$17,465,000;
- Planned and unplanned ignitions would be suitable on 100 percent of the Forest;
- An additional 15,900 acres would be recommended as wilderness (Salmo-Priest Adjacent). Existing inconsistent uses (such as mountain bike and chainsaw use) would continue in recommended wilderness until such time as designated as wilderness by Congress. No new motorized or mechanized recreation opportunities would be allowed;

- Approximately 21 percent of the Forest would be suitable for non-motorized recreation opportunities. Backcountry and backcountry motorized management areas represent 21 percent of the Forest;
- Approximately 99,000 acres would be managed as the Kettle Crest Recreation Area. This management area allocation would protect outstanding recreation opportunities in a semi-primitive setting while allowing continued motorized and mechanized recreation opportunities;
- Alternative O would adopt ARCS (2008) similar to the proposed action. It would include a key watersheds network.

## **Alternatives Considered but Eliminated From Detailed Study**

Federal agencies are required by NEPA to rigorously explore and objectively evaluate all reasonable alternatives and to briefly discuss the reasons for eliminating any alternatives that were not developed in detail (40 CFR 1502.14). Public comments received in response to the proposed action provided suggestions for alternative methods for achieving the purpose and need. Some of these alternatives may have been outside the scope of this revision effort or duplicative of the alternatives considered in detail. More than sixteen alternatives or variations of alternatives were considered, but dismissed from detailed study for reasons summarized in Chapter 2 of the final EIS and in the response to public comments (FEIS, Appendix E).

## **Range of Alternatives**

After considering the analysis of all the alternatives, and the alternatives considered but eliminated from detailed study, I believe a reasonable range of alternatives was carefully evaluated based on the need for change and compliance with the NEPA.

Although consideration of budget constraints reduced the variation in the effects of the actions across the alternatives, the analysis in the final EIS covered a full spectrum of management intensity ranging from a preservation emphasis in alternative R to a more balanced approach of increased commodity output, with non-motorized and motorized recreation emphasis in alternative P. All action alternatives are realistic, implementable, and responsive to the revision topics.

## **Environmentally Preferable Alternative**

The NEPA regulations require agencies to specify the alternative or alternatives which were considered to be environmentally preferable (40 CFR 1505.2(b)). Forest Service policy (FSH 1909.15) defines environmentally preferable as: “An alternative that best meets the goals of Section 101 of NEPA. ... Ordinarily this is the alternative that causes the least damage to the biological and physical environment and best protects, preserves, and enhances historical, cultural, and natural resources.”

I find, based upon the laws and regulations guiding National Forest System management, that alternative P is the environmentally preferred alternative. Although alternative R would allow the fewest mechanical ground-disturbing activities and lowest acres allowing motorized use, it does not address the six goals of NEPA (outlined below) as well as alternative P does. I base my finding on the following comparison showing how the alternatives address the goals of Section 101 of NEPA:

- 1. Fulfill the responsibilities of each generation as trustees of the environment for succeeding generations**

The selected alternative emphasizes moving forest conditions toward desired future conditions while contributing to ecological, social, and economic sustainability. The selected alternative provides movement toward vegetation desired conditions while providing sustainable levels of timber. The timber harvest levels under the selected alternative provide the Colville NF's sustainable share of products and public uses, while having a higher probability of improving and restoring vegetation for future generations than other alternatives considered in detail (see FEIS, Chapter 3, Forested Vegetation).

**2. Assure for all Americans safe, healthful, productive, and aesthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings**

The selected alternative achieves maintenance of a safe, healthful, productive, and aesthetically and culturally pleasing Forest better than the other alternatives because it provides the best mix of resource utilization, active and passive management, and motorized and non-motorized recreation uses along with the safeguards provided by standards and guidelines for maintaining water quality, scenery, and wildlife habitat. The selected alternative also provides greater timber harvest levels compared to the no action alternative and maintains access to important recreational areas better than alternative R.

**3. Attain the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment without degradation, risk to health or safety, or other undesirable and unintended consequences**

The beneficial uses that are most varied between alternatives include timber production, aquatic management and a reasonable balance between motorized and non-motorized recreation opportunities. The selected alternative achieves a higher level of beneficial uses than the other alternatives. While the proposed action provides almost the same level of wood fiber production as the selected alternative, it provides less flexibility and fewer provisions for aquatic restoration and maintenance. The selected alternative provides for greater assurance of maintenance of large trees across the landscape over time. This improves the health of our forests and watersheds, enhances wildlife habitat, and reduces undesirable and unintended consequences. Additionally, the selected alternative (alternative P) provides a reasonable balance between motorized and non-motorized recreation opportunities by allowing for motorized use on 75 percent of the Forest while the proposed action alternative would allow for motorized use on 73 percent of the Forest. It should be noted that non-motorized uses also are available in areas suitable for motorized use.

**4. Preserve important historic, cultural, and natural aspects of our national heritage and maintain, wherever possible, an environment, which supports diversity and variety of individual choice**

Part of preserving our historic and cultural national heritage is recognizing that humans are a natural aspect of our national heritage. Humans have utilized the physical and cultural resources offered by the Colville NF for thousands of years. Recognizing that, I find that the best way to preserve that heritage, and the environment that supports diversity and variety of choice, is to manage for a National Forest that provides a balance between the physical resource use and the appropriate protection of cultural and historic resources. Based upon collaborative public efforts, tribal consultation, and the effects of each alternative displayed in the final EIS, I find that all alternatives meet this goal. However, the selected alternative adopts a landscape scale approach, including the ARCS, and an adaptive monitoring strategy. It provides the best balance of uses between alternative R's emphasis on wilderness values and protection of backcountry and the proposed action's emphasis on achieving desired

conditions through mechanical means. The selected alternative provides the best balance to preserve our natural heritage.

**5. Achieve a balance between population and resource use, which will permit high standards of living and a wide sharing of life's amenities**

The public demands a variety of products and uses that can be provided by their National Forests. National Forest lands and resources contribute to local economies and the quality of life in the region. The final EIS alternative analysis compares the various values the public uses to determine their quality of life, varying from economic resource extraction values (timber harvest and minerals) to less tangibly-defined resources such as recreation, wilderness values, and backcountry protection. I find that the selected alternative best achieves the balance sought in this goal by increasing timber volumes and jobs, maintaining livestock grazing, keeping 75 percent of the Forest open for motorized access, and at the same time designating 6 percent of the Forest as recommended wilderness.

**6. Enhance the quality of renewable resources and approach the maximum attainable recycling of depletable resources**

I find the selected alternative enhances the quality of renewable resources and provides sustainable use of renewable resources. The standards and guidelines and the management area allocation under the selected alternative provides for levels of resource use that are greater than current levels under the no action alternative, while providing protection measures and maintaining areas as backcountry or recommended wilderness. While the proposed action provides the same level of resource use, it does not provide plan components that maintain and enhance wildlife habitat to the same degree as does the selected alternative (alternative P). Alternative R emphasizes more passive management and greater amount of backcountry and recommended wilderness, but it does so at the expense of resource utilization and does not achieve as much vegetation restoration as the selected alternative.

## Using Best Available Science

The development of the final EIS and the revised land management plan was based on consideration of the best available science throughout the planning process. The IDT comprehensively reviewed available scientific research and other information relevant to the resource areas addressed. Scientific conclusions were drawn from well-supported data sources and data availability was disclosed. Scientific sources were cited, responsible opposing views were discussed, incomplete and unavailable information was acknowledged, and scientific uncertainty and risk was addressed in relevant portions of the final EIS or project record. In addition, specific modeling and analysis methods were documented as appropriate.

For the Colville NF, scientific studies in this analysis included science supporting the Interior Columbia Basin Management Project (Quigley et al. 1996, 1997), a project initiated in 1993 to “develop a scientifically sound ecosystem-based strategy for management of eastside forests.” A final EIS and proposed decision for the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project were published in December 2000. In January 2003, the Regional Executives for the Forest Service, Forest Service Research, BLM, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Marine Fisheries Service, and the EPA signed a Memorandum of Understanding completing the project. The agencies signing the memorandum agreed to cooperatively implement the Interior Columbia Basin Strategy (Strategy), to use the scientific findings of the Strategy’s science, and to integrate new information and best available science as they are developed.

The Strategy was updated in 2014, incorporating the science data and resource information developed by the Interior Columbia Basin Management Project, as well as more recent science, into land use plans (Forest Service land management plans and BLM resource management plans) and project implementation. The Strategy identifies key principles that are relevant to future planning efforts including an update of ecological principles. The revised land management plan has been designed to be responsive to the guidance and expectations identified in the Strategy. For more information on the Strategy, including expectations for incorporating guidance from the Strategy in land management plan revisions, refer to the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project website at:

[https://icbemp.gov/html/ICBEMP\\_Frameworkmemorandum-and-strategy\\_2014.pdf](https://icbemp.gov/html/ICBEMP_Frameworkmemorandum-and-strategy_2014.pdf)

In addition, the specialists on the IDT have used and referenced appropriate scientific information, models, and data to develop the analyses and conclusions in the final EIS. This science has been continually updated throughout the land management plan revision and environmental analysis process. The final EIS explains how scientific information has been compiled and used. Each resource section analyzed in Chapter 3, Environmental Consequences, discloses the methods used and cites the scientific sources relied on to disclose the effects of the alternatives.

## Findings Related to Laws and Regulations

The Forest Service manages the Colville NF in conformance with many laws and regulations. I have reviewed the statutes specific to individual resources as described in Chapter 3 of the final EIS, and I find this decision represents the best possible approach to both harmonizing and reconciling the current statutory duties of the Forest Service. The revised land management plan is strategic and programmatic in nature, providing guidance and direction to future site-specific projects and activities. Following are summaries of how the revised land management plan addresses compliance with some of the more prominent applicable laws and regulations.

### National Forest Management Act

The NFMA requires the development, maintenance, amendment, and revision of land management plans for each unit of the National Forest System. These plans help create a dynamic management system so that an interdisciplinary approach to achieve integrated consideration of physical, biological, economic, and other sciences will be applied to all future actions on the unit (16 U.S.C. 1604(b), (f), (g), and (o)). The Forest Service is to ensure coordination of the multiple uses and sustained yield of products and services of the National Forest System (16 U.S.C. 1604(e)(1)).

The NFMA requires the Secretary of Agriculture to promulgate regulations for developing and maintaining land management plans. On April 9, 2012, the Department of Agriculture issued a final planning rule for National Forest System land management planning (2012 Rule) 77 FR 68 [21162-21276]. According to transition language of the 2012 Planning Rule at 36 CFR 219.17(b)(3), the responsible official may elect to use the provisions of the prior planning regulations (1982 Planning Rule, dated September 30, 1982, and as amended<sup>2</sup>) to prepare plan

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<sup>2</sup> The 1982 provisions can be found online at <http://www.fs.fed.us/emc/nfma/includes/nfmareg.html>.

revisions initiated prior to the effective date of the regulations. The Colville NF elected to use the provisions of the 1982 Planning Rule for the plan revision.

The 1982 Planning Rule under 36 CFR §219.7(c) requires the review of planning and land use policies of other Federal Agencies, State and local governments and Indian tribes. This review includes (1) consideration of the objectives of these entities as expressed in their plans and policies; (2) an assessment of the interrelated impacts of these plans and policies; (3) determination of how the Forest's revised land management plan should deal with impacts identified; and (4) where conflicts with Forest Service planning are identified, consideration of alternatives for their resolution. The IDT's review of these plans is documented in the final EIS Appendix B.

### **Establishment of Forestwide Multiple-Use Goals, Objectives, Desired Conditions, and Quantities of Goods and Services (1982 Planning Rule, 36 CFR 219.11(b))**

Forestwide goals, termed in this plan as desired conditions, and objectives are defined in Chapter 1 and listed by resource in Chapter 2 of the revised land management plan. The "quantities of goods and services" are defined in the objectives located in Chapters 2 and 3 of the revised land management plan. Chapter 3 of the revised land management plan lists objectives for the desired conditions, by management area. I believe that the desired conditions and objectives provide sufficient multiple-use goals for management and resource protection. I find that the objectives were developed in an interdisciplinary manner, and provide for maintenance or achievement of the revised land management plan's desired conditions.

### **Establishment of Management Area Direction (Multiple-use Prescriptions) with Associated Standards and Guidelines (1982 Planning Rule, 36 CFR 219.11(c))**

The revised land management plan allocates 13 management areas across the Colville NF that each have specific management direction. The management areas span a continuum of management emphasis from a passive approach with little human-caused change, to more active management with substantially more human-caused change, designed to sustain the social, economic, and ecological attributes of the Forest. The management area prescriptions include specific desired conditions, objectives, standards and guidelines, which are listed by management area in Chapter 3 of the revised land management plan. Unless otherwise stated in the revised land management plan, forestwide desired conditions, objectives, standards and guidelines also apply to all management areas.

Land within the Colville NF may be assigned to more than one management area. For example, the Kettle Crest Recreation Area overlays backcountry and backcountry-motorized management areas. Riparian Management Areas and Nationally Designated Trails are other examples where direction from more than one management area may apply to the same part of the Forest. In such cases, the most restrictive plan direction applies to the area of overlap.

The emphasis of each management area is described in Chapter 3 of the revised land management plan and in Chapter 2 of the final EIS, under the alternative descriptions. Total percent and acres of each management area are shown in bold. I find that the management areas provide a reasonable range of management direction for the Colville NF.



## **Recommendations to Congress for Additions to the Wilderness Preservation System**

Specific direction for the management and protection of wilderness characteristics in recommended wilderness is included in the revised land management plan and complies with the planning regulations (36 CFR 219) and agency policy (Forest Service Handbook 1900). I am recommending the addition of 6 percent of the Forest for wilderness. These areas include portions of Abercrombie-Hooknose (29,300 acres), Bald Snow (17,400 acres), and Salmo-Priest Adjacent (14,900 acres) IRAs. Components of the revised land management plan direct that current uses in these areas, including mountain biking and chainsaw use, may continue so long as the wilderness characteristics and potential for each area recommended remains intact until congressional action is taken or the area is released from consideration through a future plan amendment or revision.

These preliminary administrative recommendations are consistent with my responsibilities under 36 CFR 219.17. These recommendations will receive further review and possible modification by the Chief of the Forest Service, Secretary of Agriculture, and the President of the United States. Congress has reserved the authority to make final decisions on wilderness designation. Until such time Congress chooses to act to designate these areas, these areas will be managed as recommended wilderness under the revised land management plan.

## **Determine Suitability and Potential Capability of Lands for Resource Production (Timber and Grazing) (1982 Planning Rule, CFR 219.14 and 219.20)**

Suitability of lands for timber production and suitability and capability of lands for grazing are defined in part by management area standards and guidelines. The revised land management plan identifies 63 percent (656,600 acres) of the Forest as suitable for scheduled timber production. These suitable acres fall within general restoration and focused restoration management areas.

Approximately 690,311 acres are capable of producing forage for cattle, while 881,287 acres are capable of producing forage for sheep (these areas overlap in many places). Of this, approximately 363,217 acres are suitable for grazing cattle, and 447,532 are suitable for grazing sheep, based on allotments and management area allocations. Livestock grazing is identified as a suitable use in all management areas except for research natural areas and administrative sites. I have determined that the processes used for assessing suitability and potential capability for livestock grazing and timber production are consistent with my responsibilities under 36 CFR 219.20 (for livestock) and 36 CFR 219.14 (for timber).

## **NFMA Diversity and Viability Requirements**

The NFMA also requires that land management plans “provide for diversity of plant and animal communities based on the suitability and capability of the specific land area in order to meet overall multiple-use objectives, and within the multiple-use objectives of a land management plan adopted pursuant to this section, provide, where appropriate, to the degree practicable, for steps to be taken to preserve the diversity of tree species similar to that existing in the region controlled by the plan” (16 U.S.C. §1604 §6 (g)(3)(B)). The 1982 Planning Rule requires that “Forest planning shall provide for diversity of plant and animal communities and tree species consistent with the over-all multiple-use objectives of the planning area” (36 CFR 219.26). In addition, land management plans shall provide direction to manage fish and wildlife habitat to maintain viable<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For planning purposes, a viable population shall be regarded as one that has the estimated

populations of existing native and desired non-native vertebrate species in the planning area (36 CFR 219.19).

My interdisciplinary team identified the species that occur on the forests, determined which of those species have special concerns, narrowed down which species could be affected by forest management, screened the risks to species through a coarse filter (ecosystem diversity), and developed additional plan components where necessary through a fine filter approach (species diversity).

The overall goal for ecological sustainability is to sustain native ecological systems and support diversity of native plant and animal species. The focus in the sustainability analysis was on species that are of regional or local concern as indicated by documented threats to populations or habitats. Native vertebrates and invertebrates known to occur on land administered by the Colville NF also were considered. In addition to viability, the revised land management plan establishes surrogate species that represent the habitats and risk factors that relate to a broader group of species. There are over 30 surrogate terrestrial and aquatic species listed for the revised land management plan. The final EIS (Chapter 3) documents how the revised land management plan provides for diversity and viability of these surrogate species.

My review of the planning process and the final EIS indicates the revised land management plan and its preparation meet requirements for NFMA viability, per 36 CFR 219.19, and diversity, per 36 CFR 219.26. Therefore, the revised land management plan is fully compliant with the act.

### **Establishment of Monitoring and Evaluation Requirements that Provide a Basis for Periodic Determination and Evaluation of the Effects of Management Practices (2012 Planning Rule)**

The monitoring plan, described in Chapter 4 of the revised land management plan, is consistent with the 2012 Planning Rule at 36 CFR 219.11(d) and 219.12(k). Each monitoring question links to one or more goals, desired conditions, or objectives. However, the monitoring program strives to be realistic in terms of budget and capacity and does not include a monitoring question for every plan component. The monitoring requirements will provide the information necessary to evaluate implementation of the revised land management plan and will facilitate adaptive management in response to monitoring results and other new information.

### **Research Station Director Concurrence**

Consistent with the Forest Service Manual (FSM) 1921.04.b.4 and 4063.04.b.1.b, revised land management plan components for experimental forests and research natural areas were reviewed by the Station Director, Pacific Northwest Research Station. The Station Director, by April 24, 2017 letter, has approved the revised land management plans' management direction for experimental forests and research natural areas.

### **Archaeological Resources Protection Act**

The purpose of the Archeological Resources Protection Act is to provide protection for archaeological resources found on public lands and Indian lands of the United States. The legislation provides civil and criminal penalties for those who remove or damage archaeological

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numbers and distribution of reproductive individuals to ensure its continued existence is well distributed in the planning area (36 CFR 219.19).

resources in violation of the prohibitions contained in the act. The act prohibits the removal of archaeological resources on public lands or Indian lands without first obtaining a permit from the affected Federal land manager or Indian Tribe, and requires Federal agencies to develop plans to survey lands under their management to determine the nature and extent of archaeological and cultural resources.

The revised land management plan is strategic and programmatic in nature, providing guidance and direction to future site-specific projects and activities. Compliance with section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and 36 CFR 800 regulations also meets the intent of this act by requiring assessments and surveys to identify the presence of historic properties within the area of potential effect for site-specific activities and to assess their effects on these resources. In addition, the Colville NF will continue to consult with tribes during site-specific management activities that may impact cultural sites and cultural use. The revised land management plan includes desired conditions, standards, guidelines, and management focus provisions to consider the effects of project and management activities to American Indian rights, interests, and cultural resources. Therefore, the revised land management plan is fully compliant with this act.

## **Clean Air Act**

According to the Clean Air Act of 1990, the Forest Service has the responsibility to protect the air, land, and water resources from the impacts of air pollutants produced within national forest boundaries and to work with states to protect those same resources from degradation associated with the impacts of air pollution emitted outside of national forests.

The revised land management plan does not create, authorize, or execute any activities with the potential to alter air quality, although it does provide for the consideration of certain types of activities such as prescribed burning. Forestwide desired conditions and guidelines include direction for meeting air quality standards established by Federal and State agencies during prescribed burns. Therefore, the revised land management plan is fully compliant with this act.

## **Clean Water Act**

The intent of the Clean Water Act is to restore and maintain the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the nation's waters. The revised land management plan does not create, authorize, or execute any ground-disturbing activity, although it does provide for the consideration of certain types of activities. The revised land management plan contains direction to ensure all site-specific projects meet or exceed State water quality standards by implementing best management practices prepared under guidance of the Clean Water Act. Implementation of the revised land management plan is expected to contribute to protecting or restoring the physical, chemical, and biological integrity of surface and ground water within the Colville NF in accordance with the Clean Water Act. Therefore, the revised land management plan is fully compliant with this act.

## **Endangered Species Act**

The purpose of the ESA is to provide a means whereby the ecosystems upon which endangered species and threatened species depend may be conserved and to provide for the conservation of such endangered species and threatened species. Section 7(a)(1) of the ESA requires federal agencies to carry out programs for the conservation of listed species. In addition, ESA requires federal agencies to insure that any agency action does not jeopardize the continued existence of the listed species or adversely modify or destroy designated critical habitat (ESA Section 7(a)(2)). ESA also requires the USFWS and Forest Service, respectively, to base the BO and subsequent agency action on the use of best scientific and commercial data available [16 U.S.C. 1536(a)(2)].

In accordance with Section 7(c) of the ESA, USFWS identified the listed and proposed threatened or endangered species and their critical habitats that may be present on the Forest. A biological assessment (BA) was prepared by the Forest to assess the revised land management plan's effects on the identified terrestrial, aquatic, and plant species and their critical habitats.

The terrestrial portion of the BA found implementation of the revised land management plan *may affect, and is likely to adversely affect* woodland caribou, Canada lynx, grizzly bear, yellow billed cuckoo and the candidate species whitebark pine and the proposed wolverine. The BA also determined that implementation of the revised land management plan may *adversely affect* designated critical habitat for woodland caribou. The BA outlines the specific reasons why implementation of the revised land management plan may have short-term adverse effects to these species and critical habitat but result in overall net conservation and recovery benefits.

The aquatic portion of the BA found implementation of the revised land management plan *may affect, and is likely to adversely affect* bull trout and its designated critical habitat. The BA outlines the specific reasons why implementation of the revised land management plan may have short-term adverse effects to this species and its critical habitat, but result in overall net conservation and recovery benefits.

The USFWS issued a biological opinion for the revised land management plan on October 24, 2017. The biological opinion determined that the actions as proposed are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of Canada lynx, woodland caribou, grizzly bear, yellow billed cuckoo, wolverine, whitebark pine, or bull trout, and are not likely to destroy or adversely modify critical habitat for woodland caribou or bull trout. No incidental take was issued by USFWS associated with the revised land management plan's programmatic actions, as incidental take is to be assigned, as necessary, for future, site-specific projects. Therefore, the revised land management plan is fully compliant with the requirements of this act.

## **Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act**

The procedures of the 1982 Planning Rule (36 CFR 219.12(f)(6)) require that at least one alternative be developed that responds to and incorporates the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act (RPA) Program's tentative resource objectives for each National Forest as displayed in Regional Guides. However, in 2001, the Pacific Northwest Region's Regional Guide was retracted. Therefore, for purposes of ensuring consistency with the RPA, we designed all action alternatives to support the broad resource objectives of the Forest Service's Strategic Plan for 2015–2020. The Strategic Plan was developed in lieu of an RPA Program, and was completed in accordance with the Government Performance Results Act and the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Act. Therefore, the revised land management plan is fully compliant with this act.

## **Multiple Use Sustained Yield Act**

Consistent with the Multiple Use Sustained Yield Act of 1960 (16 U.S.C. 528–531) (MUSYA), the Forest Service manages the National Forest System to sustain the multiple use of its renewable resources in perpetuity while maintaining the long-term health and productivity of the land. Resources are managed through a combination of approaches and concepts for the benefit of human communities and natural resources. As demonstrated in the final EIS and as required by MUSYA, this revised land management plan guides sustainable, integrated resource management of the resources on the Colville NF in the context of the broader landscape, giving due

consideration to the relative values of the various resources in particular areas. Therefore, the revised land management plan is fully compliant with this act.

## **National Environmental Policy Act**

The NEPA requires public involvement and consideration of potential environmental effects of new projects and programs. The plan revision's environmental analysis and public involvement process complies with the major elements of the requirements set forth by the Council on Environmental Quality for implementing NEPA (40 CFR 1500-1508). These include 1) considering a broad range of reasonable alternatives, 2) disclosing cumulative effects, 3) using high quality and accurate scientific information, 4) consideration of long-term and short-term effects, and 5) disclosure of unavoidable adverse effects.

The Colville NF considered a broad range of alternatives in the final EIS and has compiled a comprehensive record of the effects relevant to the alternatives considering best scientific information. The revised land management plan adopts all practicable means to avoid or minimize environmental harm. These means include provisions for providing the ecological conditions needed to support biological diversity and standards and guidelines to mitigate adverse environmental effects that may result from implementing various management practices. The revised land management plan includes monitoring requirements and an adaptive management approach to assure needed adjustments are made over time.

The revised land management plan does not represent an irreversible or irretrievable commitment of resources. The revised land management plan is a programmatic level planning effort and does not directly authorize any ground disturbing activities or projects. Future ground disturbing activities and projects will be made consistent with the revised land management plan and will be subject to additional site-specific public involvement, environmental analysis, and pre-decisional review processes. Therefore, the revised land management plan is fully compliant with the act and CEQ implementation regulations.

## **National Historic Preservation Act**

Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act requires each Federal agency to take into account the effects of its actions on historic properties, prior to approving expenditure of Federal funds on an undertaking or prior to issuing any license. Furthermore, an agency must afford the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (an independent Federal agency created by the act) an opportunity to comment on any of the agency's undertaking that could affect historic properties. National forests must work closely with the appropriate scientific community and American Indian Tribes concerning cultural resources. In addition, the laws and policies that govern cultural resource protection on Federal lands are coordinated with the State Historic Preservation Officer in Washington who serves in an advisory capacity.

The revised land management plan is a programmatic level planning effort and does not directly authorize any ground disturbing activities or projects. Future site-specific projects undertaken in response to direction in the revised land management plan will fully comply with laws and regulations that ensure protection of heritage resources. The revised land management plan includes forestwide desired conditions, standards, and guidelines for cultural resources to fully integrate heritage resource management with other management activities. Therefore, the revised land management plan is fully compliant with this act.

## **Roadless Area Conservation Rule (36 CFR 294)**

Management direction for IRAs is compliant with the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule (36 CFR 294 Subpart B, published at 66 Fed Reg. 3244-3273). The 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule includes a prohibition on road construction and reconstruction in IRAs, and prohibitions on timber cutting, sale, or removal except in certain circumstances. The revised land management plan is a programmatic level planning effort and does not directly authorize any road construction, reconstruction, or timber removal. The revised land management plan also contains guidelines for road construction and timber harvest in IRAs that incorporate the text of the rule. Therefore, the revised land management plan is fully compliant with this rule.

## **Wild and Scenic Rivers Act**

The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act establishes a National Wild and Scenic Rivers System with three classes of river systems: wild, scenic, and recreational. The purpose of the act was to protect select rivers "...for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations" and to "preserve select river's free-flowing condition, water quality, and outstandingly remarkable values."

Evaluation of the eligibility of rivers and streams for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System was conducted during the preparation of the revised land management plan as required by the act and Forest Service Manual policy (FSM 1924.03). The Forest has identified two rivers systems as eligible for wild and scenic designations. Five miles of the South Fork Salmo River are eligible as a Wild river, and three miles of the Kettle River are eligible as a Recreational river. These rivers were also found eligible under the 1988 land management plan. I will continue to manage these rivers, totaling eight miles on Forest lands, as eligible for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic River System. In addition, management area direction in the revised land management plan provides protection for the outstandingly remarkable values identified for those rivers identified as eligible. Therefore, the revised land management plan is compliant with this act.

## **Wilderness Act**

The Wilderness Act of 1964 established a National Wilderness Preservation System to be administered in such a manner as to leave these areas unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as wilderness. It provides the statutory definition of wilderness, how areas are assessed for addition to the wilderness system, and management requirements for congressionally designated areas.

Evaluation of existing wilderness and areas recommended for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System was included in the environmental analysis for the revised land management plan. The revised land management plan provides direction for designated wilderness through goals, desired conditions, standards, guidelines, and suitability that preserves the wilderness character of designated wilderness. Therefore, the revised land management plan is compliant with this act.

## **Pre-decisional Administrative Review Process (Objection Process)**

This decision is subject to objection pursuant to the 2012 Planning Rule at 36 CFR Part 219. Objections must be filed by way of regular mail, fax, e-mail, hand-delivery, or express delivery with the Objection Reviewing Officer, USDA Forest Service.

1. Electronic objections must be submitted to the Objection Reviewing Officer via e-mail to [objections-chief@fs.fed.us](mailto:objections-chief@fs.fed.us), with a subject line stating: "Objection regarding the revised Colville Land Management Plan." Electronic submissions must be submitted in a format (Word, PDF, or Rich Text) that is readable and searchable with optical character recognition software.
2. Faxed objections must be sent and addressed to "Objection Reviewing Officer" and must include a subject line stating: "Objection regarding the revised Colville Land Management Plan." The fax coversheet should specify the number of pages being submitted. The fax number is (202) 649-1172.
3. Hardcopy objections may be submitted by regular mail to the following address: USDA Forest Service, Attn: Objection Reviewing Officer, 1400 Independence Ave. SW, EMC-LEAP, Mailstop 1104, Washington, DC 20250. Hardcopy submissions must include a subject line on page one stating: "Objection regarding the revised Colville Land Management Plan."
4. Hardcopy objections also may be submitted by carrier or hand deliveries to the following address: USDA Forest Service, Attn: Objection Reviewing Officer, 210 14<sup>th</sup> Street, SW, EMC-LEAP, Mailstop 1104, Washington, DC 20250. Office hours are Monday through Friday, 8:00am to 5:00pm, excluding Federal holidays. Carrier deliveries may call 202-791-8488 during regular business days and hours, above, to coordinate delivery of objections. Hardcopy submissions must include a subject line on page one stating: "Objection regarding the revised Colville Land Management Plan."
5. Individuals who need to use telecommunication devices for the deaf (TDD) to transmit objections may call the Federal Information Relay Service (FIRS) at 1-800-877-8339 between 8:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m., Eastern Standard Time, Monday through Friday.

Objections, including attachments, must be filed within 60 days following the day after publication of the notice of the opportunity to object in The Seattle Times, the newspaper of record. The objection period begins the first day after the publication date of the notice. Objections or attachments received after the 60-day objection period will not be considered. The publication date in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an objection. Those wishing to object to this land management plan revision should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source.

Individuals and entities who have submitted substantive formal comments related to land management plan revision during the opportunities for public comment (as provided in subpart A of 36 CFR part 219) during the planning process for that decision may file an objection. Objections must be based on previously submitted substantive formal comments attributed to the objector unless the objection concerns an issue that arose after the opportunities for formal comment. Objections received in response to the notice, including names and addresses of those who object, will be considered part of the public record and will be available for public inspection.

Prior to the issuance of the reviewing officer's written response, either the reviewing officer or the objector may request to meet to discuss issues raised in the objection and their potential resolution. Interested persons who wish to participate in meetings to discuss issues raised by objectors must have previously submitted substantive formal comments related to the objection issues. Interested persons must file a request to participate as an interested person within 10 days after a legal notice of objections received has been published. Requests must be sent to the same email or address identified for filing objections, above, and the interested person must identify the specific issues they have interest in discussing. During the objection meeting, interested persons

will be able to participate in discussions related to issues on the agenda that they have listed in their request to be an interested person.

## **Implementation of the Revised Land Management Plan**

The revised land management plan provides a framework and text to guide resource management options. It is a strategic, programmatic document and does not make project-level decisions or irreversible or irretrievable commitments of resources. Those kinds of commitments would be made after more detailed, site-specific analysis, and further public comment as part of the site-specific NEPA process.

The Colville NF will also follow all laws, regulations, and policies that relate to managing National Forest System land. The revised land management plan is designed to supplement, not replace, direction from these sources. The final EIS lists and considers this direction for each of the revision topics and specific resources, but the revised land management plan generally does not repeat laws, regulations, or program management policy, practices or procedures.

Following resolution of objections, the revised land management plan will become effective 30 days from the date of the publication of the Notice of Availability of the final EIS in the Federal Register (per 36 CFR 219.17(a), 2012 Planning Rule).

## **Project and Activity Consistency and Transition to the Revised Plan**

To ensure better consistency of projects, activities, and resource plans with the 2012 Planning Rule, I am adopting the consistency provisions as described at 36 CFR 219.15 of the 2012 Planning Rule. The following explains how new and ongoing projects and activities, and existing resource plans, will be made, as appropriate, consistent with the revised land management plan, per guidance in the 2012 Planning Rule.

### **Application to projects or activities authorized after Plan decision**

Direction in revised land management plan will apply to all projects that have decisions made on or after the implementation date of the final ROD. All projects and activities authorized by the Forest Service after approval of the revised land management plan, subject to valid existing rights, must be consistent with the revised land management plan. All subsequent project or activity approval documents will describe how the project or activity is consistent with the land management plan using the criteria identified in the revised land management plan (see Consistency with Plan Components, pages 12-16 in the revised land management plan).

### **Application to projects or activities authorized before Plan decision**

All ongoing Forest projects and activities shall be revised to be consistent with the revised land management plan as soon as practicable, subject to valid existing rights (16 U.S.C. 1604(i)) as follows:

Contracts, authorizations of occupancy and use, or other instruments subject to annual operating instructions or operating plans will be made consistent with all applicable revised land



management plan direction through the annual operating instructions or annual operating plan during the operating season after the final ROD for the revised land management plan is signed. Exceptions to this requirement include where the revised land management plan states a timeline for consistency that is different than described in this paragraph. Additionally, where necessary for certain Forest uses, determination of conditions (water quality, aquatic habitat, and riparian vegetation), based upon best available information, will be completed within five years where ESA listed fish may be affected, and within seven years for all other areas.

- Contracts, authorizations of occupancy and use, or other instruments not subject to annual operating instructions that will expire within five years of the implementation date of the final ROD for the revised land management plan where federally listed species or habitat may be affected will be made consistent with revised land management plan direction within one year of the date the final ROD for the revised land management plan is signed. Where federally listed species or habitat is not affected, these activities will be made consistent upon renewal of the contract or authorization.
- Contracts, authorizations of occupancy and use, or other instruments that will expire more than five years after the implementation date of the final ROD will be made consistent with revised land management plan direction within five years of the implementation date where federally listed species or habitat may be affected. Where federally listed species are not affected, these activities will be made consistent with revised land management plan direction within seven years of implementation date.

### **Application to Existing Resource Plans**

Resource plans previously developed by the Forest Service that apply to resources or land areas within the analysis area will be reviewed for consistency with the revised land management plan components and, as soon as practicable, will be updated, as needed, to make such resource plans consistent with the revised land management plan components (per Forest Service Handbook 1909.12 section 21.41).

## **Maintaining the Land Management Plan and Adapting to New Information**

### **Amendments and Administrative Changes to the Forest Plan**

The revised land management plan may be amended at any time based on a preliminary identification of the need to change it. In addition, certain minor changes to the revised land management plan may be made administratively. The preliminary identification of the need to change the revised land management plan may be based on a new assessment, land management plan monitoring, or other documentation of new information, changed conditions, or changed circumstances. The amendment and administrative change processes that will be followed for any future amendment or administrative change of this revised land management plan are described at 36 CFR 219.13(b) and (c) of the 2012 Planning Rule.

### **Adaptive Management**

The revised land management plan is an integral part of an adaptive management cycle that will guide future management decisions and actions on the Forest. Adaptive management under the revised land management plan includes:

- Defining and measuring progress toward management objectives;
- Monitoring management outcomes and changing circumstances at the plan-level and broader-scale; and
- Revising management strategies accordingly.

The revised land management plan identifies measureable management objectives that will be monitored via the Forest’s plan-level monitoring program. Additionally, broader-scale monitoring actions will contribute additional knowledge to this adaptive management cycle. This adaptive management cycle will enable the Forest to identify and respond to changing conditions, changing public desires, and new information, such as that obtained through research and scientific findings.

## Contact

For more information, please contact Rodney Smoldon, Colville National Forest Supervisor, at 509-684-7015.

## Approval

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Regional Forester  
Pacific Northwest Region

Date