



State of Washington
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

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Main Office Location: Natural Resources Building, 1111 Washington Street SE, Olympia, WA

DETERMINATION OF NONSIGNIFICANCE (DNS)

Name of Proposal: DNS 23-030: SODA SPRINGS FOREST RESTORATION PHASE 2

Description of Proposal:

The Soda Springs Forest Restoration Phase 2 project is intended to improve ecological integrity ratings, habitat for multiple wildlife species, and forest health on the Klickitat Wildlife Area. Special emphasis for this project is placed on improving habitat for the western gray squirrel.

Approximately 275 acres of overstocked forest stands on 6 units will be commercially thinned to more closely reflect the historic range of variability found in fire dependent forests on the east slopes of the Cascades before 1880. This will include a reduction in stocking levels to approximately 25 trees per acre on drier sites to 45 trees per acre in areas with more available moisture (north aspects, protected draws, etc.). All of the commercial thinning units will be marked with orange paint to denote retention trees.

In all units, the thinning prescription will use a combination of Individual, Clumps and Openings (ICO) techniques and stocking/spacing strategies. The following criteria will be used during the leave tree selection process:

- Species preference, in declining order: ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir and grand fir.
- Leave “unique” species that are limited to microsites within the stand.
- All hardwood species will be automatic leave trees.
- Leave trees with good growing characteristics (good crown ratios and relatively free of pathogens and/or insect damage).
- Leave defective trees with unit characteristics (trees with cat faces, “wolfy” crowns, large limbs, broken tops, etc.) for Wildlife Reserve Tree (WRT) recruitment.
- In general, attempt to leave a residual stand with a post-treatment stocking level of between 25 and 45 trees per acre. It is important to note that these guidelines are only intended as a spatial reference starting point. Residual tree density will adapt to account for changes in timber types and microsite conditions.
- A 25-foot radius circle around documented western gray squirrel nest trees will be completely bounded out of the treatment area, and will not be thinned. These protected nest buffers will help provide a clumpy pattern of retention trees across all units, helping to provide a mosaic pattern that mimics historic fire patterns before 1880.

Additional elements of this proposal may include:

- Slash disposal where debris from timber harvest operations (limbs, tops, etc.) will be piled and trailed at landings in preparation for burning. Slash burning will be carried out after the timber harvest work has been completed. All slash burning will be completed as per

Department of Natural Resources and Department of Ecology regulations.

- Pre-commercial thinning/slashing: All units will be re-evaluated after harvest operations have been completed to assess the need for further reduction in stocking of seedlings and/or saplings.
- Close and/or abandon selected roads, at the discretion of the local Wildlife Area Manager, after project completion.
- Prescribed broadcast burning in selected units dependent upon management needs and available funding.

The goal of future treatments will be to continue restoring forest stand structure and species composition within the historic range of conditions found on these sites before 1880, when natural disturbance regimes like frequent, low-severity wildfires were the primary ecological disturbance agents.

As part of this proposal, all roads used for access and timber hauling will be existing grades that were constructed when these stands were harvested previously. Some of these roads may be abandoned to Washington Forest Practice standards at the discretion of the local Wildlife Area Manager. This work will include installing undrivable water bars, spreading slash and debris over the road prism, and grass seeding with a mix of native species.

Proponent/Applicant: Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW)
Contact: Leland Lauffer
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Ellensburg, WA 98926
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Leland.Lauffer@dfw.wa.gov

Location of Proposal, including street, if any: Soda Springs unit of the WDFW Klickitat Wildlife Area, approximately 15 miles northwest of Goldendale, Klickitat County, Washington: Township 5N, Range 14E, parts of Sections 5, 8, 17, 20, 26, and 34.

Lead Agency: Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW)

WDFW has determined that this proposal will likely not have a significant adverse impact on the environment. Therefore, state law¹ does not require an environmental impact statement (EIS). WDFW made this determination of nonsignificance (DNS) after we reviewed the environmental checklist and other information on file with us.

We issued this DNS according to state rules.² **We will not act on this proposal for 14 days** from the date we issued the DNS. Agencies, tribes, and members of the public are invited to comment on this proposal or DNS. We must receive your comments within 14 days of the date of this letter. The comment period will end at **5:00 pm on August 25, 2023**.

Method of Comment:

SEPA documents related to this proposal can be reviewed at the WDFW SEPA website at: <http://wdfw.wa.gov/licenses/environmental/sepa/open-comments>.

The following procedures shall govern the method to comment on agency SEPA proposals.

Comments received through these procedures are part of the official SEPA record for this proposal. You can submit your comments through one of the following ways:

- Online at the Public Input comment portal for this proposal:
<https://publicinput.com/SodaSprings2>
- Email to: SodaSprings2@PublicInput.com

Responsible Official: Lisa Wood

Position/Title: SEPA/NEPA Coordinator, WDFW Habitat Program, Protection Division

Address: P.O. Box 43200, Olympia, WA 98504-3200

After the comment period closes, applicants may view the updated status of this proposal on the WDFW SEPA website: <https://wdfw.wa.gov/licenses/environmental/sepa/closed-final>. Once the status is posted as final, applicants and permittees may take action on the proposal. When a proposal is modified or withdrawn, notice will be given in accordance with state law.¹

If you have questions about this DNS or the details of the proposal, or have difficulty with the Public Input comment portal, contact Lisa Wood at: SEPADesk2@dfw.wa.gov.

DATE OF ISSUE: August 11, 2023

SIGNATURE:



Footnotes

1. RCW 43.21C.030(2)(c)
2. WAC 197-11-340(2).

SEPA Log Number: 23-030.dns

Individuals who need to receive this information in an alternative format or language, or who need reasonable accommodations to participate in WDFW-sponsored public meetings or other activities may contact the Title VI/ADA Compliance Coordinator by phone at 360-902-2349, TTY (711), or email (Title6@dfw.wa.gov).