Panel Presentations at the April 23, 2008 Finney AMA Public Meeting

Peter McBride–Washington Department of Natural Resources

DNR manages its lands surrounding the Finney based on a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) that will be effective for 60 more years. The HCP addresses three primary management issues: habitat for the northern spotted owl, habitat for the marbled murrelet, and management of riparian areas. There are also an array of additional conservation measures for other species listed in the federal endangered species act, species of concern, and unique habitats. Management of occupied marbled murrelet areas currently is no management, but *DNR* is interested in exploring if stand treatments in unoccupied stands could be used to increase the amount of marbled murrelet nesting habitat in the future.

Because northern spotted owl home ranges are very large, it is difficult for DNR to provide for the entire suite of habitat needs for this species. Their role is more to support the contribution of federal lands to the species recovery. DNR currently has approximately 50,000 acres of lands surrounding the AMA identified to provide nesting, roosting, or foraging (NRF) spotted owl habitat. This is about ½ of the NRF lands that this region of DNR manages for northern spotted owl NRF habitat. There are an additional 20,000 acres of DNR ownership that is identified to facilitate spotted owl dispersal between the AMA and other federal lands. DNR is interested in learning how to better develop spotted owl habitat on the 88% of its NRF lands that are not currently identified as spotted owl nest patch cores.

Kevin Geraghty–North Cascades Conservation Council (NC3)

Although originally focused on the establishment of national parks and wilderness areas, NC3's interests have expanded to the preservation and conservation of species that are not protected through wilderness areas and national parks. The marbled murrelet is one example of this type of species. NC3 advocates restoration to repair damage caused by past land management activities. The Mount Baker-Snoqualmie has made some effort to decrease the miles of road and better manage the remaining roads, but there are still more roads that can be sufficiently maintained. This situation is likely to lead to more aquatic degradation.

NC3 does not view commercial thinning of trees in western Washington as restoration, as least as it has been practiced on the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie and other west-side National Forests. Thins that have been implemented have homogenized forest stands reduced biomass accumulation rates, but the development of old-forest characteristics requires heterogeneity in forest stands and large accumulations of biomass. Thinning also results in damage to forest soils during yarding activities. If thinning was conducted in a way that led to restoration (generally lighter thins with more heterogeneous prescriptions in younger stands, with less ground yarding and road construction) the increased costs are likely to result in uneconomical timber sales. So funds would be better spent to fix road related problems, which is NC3's highest priority.

Younger stands (generally less than 50 years-old) are more "plastic" and respond better to restorative stand management. These stands should be the target of restoration stand management. Older stands are less likely to respond to meet restoration goals. Targeting younger stands for restoration treatments also does not favor economical timber sales.

Jonathan Guzzo–Washington Trails Association (WTA)

WTA's primary concern is the road and trail infrastructure; however, there is considerable variability in the views of WTA's membership on the specifics. There are many miles of road in the AMA and road density can detract from a hiker's experience by reducing visual quality of the landscape and streams. Trails of interest in the AMA include Gee Point, Finney Peak, Round Mountain, and Mount Higgins. WTA supports road to trail conversions where a reduction in road miles are necessary.

Derek Churchill–Conservation Northwest (CNW)

CNW's focus is on the conservation of biological diversity. National Forest lands are anchors of this focus because of the amount of habitat on these lands. CNW is interested in the restoration at the landscape scale of both terrestrial and aquatic systems. CNW is committed to using the best available science and has been involved in many collaborative restoration efforts.

Restoration thinning can have ecological benefits, especially in younger stands. Most research on the ecological benefits is from studies in Oregon and in Douglas-fir stands. How applicable these results are to the AMA is not known. There are opportunities in the AMA to learn the local forest types that are different from where most research has occurred.

For connectivity purposes, the Finney AMA is important to the conservation of biological diversity because it is surrounded by non-federal land ownership that have little to no old-growth forest structure. Research opportunities in the AMA are:

- Identifying ways to accelerate the development of or create more complex stands and other attributes of older forest structure, and the potential trade-offs involved with these treatments with respect to other processes like down wood amounts and carbon storage. Variable density thinning would be the prescription to accomplish this and there are increased costs associated with these more complex prescriptions.
- Examining different methods to implement more complex Variable Density Thinning prescriptions and looking at the degree of extra cost and economically viability.
- Research on the impacts of complex pre-commercial thinning vs. traditional spacing based PCT in very young stands and how long these impacts persist (does the variability of more complex prescriptions become unrecognizable after many decades?).
- Paired watershed hydrological comparisons of managed vs. unmanaged areas to see the overall impacts of thinning vs. no-action: impacts of opening roads, transportation, invasive species, peak flow hydrology, etc.
- Climate Change Effects on:
    1. Plant species composition, particularly the effects on silver-fir.
    2. If thinned stands respond differently to shifts in climate than unthinned stands.
    3. Effects of shifting hydrologic regimes from climate change on channel structure and riparian forest.

Mark Baugh–Hampton Affiliates

Hampton Affiliates operates a sawmill and cogeneration facility in Darrington that employs 100-125 people. In addition, contracted work for logging and other activities has a ripple effect on community and county employment in eastern Skagit and Snohomish Counties. Past timber harvest funded the creation of roads that are now important to recreation and also funded the construction of trails.

The mill processes about 100 truck loads of logs each day. To keep this level of production, about 15% of the processed logs are imported from Canada and from eastern Washington. These log loads pass by hundreds of thousands of acres of National Forest lands that are not supplying timber. Increasing fuel costs may make this more difficult to remain economical.

The cogeneration plant is used to produce electricity and to dry lumber. It produces about 4 megawatts of power each day. Currently there are efforts being explored to use slash and smaller wood material as forest products. This would have reduce the risks of wildfires.

There are opportunities to achieve habitat management goals of the AMA and meet some social and economic benefits to the surrounding communities.

Curt Veldhuisen–Skagit River System Cooperative

The Skagit River System Cooperative represents the interests of the Swinomish and Sauk-Suiattle Indian Tribes in issues of treaty rights and natural resource management. The Finney AMA is also in the backyard of three other tribes: Upper Skagit, Stillaguamish and Tulalip. These tribes have an interest in wildlife both for harvest and for ecological reasons. Tribal interests also include gathering cedar bark, berries, and other traditionally used plant materials. Road access is important for tribal elders to collect these materials. Tribal hunting, collecting, and fish habitat are all protected by treaties with the federal government.

Fisheries interests are directed towards salmon and steelhead. The AMA is sensitive to land management practices, especially logging and road building. Adaptive management has already occurred in the AMA. Important research on landslides and inner gorges from the thesis produced by Dave Parks has been used to influence management activities on DNR and private lands.

The watershed is currently recovering from past impacts to the aquatic system. It has been an important area to demonstrate the importance of addressing headwater issues in degraded watersheds.

Finney Creek is a unique tributary to the middle Skagit River because it has a long, low gradient section that is not found elsewhere in the middle Skagit. There is substantial tribal interest in this low gradient section of Finney Creek because it historically produced large numbers of salmon and steelhead.

The Tribes are sensitive to the potential transfer of logging impacts to the Finney AMA as a result of the Blanchard Mountain Agreement and to using roads for commercial purposes that were

improved with SRFB funding. There is also a Tribal interest in elk. Although sediment levels have improved in the system, it will take decades for full recovery.