



NEWS

Release

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Colville National Forest

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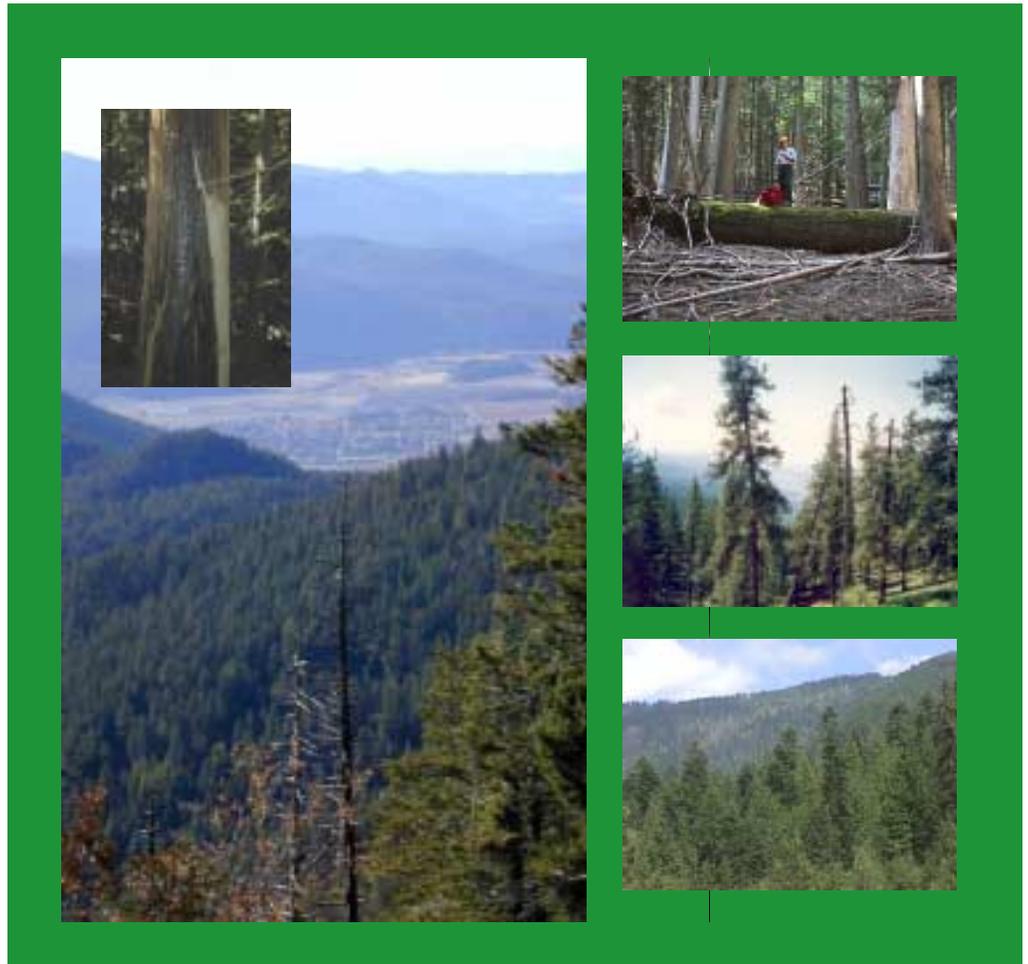
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Colville National Forest supervisor releases Record of Decision for Quartzite Watershed Management Project

Chosen Alternative will help restore fire tolerant ecosystems in Quartzite Watershed, keep all management options open for future consideration

Colville, Wash., -- Nora Rasure, supervisor of the Colville National Forest, signed a record of decision last Friday designating a course of action for the management of the Quartzite Watershed Project Area designed to move vegetation there toward a "natural range of variation" by

developing a "forest matrix of patches and corridors that are consistent with fire landscapes." The alternative also maintains the character of a 4,801-acre unroaded area, proposes commercial timber harvest on 1,748 acres, and prescribed fire and non-commercial thinning on 3,479 acres within the 10,588-acre project area.

After considering 189 public comments on the six alternatives described in the Quartzite Watershed Management Project Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), Rasure chose the Wildland Fire Alternative (Alternative J) for implementation.

The DEIS assessed the environmental, social and economic effects of proposed management activities in the Project area which is located approximately two miles east of Chewelah, Wash., in Stevens County. The analysis area comprises 36.4 square miles of which 12,723 acres are in private or other ownership.

Management activities were proposed in response to an ecosystem analysis performed for the area in May 1999. The analysis revealed forest vegetation that has been dramatically altered by exclusion of fire. Scientists revealed an increase in the forest's susceptibility to insects, disease, drought and

potential for atypical, stand-replacement wildfire after nearly a century of fire suppression.

According to Rasure, the analyses also revealed deteriorated conditions in low elevation riparian areas, in-stream fish habitat and problems associated with the road system.

"Roads in the area have caused a variety of problems to wildlife habitat by disrupting the connectivity of travel corridors, fragmenting seclusion habitat for large home range vertebrates and damaging riparian areas," Rasure said. "The Project will upgrade, maintain and develop those

TECHNICAL CONTACTS:

Rex Holloway, Regional media coordinator (503-808-2241) Pacific Northwest Region, 333 SW 1st Ave., Portland, OR 97204
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roads that are necessary for long-term land management and important to public access and eliminate unneeded roads," she said.

Rasure said public opinions expressed about the effects of timber harvest and road building activities upon an unroaded area located on National Forest System lands between the Upper Cottonwood Road and the Cottonwood Divide Road (see map) influenced her decision to select the alternative which proposes no timber harvest or road construction in the unroaded area.

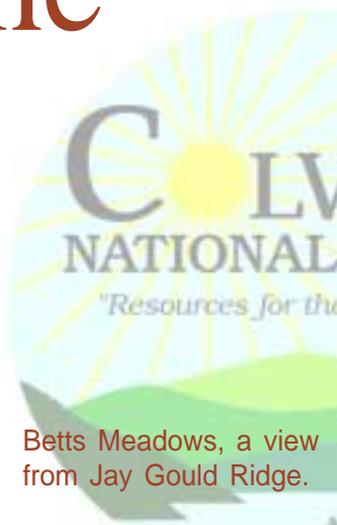
"The depth of passion evident in the comment letters made it apparent that the unroaded area is a special place for many people," she said. "It is also one of four areas in the Colville National Forest where environmental organizations and others are seeking wilderness designations," she added.

Rasure said that to select an alternative that makes changes [e.g., road construction or harvest] would foreclose future management options which will be considered during the upcoming forest plan revision process.

The chosen alternative, however, will use prescribed maintenance fire over 459 acres within the unroaded area where existing fuels do not pose a risk to the overstory.

"This fuel treatment, though conducted on only 10 percent of the unroaded area, may not reduce the risk of wildfire as much as other alternatives, but it will reduce the threat somewhat and help to maintain those areas where desired conditions currently occur," she said.

Rasure hopes a collaborative, community-based stewardship plan will be developed for the Chewelah area that addresses the unroaded area and is both effective and feasible to reduce the



Betts Meadows, a view from Jay Gould Ridge.



Public Involvement: Issue Identification and Clarification

Public 'scoping' from May 27, 1999 through September 6, 1999 and public meetings held during the summer of 1999 generated comments regarding the effects of the proposed action on three key issues:

- Effects of new road construction or road closures on an unroaded area, quality of wildlife habitat, water quality, recreation opportunities, firewood gathering and wildfire access.
- Effects of harvest and road construction above the Betts Meadows Wetland Preserve on water quality and fish habitat.
- Effects of storm damage, diseases, insect infestations, overstocking upon forest health and productivity and losses if left untreated.

QUARTZITE RECORD OF DECISION



Eighty years of fire suppression has increased the uniformity and density of forests by establishing a class of younger trees across the Quartzite Watershed. The majority of this class of trees would have been killed by fire in the past, and now because of their crown position, they provide a fuel-ladder that threatens older overstory trees. Many of these 70-80 year-old trees are now merchantable and are included in the timber sale proposal. Commercial vegetation management is designed to restore or maintain vegetation conditions consistent with fire ecology. Consequently, silvicultural prescriptions vary across the area. Most would thin trees to reduce stocking, and some small areas (up to five acres) would leave only a few trees, to increase patchiness and mimic intense fires.

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threat of catastrophic wildfire to the community and surrounding area.

According to Rasure, Alternative J provides for 1,748 acres of commercial timber harvest including both even-age and uneven-age silvicultural prescriptions. It also implements 3,479 acres of prescribed fire and non-commercial thinning, she said. Timber sale activities in the project will yield an estimated 16.3 million board feet of timber.

"Most non-commercial thinning and prescribed fire vegetation management proposals follow commercial activities," Rasure said. "Like the commercial proposals, these activities are designed to restore or maintain vegetation conditions that are consistent with fire dependent landscapes characteristics of the project area," she said.

Rasure said the entire project puts landscape solutions into place to ensure the sustainable conservation of biodiversity, soil and water across the landscape.

The project also includes activities that provide "side" benefits, Rasure said. "Management activities will include improving a stream channel in the Woodward Meadows riparian area and planting native riparian plant species on 100 acres," she said.

The project will also pay for improvements to six road/stream crossings and close two roads, one to protect the riparian area at Woodward Meadows (Forest Road #4342.250) and the other to protect public safety and prevent soil damage along a steep portion of road along Jay Gould Ridge (Forest Road #4300.300), she said.

Rasure said she depended heavily upon public input to identify and clarify issues for the project. "Public opinion has been very helpful to me in formulating alternatives and making a more informed decision for the Quartzite Project," she said.

The decision is subject to appeal in accordance with 36 CFR 215. A notice of appeal must be in writing and addressed to the Regional Forester, ATTN: 1570 APPEALS, P.O. Box 3623, Portland, Ore. 97208-3623 within 45 days of legal notice of this decision in the Statesman-Examiner Newspaper, Colville, Wash.

For more information about the Quartzite Watershed Management Project and copies of the FEIS, summary or Record of Decision, please go to www.fs.fed.us/r6/colville/quartzite.htm or call (509) 684-7000 or write the Colville National Forest at 765 South Main Street, Colville, Wash., 99114.

Quartzite Watershed Management Project

Activity Statistics:

1,748 acres of commercial harvest, including:

- 67 acres of uneven-age silvicultural prescription
- 930 acres of irregular shelterwood silvicultural prescription
- 639 acres of commercial tree thinning silvicultural prescription
- 49 acres of seed tree silvicultural prescription
- 63 acres of salvage silvicultural prescription
- 335 acres of the non-commercial thinning silvicultural prescription

Other Activities:

- 3,144 acres of prescribed fire
- 100 acres riparian area planting/stream channel improvement
- 2.33 miles of new road construction
- 35.05 miles of road reconstruction
- 6 road/stream crossing improvements (ditch modifications and road surfacing)
- 2 road closures
- 459 acres of prescribed maintenance fire in unroaded area



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QUARTZITE PROJECT RECORD OF DECISION

Add Three



4,801-acre unroaded area, outlined in green, located in the eastern portion of the Quartzite Watershed Management Area.

End

QUARTZITE PROJECT RECORD OF DECISION