

# STATE of our FORESTS & PUBLIC LANDS GRADES at a GLANCE



## STATEWIDE FORESTRY ISSUES

### COMMUNITY WILDFIRE RESILIENCE

WORK IN PROGRESS

DNR made notable improvements to contracting processes for community organization grantees, enabling more effective project implementation. Equity and Inclusion Grants for organizations serving Latinx communities are positive, though a very modest portion of DNR's wildfire spending. To address community needs, DNR and other state agencies must prioritize better collaboration. Wildfire Ready Neighbors continues to overlap with other wildfire home assessments, creating excess work for local partners. Notable progress has been made in post-fire recovery and in expanding resilience work in Western Washington.

### BENEFICIAL FIRE

WORK IN PROGRESS

DNR addressed some of the barriers to expanding prescribed fire and continued to train burn bosses through their Certified Burn Manager program. However, staff capacity and total acres burned remains low. An April 2024 Leader's Intent establishes an ambitious objective of 100,000 acres of prescribed burning annually. An actionable plan and significant additional investment will be needed to reach this magnitude of burning. This is more than five times the average annual acres of prescribed fire since the Forest Health Strategic Plan's inception in 2017.

### 20-YEAR FOREST HEALTH STRATEGIC PLAN

WORK IN PROGRESS

Forest health treatments in Eastern Washington continue to progress ahead of pace, reaching a total of 790,790 acres. More emphasis is needed on treatment types with the greatest ecological impact: non-commercial thinning and broadcast burns. On state lands, "regeneration harvests" (clearcuts) continue to comprise a large portion of treatments, suggesting more scrutiny is needed over forest health objectives of treatments. Substantially more broadcast burning is needed to restore forest health. On state lands, less than 1% of treatments were broadcast burns. The first 20-Year Forest Health Strategic Plan Monitoring Report, published this year, reflects an ongoing commitment to scientific rigor, building on the landscape analysis used to identify priority treatment areas.

### CARBON SEQUESTRATION AND STORAGE IN FORESTS ACROSS WASHINGTON

NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

DNR has not taken steps to develop a statewide plan for enhancing carbon sequestration and storage on natural and working lands. This leaves a void in the state's climate strategy. The agency has secured funding and initiated mapping to guide future reforestation, but has not advanced other forest-based natural climate solutions. This year, the DNR-convened Small Forest Landowner (SFLO) Carbon Workgroup delivered a report, fulfilling a legislative mandate to provide recommendations on carbon market opportunities for SFLOs. The report contained recommendations that merit further exploration. However, the path forward to prioritize these recommendations and make them actionable is not yet clear.

## ISSUES ON STATE TRUST FOREST LANDS

### GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT OF STATE LANDS FOR MULTIPLE BENEFITS

NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

DNR has not changed its approach to managing state trust lands following the Washington State Supreme Court's unanimous *CNW v. Franz* decision in 2022. The ruling affirmed DNR's duty to manage for public benefit alongside a duty to provide benefit to trust beneficiaries. The Court also affirmed that DNR is not obligated to maximize revenue. DNR has continued to prioritize maximizing revenue through timber harvest, as demonstrated by ongoing logging of mature forests, as well as a landslide following logging of known unstable slopes in Cowlitz County. DNR has initiated legislatively mandated efforts to create an ecosystem services asset inventory on state lands.

### OLDER FORESTS AND CRITICAL HABITATS ON STATE LANDS

NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

DNR's Habitat Conservation Plan includes an objective to achieve 10% to 15% older forests across DNR managed lands by 2067. DNR has asserted they are on track to meet this objective in the future. However, DNR continues to log existing older, structurally complex forests, even though agency policy commits to harvesting structurally complex stands only once older forest targets are met. These remaining mature forests represent less than 4% of all DNR managed lands. Initiatives led by the conservation community and counties have secured Climate Commitment Act funds to conserve mature forests and buy replacement forestland to add to the trust for timber harvest.

### MANAGING FOR CARBON AND CLIMATE ON STATE LANDS

NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

DNR has not changed management practices to enhance carbon storage and sequestration on forested trust lands nor has it explored creation of a carbon policy or a climate policy. DNR continues to log carbon-rich mature forests. The agency also voluntarily halted its sole proposed carbon offset project in response to timber industry litigation. In April, a Superior Court judge ruled in this litigation, affirming DNR's legal authority to lease lands for carbon storage and sequestration projects. In March, King County Superior Court also found that DNR failed to conduct adequate review of the climate impact of individual timber sales, affirming a similar ruling from Jefferson County Superior Court in 2022 that DNR did not implement broadly.

### EASTERN AND WESTERN WASHINGTON SUSTAINABLE HARVEST CALCULATIONS

WORK IN PROGRESS

The Sustainable Harvest Calculations (SHC) for Eastern and Western Washington were delayed due to timber industry litigation that was withdrawn in September 2023. DNR now anticipates completing the SHCs at least one year into the 2025-2034 decadal sustainable harvest period. DNR has not demonstrated how SHC modeling will change to quantify and to promote social and ecological outcomes, beyond the status quo of optimizing for timber revenue. Board of Natural Resources Resolution 1591 requires DNR to consider objectives such as carbon sequestration and storage. The resolution was passed in December 2022, though DNR has neither demonstrated progress nor shared plans to fulfill the Resolution's requirements. DNR has also not engaged the Sustainable Harvest Technical Advisory Committee this year or last year.

## ISSUES ON PRIVATE FOREST LANDS

### ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

WORK IN PROGRESS

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has made significant progress on the Washington State Auditor's Office recommendations. However, in its role as program administrator, DNR has taken a passive stance on industrial landowner litigation threats, missing opportunities to reinforce AMP norms. Recently, a Structured Decision Making workshop was held. Facilitators have been brought on board to pilot this decision-making process within AMP, though its long-term trajectory remains uncertain. Lastly, a Timber, Fish, and Wildlife Policy Manual has been approved to enhance program consistency. Despite these efforts, the AMP is facing a substantial \$3.8 million budget shortfall, which threatens the continuation of planned projects and stakeholder participation.

### WATER TYPING RULEMAKING

NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

Water Typing rulemaking took a problematic turn in August, when core, longstanding elements of the proposed rule were moved to non-binding Board Manual guidance. Earlier this year, DNR hired a contractor to develop spatial analysis to guide the economic analysis for rulemaking. The spatial analysis methodology contains significant issues. It also does not integrate prior, more robust Adaptive Management Program (AMP) analysis produced by a lengthy multistakeholder process. This past modeling studied how well rule alternatives achieve program objectives. The options, materials, and framing DNR provided the Forest Practices Board (FPB) to guide decision making between water typing rule alternatives generated confusion and misperceptions. As a result, the FPB voted to remove these elements from the water typing rule. This path sidelines 8+ years of AMP work, and risks violating both the Habitat Conservation Plan and Tribal treaty rights.

### PROTECTING STREAM TEMPERATURE IN HEADWATER STREAMS AND CLEAN WATER ACT ASSURANCES

WORK IN PROGRESS

A stakeholder workgroup was formed to draft new rules for riparian buffers on Type Np streams. DNR struggled to maintain process clarity and inconsistently incorporated stakeholder input. DNR finalized the draft rule language and submitted to the FPB, leading to improved transparency. The Type Np (non-fish perennial) rulemaking analysis relies on the same spatial analysis methodology used in water typing. The significant errors and resolution limitations of this analysis may result in inaccuracies to the economic analysis. DNR intends to move forward with Type Np rulemaking concurrently with water typing, hopefully avoiding the Type Np rulemaking timeline being negatively impacted by any delays in Water Typing rulemaking.

## AQUATICS

### ISSUES ON AQUATIC LANDS

SUCCESS

DNR continues to grow the Derelict Vessel Removal Program and to make good use of the Watercraft Excise Tax and vessel registration fees. DNR is also preventing boats from becoming derelict vessels through the Vessel Turn-In Program. Reducing toxic discharges is good for salmon and for people, including upcoming work to remove tire reefs from Puget Sound that continue to leach chemicals. A pilot program to accelerate salmon recovery in the Snohomish Basin is gaining momentum and leveraging modest initial investments into millions of dollars of state and federal funding.

## CLEAN ENERGY

### CLEAN ENERGY

WORK IN PROGRESS

DNR has made progress in the past year by updating its policies to promote a more robust public process for land-use decisions. The agency has also been focusing on exploratory land use licenses that do not allow infrastructure development or land disturbance. There have been some refinements of the Clean Energy Parcel Screening Tool based on Tribal consultation and public feedback. However, the agency is falling far short of its goal of 1,000 MW of new clean energy generation, with no new projects moving forward in the past year.