



## **Renshaw Vegetation Management Project Environmental Assessment**

Decision Notice, Finding of No Significant Impact, and  
Response to Public Comments



**April 2015  
USDA Forest Service  
Colville National Forest  
Newport-Sullivan Lake Ranger Districts  
Pend Oreille County, Washington**

## INTRODUCTION

### Background

The Renshaw project area is 13,234 acres within the Colville National Forest. Its boundaries stretch from near the Pend Oreille River valley to Granite Peak in the southwest portion of the planning area. This part of the forest is valued as a scenic backdrop for those people living or recreating in and around the area and most of the project area is accessible by vehicle for most of the year. It is a destination for winter and summer motorized recreation and dispersed camping. The area is important to the Kalispel Tribe for historic cultural uses dependent on healthy and sustainable forest stands that support quality fish habitat. Comments received from the public regarding the Renshaw project indicate a strong sense of place or attachment to the area and high interest in restoring the landscape to one that is healthy and resilient.

The Renshaw Planning Area is primarily located within the Lost Creek subwatershed. The subwatershed ranges in elevation from about 5,200 feet near Granite Peak down to about 2,200 feet. Lost Creek and Renshaw Creek, where located on National Forest Service (NFS) lands, both contain viable populations of eastern brook trout (*Salvelinus fontinalis*) (USFS 1991, 1994, 1999, and 2009). The portion of Lost Creek that lies upstream of Nile Lake supports eastern brook and rainbow trout. Currently there are no bull trout inhabiting the project area.

Past disturbances to the forested landscape including logging, mining, homesteading, storms, wildfires, and insect and disease outbreaks have created a landscape that is a substantial change from the historic conditions.

This decision notice documents my decision regarding actions proposed in the Renshaw Vegetation Management Project Environmental Assessment, February 2015 (hereafter referred to as the Renshaw EA). The Renshaw EA, which is incorporated by reference, documents the site-specific analysis conducted by an interdisciplinary team to determine the potential environmental effects connected to the decision.

### Decision

Based on careful review of the project purpose and need, issues identified by the public, interdisciplinary team analysis described in the Environmental Assessment, collaboration with the Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition (NEWFC), Priest Community Forest Connection (PCFC), consultation with the Kalispel Tribe, and coordination with Pend Oreille County and other state and federal agencies, **I have decided to implement Alternative B Option 1 (EA pages 12 through 33) including the project design criteria, mitigation (EA pages 14 through 31), and monitoring (EA pages 32 to 33).** The EA documents the environmental analysis and supports the rationale upon which this decision is based. I have also determined that these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment; therefore, an environmental impact statement (EIS) will not be prepared. A finding of no significant impact (FONSI) accompanies this decision.

As described in the Renshaw EA, the decision includes:

#### **Vegetation Treatments (Purpose and Need #1 & #2, DN pages 9-11)**

##### **Non-Commercial Treatments**

- Fuels within areas commercially treated will be underburned (up to 1,330 acres) or mechanically treated (up to 2,388 acres).

- Fuels outside areas commercially treated will be underburned (prescribed fire) on approximately 663 acres to reduce fuel loading and reintroduce a disturbance regime similar to historic conditions.
- Precommercial thinning will occur on approximately 457 acres to improve growth, increase resistance to insects and disease, and encourage the species composition needed to meet the desired future condition for the area.

**Commercial Harvest Treatments**

- Approximately 4,970 acres of vegetation on NFS land (table 1) will be treated to improve stocking levels, stand vigor, move the stands toward target condition and towards the historical range of variability of structural stages. Highly stocked stands will be treated to reduce the future hazard of insect and disease outbreaks and to modify the expected fire behavior if a wildfire were to occur. Ground-based logging systems are expected to be used for yarding the majority of the commercial treatment area. Where ground based logging systems are not appropriate (slopes steeper than 35%) or areas are inaccessible via roads, skyline logging systems may be used (EA pages 12, 114-116).

**Table 1. Commercial Harvest by Treatment Type**

Treatment Type	Approximate Acres	Percent of Renshaw Planning Area
Final removal harvest	51	<1%
Final removal/PCT <sup>1</sup>	22	<1%
Overstory removal	10	<1%
Overstory removal/PCT	59	<1%
Partial removal harvest	17	<1%
Shelterwood	756	6%
Shelterwood/overstory removal <sup>2</sup>	13	<1%
Single tree selection harvest	849	6%
Single tree selection harvest/overstory removal	147	1%
Single tree selection harvest/small group	686	5%

<sup>1</sup> Precommercial thinning

<sup>2</sup> Where multiple treatments are proposed together, the treatment listed first will be the primary treatment for an area. The second treatment will be implemented within inclusions (e.g., proposing a shelterwood treatment for a small lodgepole pine pocket within an area that will have a thinning proposed for the remainder of the unit.)

Treatment Type	Approximate Acres	Percent of Renshaw Planning Area
Single tree selection harvest/shelterwood	1,386	10%
Single tree selection harvest/PCT	115	<1%
Special harvest	11	<1%
Commercial thin	262	2%
Commercial thin/small group	52	<1%
Commercial thin/shelterwood	505	4%
Commercial thin/PCT	29	<1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,970</b>	<b>38%</b>

### Roads

Table 2 displays the transportation system changes that will occur as a result of this decision. Additional information is located in the EA pages 12-13, Chapter 3, and the Fisheries, Hydrology, and Transportation specialist reports in the project record.

**Table 2. Renshaw Transportation System Changes with this Decision**

Transportation System Change	Approximate Length (miles)
New road construction	3
Temporary road construction	10
Light road reconstruction <sup>3</sup>	13
Medium road reconstruction	19
Heavy road reconstruction	0.4
Road decommissioning	7

<sup>3</sup> **Light Reconstruction:** This includes minor work activities in the roadway which may involve minor disturbances to existing cut and fill slopes and is normally performed by road maintenance equipment such as a motor grader or rubber-tired backhoe. **Medium Reconstruction:** This includes activities on an existing road that may involve localized disturbance to the existing cut or fill slopes and additional clearing and grubbing. **Heavy Reconstruction:** This includes activities that would have impacts similar to new road construction and may involve: widening and/or realignment along portions of, or the entire road; substantial additions to, or replacement of, drainage structures including live crossings; and/or new excavation, embankment, and surfacing.

Transportation System Change	Approximate Length (miles)
Road closures	2.8
Culvert removal	16 (culverts)

### Ecological Processes/Restoration (Purpose and Need #3, DN page 11)

#### Revegetation/Rehabilitation Treatments

- Approximately 7 miles of roads will be removed from the Forest transportation system. Of that, about 4 miles are redundant<sup>4</sup> roads brushed in with alder and other vegetation and are no longer needed for forest management given the capabilities of modern logging equipment. To help restore ecological processes, long-term drainage will be installed and entrances blocked with native materials, as needed. The obliteration of the existing Rocky Creek road post-project accounts for the remaining 3 miles to be decommissioned. Obliteration of this road post project will start the rehabilitation and restoration of ecological processes for this area of Lost Creek (EA page 62).
- Closure of approximately 2.8 miles of NFS roads. The majority of these roads are short, dead-end spurs that are currently un-drivable, but are contributing to total road density as well as illegal motor vehicle use in the project area. These roads will be closed (placed in Maintenance Level 1<sup>5</sup> status) and put into “storage”. Any areas that are likely to impede proper hydrologic function will be stabilized before the road is closed. To aid in public information, the forest service will post a sign at the beginning of the road for one year prior to the closure action (EA page 12).
- All temporary roads constructed for the project will be removed post-project. Obliteration of these roads shall include removing any culverts placed as part of the new road construction of these roads (EA page 19 and 29, design criteria). Rehabilitation work will contour, plant, pull culverts, and restore streambanks to the extent possible.
- Incorporate the *Colville National Forest Weed Prevention Guidelines and Preventing and Managing Invasive Plants* Record of Decision direction to prevent and manage competing and unwanted vegetation that may result from the decision (EA pages 1, 86-90); and
- Follow all Best Management Practices (BMPs) and project design criteria and mitigation stated in the EA (design criteria and mitigation: EA pages 14-32; BMPs are in the Hydrology report in the project files).

#### Water Quality/Fish Habitat Improvement (EA pages 21-24 and 56-77)

- Relocation of a portion of the Rocky Creek road out of a riparian area (County Road 4699/Forest Road 7018000):

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<sup>4</sup> Redundant roads occur when there are two or more roads accessing the same area, but some of the roads are not needed for long-term management of the area.

<sup>5</sup> Maintenance level 1 roads are closed to vehicular traffic. Maintenance level 2 roads are open for use by high clearance vehicles.

Obliteration of the portion of County Road (CR) 4699 lying within the riparian area of Lost Creek for approximately 3 miles. Obliteration will include some contouring, ripping, decompaction of roadbed, berming, revegetation, and re-establishment of the floodplain.

The only new construction is a new section of the Rocky Creek road in an upland area outside the stream corridor. This road is being moved to a more appropriate location for resource protection, for improved access to the area, and is better economically for project operations. The new road will have the same mixed uses open to all vehicles as the current Rocky Creek Road.

- Replacement of 8 existing culverts on system roads used during implementation activities that are currently blocking upstream fish passage on fish-bearing streams.
- Installation or replacement of 8 culverts on system roads used during implementation activities that are insufficient for planned vegetation management activities.
- Temporary culverts and bridges will be removed to allow natural drainage configuration for decommissioned or closed roads.

**Economic (Purpose and Need #4, DN page 11)**

- Implementation will occur through various contracting options.

**Monitoring Plan**

Monitoring will be used to determine whether the decision is implemented as stated in the EA. The following is the monitoring required, listed by resource area. (EA pages 32-33)

Range

- Any new structures installed to manage livestock access will be checked for stability at least once within one year of installation.

Noxious Weeds

- All aggregate and borrow sources will be monitored and inspected by the noxious weed coordinator or a designated representative prior to use to determine if the material is free from noxious weed seeds. If it is not weed free, it is not to be hauled onto or used on NFS lands. All fill material will be sprayed to remove noxious weed seed prior to being used for the project.
- Road closures will not be implemented until weeds have been treated, with the exception of temporary roads. Follow-up monitoring and re-treatment of areas behind road closures and/or decommissioned roads must be conducted, at a minimum, once a year for the first two years after the treatment or until such time as it can be verified that the weed infestation has been effectively treated (Colville National Forest Weed Prevention Guidelines, 1999).
- The noxious weed coordinator will monitor and inventory level 2-5 roads across the project area for noxious weed occurrence. All road surfaces within the project area that receive borrow or pit material will be surveyed for three years following surfacing and appropriately treated.
- Disturbed ground and roads within proposed burn areas will be monitored for 1-3 years post-burn, or until revegetated, by the Forest or District noxious weed program specialist following prescribed fire activities to assess for the presence of noxious weeds and plan for treatment as necessary.

- Revegetation efforts will be monitored for 1-3 years to ensure successful site revegetation has occurred and reseed if necessary.

#### Silviculture

- All vegetation management projects will be monitored both during and after treatment to gather site specific information to aid in future project planning. Monitoring will check to see that marking is meeting the prescription and marking guide. Monitoring will also be conducted during harvest operations to ensure that the prescriptions are being met. Post-harvest reviews will be conducted within the 1st year after harvest to identify that the harvest met the prescription and if any changes to the fuels, site preparation, or reforestation are needed.
- Annual Aerial Forest Insect and Disease surveys will identify the locations and severity of insect and disease populations. Particular attention will be made to monitor tree mortality and subsequent insect activity in units where prescribed fire is applied. Aerial surveys will help to identify any insect or disease populations that were not identified during the planning process. If bark beetle outbreaks are identified in units during field reviews or aerial surveys, the prescriptions may be modified to treat any additional mortality. The surveys will be reviewed by the Silviculturist.
- The Silviculturist and Fuels AFMO will review a subset of the prescribed fire and fuels treatments to ensure that residual leave trees are adequately being protected, and the surface and ladder fuels are being reduced to an acceptable level. Actively monitoring of these treatments during project implementation will be necessary to make any changes or corrections as they are identified that would be analyzed in additional documentation. Post-harvest monitoring will also be conducted within 1 to 2 years to evaluate any follow up effects from the treatment.

#### Wildlife

- The district wildlife biologist and forest engineering staff will monitor all roads closed with the project for five years following the timber sale(s). If a given closure is receiving unauthorized motorized use, the forest will implement actions necessary to improve the effectiveness of the closure. This could include placing boulders or cement posts on the side of gates to block OHV access, replacing gates with earthen berms or boulders, seeding and planting berms, piling slash or root wads in the road entrance, etc.

### **Alternatives Considered**

In addition to the decision, I considered one other alternative and a second option within Alternative B in detail. Alternative A would continue existing management direction and not implement any new actions. Alternative B Option 2 was also considered, and eliminated from the decision (maintain the existing Rocky Creek road with replacement of deficient bridges). A table comparing alternatives A and B can be found in the EA on page 33.

**Alternative A (No Action).** Under the No Action alternative, current management plans would continue to guide management of the project area and no additional management activities would be implemented. Only existing, previously approved management activities such as prescribed burning, road maintenance, special use permit administration, cattle grazing, and use of dispersed recreation sites and motorized trails would continue. The No Action Alternative would continue with a management policy of fire exclusion. Alternative A is described on page 11 of the EA. (36 CFR §220.7(b)(2)(ii))

**Alternative B (Option 2).** A second option under Alternative B was developed by the Interdisciplinary Team to address and compare resource and economic concerns regarding road management in the

project area. Option 2 proposed to maintain the Rocky Creek road in its existing location, with repair and replacement of three deficient bridges to restore access to the area. This option, under Alternative B, proposed projects similar to Option 1 including vegetation treatments; fuel treatments; replacing or removing culverts to improve water quality and/or fish habitat; precommercial thinning; and decommission of approximately 5 miles of Forest Service system roads.

## **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND COLLABORATION**

Public involvement in planning for the Renshaw project began in 2013 with publication in the spring Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA). Planning for this project included public participation, consultation with the Kalispel Tribe of Indians, Colville Confederated Tribes, and Spokane Tribe, and collaboration with a group of interested parties including the Kalispel Tribe, Pend Oreille County Commissioners, Priest Community Forest Connection, Vaagen Brothers Lumber, Inc., the Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition (NEWFC), Selkirk Trailblazers, and the Colville Drift Riders. Public input was solicited in a scoping letter sent to all individuals, groups, adjacent landowners, grazing permittees, and State and Federal agencies known to be interested in projects of this type on July 16, 2013 (36 CFR §220.7(b)). During the scoping period input was received from twelve individuals or groups in the form of letters, emails, and phone calls. The issues identified through this scoping process are presented in Chapter I of the EA on pages 8-9. In addition, a public meeting was held to discuss the proposed project with adjacent landowners and interested members of the public on September 4, 2014, at the Lone Community Center in Lone, WA (EA page 121). (36 CFR §220.7(c))

We invited members of Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) <sup>6</sup>groups to attend planning meetings and considered their comments regarding recreational use in the planning area.

These issues were addressed in the Renshaw EA through project design (EA pages 14 through 31) and development of design requirements and mitigation (EA pages 31-32).

### **Tribal Consultation**

Government-to-Government consultation with the Kalispel Tribe, The Spokane Tribe, and the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation occurred in the form of a letter to the Tribes describing the project area and proposed action. Letters were mailed to all three governments on July 15, 2013, requesting consultation. The Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation did not raise any concerns with the proposed project. Concerns from the Spokane Tribe (regarding protection of cultural resources) were addressed through development of the Alternatives. Concerns from the Kalispel Tribe were addressed through meetings with members of the Kalispel Tribe Natural Resources Department (EA pages 7-9) and development of the Alternatives, and are listed below.

- Desire for positive conservation outcomes, need to ensure we have a forest that is resilient;
- Concern about water quality and temperature impaired streams related to existing conditions and proposed treatments, specifically Lost Creek and other riparian areas within the project boundary;
- Concern about fish passage related to removal or replacement of existing barriers.

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<sup>6</sup> Selkirk Trailblazers, and the Colville Drift Riders.

## Pend Oreille County Participation

Pend Oreille County Public Works Department employees met with specialists from the Renshaw Interdisciplinary Team in the spring of 2013 to discuss the Forest Service's proposal to relocate a portion of the Rocky Creek road (CR 4699)(EA page 7). The Forest Service proposed that Pend Oreille County vacate their easement on Rocky Creek Road, and by default, because the road is on Forest Service lands, the road would fall under jurisdiction of the Forest Service. The portion of the Rocky Creek road to be vacated would become the responsibility of the Colville National Forest and is proposed for obliteration post-project. During meetings the Forest Service and Pend Oreille County developed a Memorandum of Understanding for the road relocation project that outlines responsibilities and actions. Documentation of discussions with Pend Oreille County is located in the project record.

## Collaboration

The Forest Service also collaborated with a group of interested parties including the Kalispel Tribe, Pend Oreille County Commissioners, Priest Community Forest Connection, Vaagen Brothers Lumber, Inc., the Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition (NEWFC), Selkirk Trailblazers, the Colville Drift Riders, and other interested parties to refine the proposed action for the Renshaw project (EA page 7). (36 CFR §220.7(b)) Detailed discussions regarding collaboration and resolution of related issues are located in the project record.

## Thirty-day Comment Period

The Renshaw EA was made available to the public for a 30-day comment period when the legal notice was published in the *Colville Statesman-Examiner*, the newspaper of record, on September 3, 2014. Comments were received from 9 individuals or groups. The comments received are addressed in detail in Appendix A of this Decision Notice.

## Purpose of and Need for Action

The Renshaw EA documents the purpose and need for action per 36 CFR §220.7(b)(1). The purpose for this project is to meet Forest Plan direction to promote tree growth, reduce insect and disease levels (Forest Plan pages 4-2, 4-18), and move the landscape toward historic fire regime conditions (Interagency Strategy for the Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy, 2003). Increase the ability of forested areas (stands) to resist uncharacteristically high levels of loss due to insects, disease, and wildfire by restoring the composition, structure, pattern and ecological processes necessary to make these ecosystems sustainable and resilient (FSM<sup>7</sup> 2020). Take actions, where needed, to meet the above stated purpose.

**Needs:** Stand treatments are needed to reduce susceptibility to continuing insect and disease-caused mortality over the long term and promote development of late-successional habitat and old-growth forest ecosystems. Fuels treatments are needed to start the process of reversing the hazardous and expensive trend toward high-intensity crown fires. There is a need to improve ecological processes through restoration of water quality and fish habitat as well as support local economies and wood processing infrastructure.

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<sup>7</sup> Forest Service Manual

**Note:** The need for this project is derived by comparing current ecological conditions to the desired conditions described in the Goals, Objectives, and Management prescriptions in the Forest Plan, the Regional Forester's Forest Plan Amendment #2, and the INFISH.

**Discussion:**

1. The Forest Plan directs and provides for the promotion of tree growth, creation of wildlife cover, reduction of insect and disease levels, high quality water and aquatic habitats, and development of densities that sustain wood fiber production (Forest Plan pages 4-2, 4-18). For Forest Plan Management Areas 1, 3A, 5, 6, 7, and 8, the Forest Plan directs that insect and disease outbreaks be prevented or suppressed when Management Area values are threatened (Forest Plan pages 4-72, 4-79, 4-96, 4-100, 4-104, 4-108).

Restoring early seral species to their historic level would improve sustainability and resiliency in this ecosystem. Under historic fire regimes, early seral species played a more dominant role in the forested landscape. Many of the largest trees were early seral species like western white pine. Many of these large early seral trees were lost during the homestead era due to large wildfires (1910-1930), as a result of large-scale timber production, and due to other factors such as residual logging slash combined with weather conditions. Restoring early seral species would result in a landscape that is less susceptible to insect and disease outbreaks, better able to withstand effects of fire, and would improve conditions for developing (in time) large and old trees (i.e. late and old structural stage and providing habitat for species that require these type conditions).

With the exception of areas treated (i.e. timber removal, thinning, prescribed burning) within the last 15 years, the Renshaw analysis area currently includes many acres of forested areas that are highly susceptible to a variety of pathogens. Many of the lodgepole pine stands in the analysis area are reaching conditions where they are most susceptible to mountain pine beetle mortality. Mountain pine beetle, western pine beetle and Douglas-fir beetle are active within the analysis area and are mainly affecting ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir. Dwarf mistletoe is present in the western larch and lodgepole pine. Stand treatments are needed to reduce susceptibility to continuing insect and disease-caused mortality over the longer-term (Brogan 2014).

2. Wildfires are becoming increasingly expensive; dangerous to firefighters; and threatening to wildlife habitat, beneficial uses of water, and adjoining private land and property. During the past 75 years, fire suppression has resulted in increased ground and ladder fuel conditions, and increased tree-crown continuity in portions of the Renshaw Analysis area. As forest fuels have increased over time, the potential for high intensity crown fires has also increased. The effect of reducing the risk of large, stand-replacing fires would be to: 1) decrease the probability that a wildland fire would develop into, or be sustained as, a stand-replacing or crown fire, 2) increase the ability to provide for public and firefighter safety during a wildland fire, and 3) increase the effectiveness and efficiency of protecting property within the wildland-urban interface. Most of the woody fuels proposed for treatment (i.e. piling and burning, mastication) in the Renshaw analysis area are in Condition Class 2 or in Condition Class 1 and moving toward Condition Class 2 (see Fire/Fuels discussion in chapter 3 of the EA). It is estimated that should a wildfire occur (in the hottest/driest weather conditions), crown fire and high severity burns would occur on well over three-fourths of the forested acres within the analysis area (based on 97th percentile weather). Reducing fuels in Condition Class 2 stands, and maintenance activities in Condition

Class 1 stands, will be the main focus in achieving the primary purpose of providing for a sustainable forest.

Most of the natural fuels proposed for treatment in the Renshaw Planning Area are in condition class<sup>8</sup> 2 or are condition class 1 and moving toward condition class 2. Reducing fuels in condition class 2 stands, and maintenance activities in condition class 1 stands, will be the main focus in achieving the primary purpose of providing for a sustainable forest.

Restoring early seral species, reducing stand density and reducing fuel levels would result in a landscape that is less susceptible to insect and disease outbreaks and better able to withstand effects of fire. This would improve conditions for developing late and old structural stage<sup>9</sup> stands.

3. There are areas that do not currently meet standards for fish bearing streams as defined in the Inland Native Fish Strategy due to lack of shade over creeks (canopy), and current road locations within Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas (RHCAs). Reducing sediment input and improving structure and species mix within RHCAs, would improve water quality and fish habitat. Road management would help reduce susceptibility of the aquatic system to large-scale fire effects and improve ecosystem resiliency and sustainability.
4. Provide forest products which assist in sustaining local economies and options for completing forest management projects.

Two alternatives were analyzed in detail: No Action (Alternative A), and one action alternative (Alternative B, Options 1 and 2.) The Proposed Action is Alternative B Option 1.

## Issues

Using the comments from the public, collaborative group, other agencies, the Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition, Kalispel Tribe, and members of the interdisciplinary team, key issues were identified and addressed in the project. Please see Appendix A of this Decision Notice for a list of comments and concerns raised by the public and how I considered these comments when making this decision.

For example, comments were received from the public that helped us to determine key issues and address concerns within the design criteria for the implementation of the project. These comments include but are not limited to these examples:

1. "Since temporary roads are outsloped with no ditch, sediment that is generated during precipitation events, finds its way to streams and harms the aquatic resources for decades after initial construction ... unless the road is obliterated. No other post-use treatment method (including whatever BMP R-23 accomplishes) is as effective at eliminating damage to aquatic resources and subsurface water flow as obliteration." – Mr. Dick Artley

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<sup>8</sup> Condition Class is one way of determining a stand's potential risk to wildfire.

Condition Class 1: stands are within historic fire cycle;

Condition Class 2: stands have missed at least two fire cycles;

Condition Class 3: tree stands are dense with intense fire burning in most tree crowns; wildfire would cause heavy mortality to entire stand and the soil's organic layer may be removed.

Fire Regime I – high frequency, low severity fires (e.g., large ponderosa pine stands);

Fire Regime III – mixed severity fires (e.g., found in mixed Douglas-fir, western larch, grand fir stands)

<sup>9</sup> Late and old structural stage stands generally are dominated by larger diameter trees (more than eight trees per acre greater than 21" diameter at breast height).

2. “Strongly supports reopening the Rocky Creek route to vehicle and ATV use....favors Option 1.” – Pend Oreille County Commissioners
3. “Where pre-commercial thinning of lodgepole stands are being proposed, continue the practice of keeping the stands relatively tight to promote height growth versus width. That stand will be more resilient to wind events and the lodgepole will eventually be a viable commercial product. We definitely would like as many of the lodgepole stands to be treated as is possible.” - Priest Community Forest Connection (PCFC)

The Interdisciplinary team analyzed all the comments received from the public (including the above examples) and crafted the unresolved conflicts into the following key issues (EA page 9). These issues were used to compare the alternatives.

#### Landscape Resiliency

Level of commercial and non-commercial treatment would affect stand structure and composition, thereby affecting resiliency to insects, diseases and fire. Levels of early seral species, structural stages and fire regime condition classes reflect resiliency components across landscapes.

#### Ecological Processes Related to Water Quality and Fish Habitat

Roads crossing perennial streams or located within Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas (RHCA) can impact water quality and fish habitat through increased sediment flow, reduction of vegetation (stream-side shade), or blockages to fish passage.

## **RATIONALE FOR MY DECISION**

My decision to implement Alternative B option 1 reflects an inclusive process to integrate comments and ideas from a diverse array of forest users, collaborators, government entities, and interested parties. I am confident the extra effort both collaborators and Forest Service interdisciplinary team members invested resulted in a decision that will trend the forested areas within this landscape toward resiliency over the long term. The project area covers approximately 3% of the Newport-Sullivan Lake Ranger Districts and less than 1% of the Colville National Forest. I believe my decision adequately and responsibly considers the environmental and social impacts associated with implementation, and I am confident my decision meets the purpose and need because it:

1. Best meets the need to address the lack of tree species diversity, structural and age class variability resulting from the 1920s stand replacing wildfires (affecting the majority of the project area) and subsequent decades of wildfire suppression. These two situations resulted in thousands of acres of trees that are uniform in structural stages in the project area, far outside the historic range of variability for age class and structure (EA Table 6, page 42-43). In addition, many of the stands within the analysis area contain primarily lodgepole pine. Lodgepole pine now occupies more area and composes a higher portion of the standing biomass than it did historically. These lodgepole pine trees are now of a size and density that they are susceptible to mountain pine beetle (MPB) attacks. Use of mechanical treatments to introduce variability in age, structure, and species on approximately 4,970 acres of these forested lands will increase forest resilience and vigor, and move the stands toward the historical range of variability (EA pages 37-49).

It is important to note that the mechanical treatment within the project area will address about 50% of the forested acres identified for forest health concerns, with about 3000 of these acres having a dominant lodge pole pine component (EA pages 37-49). A portion of the remaining acres lie within an area identified by the public as having potential wilderness characteristics. Participants at the March 7, 2013 collaboration meeting in Usk, Washington (project file) recommended that the benefits to habitat and detrimental effects to potential wilderness characteristics outweighed the need to more fully address forest health and resiliency issues identified by the project silviculturist (though some non-mechanical prescribed burning is included). I concurred with this recommendation and removed the acres within the southwest portion of the project area from the proposed mechanical/commercial treatment proposal in the selected alternative (EA page 111).

2. Best meets the need to reduce the potential for high-intensity crown fires, move the landscape toward condition class 1, which improves public and firefighter safety, and increase landscape resiliency (EA pages 12-13) by treating up to 4,381 acres with prescribed fire and mechanical treatments. Fire suppression effectiveness is expected to be improved across most of the planning area, and a significant decrease in fire danger would occur as a result of this decision.

Commercial thinning will be used to remove some of the fuels prior to prescribed burning to reduce the intensity of prescribed fires (Purpose and Need, EA pages 2-6).

3. Best meets the need to improve fish habitat through culvert replacement and removal (e.g., fish passage) and road relocation and/or closure (reduce sources of sediment).

Replacement of culverts to improve fish passage and removal of culverts will improve water quality (EA pages 5, 11-13, and 56-77). The reconstruction of existing stream crossings will remove some existing riparian vegetation on site within the existing road prism. These disturbed areas will be revegetated and overhead shading will be reestablished in the long term. Watershed restoration activities such as the obliteration of approximately three miles of County Road 4699 will, over the long term, reestablish riparian vegetation and the natural floodplain along the same approximate distance of Lost Creek. The improvement of overhead shading and reestablishment of appropriate width/depth ratios, as a result of the proposed obliteration and revegetation along this segment, should lower summer water temperatures toward desired temperature conditions. All temporary roads constructed for project implementation will also be obliterated to decompact soils, allow for improved hydrologic function, and discourage motorized use.

4. Provides continued and consistent opportunities for employment and local economic stability by providing wood products that result from forest restoration activities to the local lumber industry; and through contracting implementation activities (e.g. culvert replacement, road reconstruction, relocation, and obliteration) to local contractors (EA pages 5-6, and 13).

I did not select Alternative A (No Action) because it fails to meet the purpose and need of: providing for a healthy, sustainable forest (EA pages 37-49 [Silviculture]); addressing fuel levels, providing for firefighter safety, and moving the planning area toward the desired future condition (EA pages 37-49 [Silviculture], 49-56 [Fire/Fuels]); improving ecological process related to riparian habitat conditions that affect water quality and fish habitat (EA pages 56-67 [Hydrology], and 67-77 [Fisheries]); and sustaining local economies and options for completing forest management projects (EA pages 114-116 [Logging Systems and Economic Feasibility]).

I did not select Alternative B Option 2 because it would not result in the best option for improving ecological processes due to the fact that the current Rocky Creek Road would remain in the same location inhibiting healthy stream temperatures, allowing for increased sedimentation, decreased riparian vegetation, and adding the long term cost of maintenance of three additional bridges to the National Forest road system. Both Options 1 and 2 are very similar in costs for vegetation management (Economics Report 2014 page 3).

## **Consistency with the Forest Plan, Management Direction, and Other Laws, Regulations and Policies**

### **Forest Plan**

This decision is consistent with the Colville National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (USDA Forest Service 1988) as amended. The Colville National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) is the guiding management direction for the Renshaw project area. The project area covers only approximately 3% of the Newport-Sullivan Lake Ranger Districts and less than 1% of the Colville National Forest. The Renshaw EA incorporates the Forest Plan by reference, and is tiered to the Forest Plan's FEIS (Final Environmental Impact Statement, USDA Forest Service 1988). The Forest Plan contains Standards and Guidelines and Management Area designations and prescriptions that apply to the entire Colville National Forest, including the project area. The silvicultural prescriptions on Management Areas (MA) 3A, 5 and 6 lands will be compatible with visual quality objectives. Management on MAs 6 and 8 lands will be compatible with management for big game winter range. Impacts of programmatic decisions contained in the Forest Plan are disclosed in the Forest Plan FEIS. The Forest Plan amendments are also management direction for this project. A document titled "Status of Management Indicator Species on the Colville National Forest" was completed (Youkey, 2012) and is incorporated by reference.

### **Relevant amendments are:**

*Inland Native Fish Strategy* (USDA Forest Service 1995b). This amendment replaced the interim riparian standard from Regional Forester's Forest Plan Amendment #1. The Inland Native Fish Strategy is also referred to as "INFISH." (EA pages 1-3, 5, 21, 23, 37, 61, 65, and 68-75; Hydrology and Fisheries specialist reports in the project record.)

Regional Forester's October 11, 2005, amendment to forest plans in Region 6, *Preventing and Managing Invasive Plants*, (Preventing and Managing Invasive Plants Record of Decision, Appendix 1-1). This management direction includes invasive plant prevention and treatment/restoration standards intended to help achieve stated desired future conditions, goals and objectives. (EA pages 1, 86-90; Noxious Weed specialist report in the project record.)

Regional Forester's Forest Plan Amendment #2 entitled *Revised Interim Management Direction Establishing Riparian, Ecosystem and Wildlife Standards for Timber Sales* (USDA Forest Service 1995). In this interim direction, the Regional Forester directs National Forests in eastern Washington to maintain, and/or enhance late and old structural stages in stands subject to timber harvest. This amendment is also known as "Eastside Screens." (EA pages 1-3, 5, 11, 31, 40, 42, 45, 53; Silviculture specialist report in the project record.)

### **Endangered Species Act**

The potential for the proposal to impact threatened, endangered and sensitive species was analyzed (EA pg. 67-77 [fish], 77-83 [terrestrial wildlife species], and 83 [plants]). Biological Evaluations have been

prepared (Analysis File: Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Species [Borysewicz, August 2014]; Biological Evaluation for Bull Trout [Honeycutt, August 2014], and Sensitive Plant Species Biological Evaluation [Ahlenlager, July 2014]). On January 12, 2015, the US Fish and Wildlife Service concurred that this project as described in the BEs is not likely to adversely affect the Canada lynx and grizzly bear, and will have no effect to bull trout. The concurrence letter is in Appendix B of the EA and in the project record.

No harvest or road construction is proposed within any old-growth areas (EA pages 17, 30, 43, 84, and 111) or core pine marten areas (EA page 84). Regeneration harvest in the Cedar Lynx Analysis Unit will promote about 300 acres of primary prey habitats in 10-20 years. Alternative B is consistent with management recommendations in the Lynx Conservation Assessment and Strategy (EA page 78). Although there will be a reduction in canopy closure and horizontal cover in treated areas, travel corridors will be maintained, and there will be a decreased risk of habitat loss to stand-replacement wildfire (EA page 84).

### **Clean Air Act**

The potential for the proposal to impact air quality was analyzed (EA pages 111-113). The proposal will have no impact on air quality nonattainment areas or Class I air sheds, and meets the Clean Air Act.

### **Clean Water Act**

The potential for the proposal to impact water was analyzed (EA pages 56-67). Stream segments listed as water quality impaired were given special consideration so as to improve conditions (See Hydrology Report August 2014). Implementation of this project meets the Clean Water Act.

### **Historic Preservation Act**

The project is in compliance with regulations that protect archeological and historic properties. The potential for the proposal to impact heritage resources was analyzed (EA pages 109-111). See the Cultural Resources report (Beat, July 2014). Determination for the project is a “no effect” undertaking, as per Programmatic Agreement Among the USDA Forest Service (PNW R6), The Advisory Council of Historic Preservation, and the Washington State Historic Preservation Office Regarding Cultural Resource Management on National Forests in the State of Washington (1997) (EA pages 109-111; and project record)

## **FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

After considering the environmental effects described in the Environmental Assessment, I have determined that this is not a major Federal action individually or cumulatively that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment (36 CFR §1508.27); therefore, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared. In considering the context of this project, all impacts will occur locally and will not have a cumulative effect on the Region or Nation as a whole. The following factors were considered in regards to the intensity of the localized impacts.

### **1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if the Federal agency believes that on balance the effect will be beneficial. [40 CFR §1508.27(b)(1)]**

The decision was reviewed. Beneficial and adverse impacts were identified. They are considered in both context and intensity. In balance, the beneficial outweigh the adverse impacts. A thorough effects analysis (direct, indirect, and cumulative) is available in Chapter 3 of the EA (pages 37-120), and in the Biological Evaluations (in the project record.)

The following are the beneficial impacts of the decision related to the purpose and need of the Renshaw project:

- **Silviculture:** Vegetation treatments are expected to reduce overstocking, remove diseased trees, and modify tree species composition for the purpose of improving forest health.
- **Fire and Fuels:** Vegetation treatments will reduce the risk, from a wildfire event, to private land, infrastructure, and forest values, and increase the effectiveness and efficiency of protecting property within the wildland-urban interface.
  - Of the 6,090 acres identified for treatment to meet the purpose and need, all of those acres will receive treatment under the decision, lessening the risk of adverse impacts in the event of a wildfire.
  - Fire will be reintroduced on the landscape, which will result in a lesser chance of high severity fire impacting the analysis area.
- **Fisheries:** Stand-replacing fire risk will be reduced both within and adjacent to the Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas (RHCAs). Fuel treatments (underburns) within the RHCA are beneficial to the RHCA because they prevent the complete loss of trees and vegetation from a possible wildfire and would burn small woody debris and leave large down woody material intact. With regard to water quality, the burning of slash and burning to restore open ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir forest stands would result in nutrient flushes into streams supporting fisheries.
- **Hydrology and Fisheries:** The obliteration of County Road 4699 (Rocky Creek Road) (Option 1) post project will include re-establishing flood plain, removing three outdated bridge structures and two tributary culvert removals on Lost Creek, and recontouring and/or decompaction of the road prism. Reconstruction and relocation of the new road should result in a moderate beneficial effect over the longer term, as sediment production from road templates decreases due to new armoring, drainage structure placement, and revegetation. There will be an immediate, small short-term increase in sediment, but an overall reduction in sediment risk and a net decrease in sediment yield long term.
- **Wildlife (Big Game):** Treatments of all units will result in more browse and forage and a better distribution of cover and forage than currently exists. Additionally, mechanical crushing and/or burning of dead and tall shrubs will either stimulate sprouting or compact browse allowing big game to reach it. Closure of approximately 2.8 miles of National Forest system roads will reduce total road density in the project area.
- **Provide sources of employment and forest products:** The decision will provide opportunities for employment through contracting the implementation activities and is expected to result in two to four wood products contracts and possible stewardship contracts with advertisement of the first contract expected to occur in 2015.
- **Roads:** Approximately 7 miles of National Forest System road will be decommissioned. This helps the Forest Service to efficiently spend their limited road maintenance dollars by reducing or eliminating expenditures on roads not necessary as part of the transportation system.
- **Soil:** Road decommissioning will allow these soils to start to recover slowly; natural processes will be allowed to resume.

- **Hydrology:** The proposed road improvements will reduce the potential for stream crossing failure and road related sediment production and delivery even if a severe wildfire did occur. Road condition improvements will be in the form of improved road drainage by replacing or removing culverts, blading road surfaces, and creating water bars and cross drains. Channel morphology will be maintained and somewhat improved since many of the known sediment delivery sources will be rehabilitated. These activities will help to bring some of the stream reaches into a positive trend towards a properly functioning condition.
- **Range:** Increased forage and foraging areas for livestock will result from the vegetation and fuels treatments.
- **Visual Quality:** While there will be short-term noticeable changes due to various burn methods, a resilient, healthy, more open, natural appearing landscape and potentially sustaining, scenic forest setting is expected to further long-term enhancement objectives.

While there will be some adverse effects, such as winter and summer recreation temporarily impaired in certain areas during project implementation, increased sedimentation to the streams during road obliteration and construction (EA pages 61-64), increased localized compaction of soils (EA 94-95), recreation and scenery impacts during harvest activities (EA pages 105 and 108) and potential wildlife disturbance (EA pages 73-74 and 78-83) during harvest activities, they will only occur over a short time span (during project implementation) and nearly all the adverse effects will be minimized by design criteria and mitigation measures listed on pages 14-32 of the EA.

**2. The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety. [40 CFR §1508.27(b)(2)]**

There are a number of health and safety hazards to Forest Service employees and the general public with carrying out the proposed action. None are unusual or unique to the Renshaw project. These are discussed in chapter 3 of the EA; Silviculture pages 37-49; Fire/Fuels pages 49-56; Transportation page 98-102; Recreation pages 102-106; and Economic Feasibility Analysis pages 114-116, and include discussions of effects related to smoke, dust, increased traffic, logging hazards, prescribed burning hazards, noise, improved road safety and reduced wildfire risk. Fuel treatment activity should effectively reduce surface fuel loads and crown fire hazards and thus decrease fire suppression costs and the associated risks to both firefighters and the public. (EA page 116) Based on the discussions in the Renshaw EA and review of many similar projects, these public health and safety effects are determined not to be significant.

**3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as the proximity to historical or cultural resources, parklands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas. [40 CFR §1508.27(b)(3)]**

There will be no effect of any alternative to prime farmland, rangeland, proximity to historical or cultural resources, parklands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas associated with the implementation of any proposed alternative, provided design criteria and BMPs listed in chapter 2 are fully implemented. (EA pg. 94 [soil], design criteria pgs. 14-31)

**4. The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial. [40 CFR §1508.27(b)(4)]**

There is no known scientific controversy over the impacts of the project. Management actions such as those discussed in Alternative B are done in other areas throughout this Forest and on many other National Forests. Consumers, civil rights, minority groups, public health and safety, and women will not be significantly affected (EA pages 117-118 [environmental justice]; pages 111-113 [air quality]);

**5. The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks. [40 CFR §1508.27(b)(5)]**

The effects analysis shows the effects are not uncertain and do not involve unique or unknown risk. While any action carries some degree of risk, Alternative B was designed, to minimize unique or unknown risks. In addition, the design criteria and Best Management Practices (EA pages 14-31 and project record) will ensure that the effects will be similar to those predicted in the Renshaw EA. There were no highly uncertain, unique, or unknown risks identified in any of the effects analyses conducted for the Renshaw project. (EA, chapter 3)

**6. The degree to which the action may establish precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration. [40 CFR §1508.27(b)(6)]**

None of the actions proposed in the Renshaw project set precedents. (EA pages 98, 106, 109, 111, and 114). The Newport and Sullivan Lake Ranger Districts have been conducting timber sales and prescribed burns for years, many of which are similar in scope and nature to those proposed in the Renshaw project. A recent example of timber harvest thinning and prescribed underburning similar to the Renshaw project includes the Hanlon Vegetation Management Project (USDA Forest Service 2010)

**7. Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts. Significance exists if it is reasonable to anticipate a cumulatively significant impact on the environment. Significance cannot be avoided by terming an action temporary or by breaking it down into small component parts. [40 CFR §1508.27(b)(7)]**

Chapter 3 pages 37-120, environmental effects under each resource section, and Appendix B of the EA.

**8. The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources. [40 CFR §1508.27(b)(8)]**

The action will not cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources because heritage sites will be protected during future site-specific implementation (EA pages 20-21). Tribal consultation has occurred and supports protective measures proposed. Determination for the project is a “no effect” undertaking, as per Programmatic Agreement Among the USDA Forest Service (PNW R6), The Advisory Council of Historic Preservation, and the Washington State Historic Preservation Office Regarding Cultural Resource Management on National Forests in the State of Washington (1997) (EA pages 7, and 109-111; and pgs. 20-21 [design criteria #46-48]; Project Record)

**9. The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973. [40 CFR §1508.27(b)(9)]**

The effects on endangered or threatened species and their habitats are discussed in the Biological Evaluations in the project record and Appendix B of the Renshaw EA, with results summarized in the EA on pages 77-83 for terrestrial wildlife, fish, and for sensitive plants (project design criteria EA pgs. 14-31; and Appendix B). On January 12, 2015, the US Fish and Wildlife Service concurred that this project as described in the BEs is not likely to adversely affect the Canada lynx and grizzly bear, and will have no effect to bull trout. The concurrence letter is in Appendix B of the EA and in the project record.

**10. Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment. [40 CFR §1508.27(b)(10)]**

The Renshaw project has been examined in relation to a number of environmental laws and requirements, and has been found to be in compliance in all cases. See the discussion of consistency with laws, regulations, and policies starting on page 14 of this document.

## **EXPECTED IMPLEMENTATION AND OBJECTION RIGHTS**

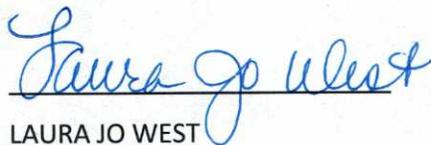
A pre-decisional objection period was offered on this project under 36 CFR 218. No objections were received. There will be no further review by any other Forest Service or USDA official. Implementation may occur immediately.

## **CONTACT PERSON**

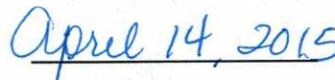
For further information regarding this project, contact:

Gayne Sears, District Ranger  
Newport-Sullivan Lake Ranger Districts  
315 North Warren  
Newport, Washington 99156  
(509) 447-7300.

## **SIGNATURE OF THE RESPONSIBLE OFFICIAL**



LAURA JO WEST  
Forest Supervisor  
Colville National Forest



Date

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