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Washington, D.C. Update

Farm Bill. Following the House’s failure to pass its [Farm Bill reauthorization](#) in May due to internal Republican disagreements over immigration policy, there has been recent progress on the Farm Bill in both chambers. AFRC is engaged in the effort as it likely represents the last vehicle available to pass additional federal forest management reforms this Congress to build upon the narrow fire funding and forestry reforms package that were included in the March Omnibus.

On June 21, the House passed its Farm Bill (H.R. 2) by a 213-211 vote. The House proposal, which includes cost-saving eligibility reforms to the federal food stamp program, was opposed by all Democrats and 20 Republicans. H.R. 2 includes a robust forestry title providing additional Categorical Exclusions for timber projects, expedited National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) reviews for salvage projects, and streamlined Endangered Species Act (ESA) consultation procedures. While the forestry provisions didn’t receive the level of attention as the proposed food stamp cuts, they attracted the ire of environmental groups and are likely outside of what’s politically viable in the U.S. Senate.

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Meanwhile, on June 13, the Senate Agriculture Committee passed [its five-year Farm Bill reauthorization](#) by a 20-1 vote – an indication of the bipartisan approach the Senate is taking on the Farm Bill. Unfortunately, the Senate Farm Bill proposal currently lacks meaningful forest management reforms. Senator Steve Daines (R-MT) drafted a package of strategic forest reform amendments but did not have sufficient support from Committee leadership to bring them up for a committee vote. The only Daines amendment adopted in committee would allow the Forest Service to enter into a Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) agreement with the counties (the underlying bill would also authorize GNA for tribes).

The Senate is expected to take up the Farm Bill this week. Senator Daines is working with other Senators, including Senator Cory Gardner (R-CO), in the hopes of securing sufficient support for a handful of strong forestry reform amendments. AFRC appreciates the tireless efforts of Senator Daines to advocate for improving the health of our forests and rural communities and we hope other Senators will support these reasonable, common sense reforms. If the Senate acts on its version of the Farm Bill, it is unclear how the two chambers will reconcile these vastly different proposals. AFRC hopes negotiators can find common ground on a proposal that can navigate partisan and ideological rifts in Congress while adding additional forest management reforms.

Appropriations and Budget. In February, Congress passed a two-year budget deal that authorized \$600 billion in additional spending above the levels called for in the Budget Control Act of 2011. Congress then followed suit by passing the Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 Omnibus Appropriations bill in March. Congress is now well into the annual appropriations process for FY 2019, which begins October 1.

Both the House and Senate Appropriations Committees adopted FY 2019 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations bills, which provide funding for the U.S. Department of the Interior and the U.S. Forest Service. Thus far, the increased spending authority included in the earlier two-year budget deal has made more funding available across the various Appropriations bills – including the Interior bill.

As reported in the [May Newsletter](#), the House FY 2019 Interior bill would boost the Forest Products budget line item by \$15 million and Hazardous Fuels reduction funding by \$63 million – both significant increases. On June 14, the Senate Appropriations Committee approved its Interior funding bill, which proposes more modest increases. Under the Senate proposal, the Forest Service would see a \$5 million increase in Hazardous Fuels reduction funding and a \$2 million increase for the Forest Products program. The Senate bill includes strong report language related to timber targets and expediting timber sales in insect and disease infestations areas:

“The Forest Service is directed to provide information within 90 days of enactment of this act detailing the resources necessary to increase the agency timber target to 4 billion board feet, annually; including the geographic regions most likely to contribute to the increase in forest product production should a new timber target be implemented, as well as any barriers to achieving the higher target level. Additionally, the Forest Service is directed to meet timber target goals using commercial products and excluding personal use firewood from accomplishment reporting.”

“The Committee directs the Service to prioritize hazardous fuels reduction projects on the greatest fire risks along wildland urban interfaces facing significant tree mortality. Additionally, the Forest Service is directed to offer timber sales expeditiously in areas where dead and dying trees occur as a result of wildfire or insect and disease infestations.”

Both the House and Senate FY 2019 Interior Appropriations bills would provide over \$106 million for the management of BLM's Oregon and California (O&C) grant lands in Western Oregon. The Trump Administration's FY 2019 budget request proposed cutting the program by over \$16 million. Maintaining the recent level of funding represents a significant victory. AFRC will be working with Congress and the Trump Administration to understand how much timber the BLM plans to offer with this higher level of funding since it reported it could offer 205 million board feet (mmbf) with the \$90 million requested by the Administration. The Senate included report language expressing continued concern about the 2016 Resource Management Plans and funds being directed at recreational facilities:

“The Committee is concerned about the Bureau's ability to generate an adequate and predictable supply of timber and the resulting county revenues in Western Oregon under the agency's plan that limits sustained yield management to just 20 percent of the forest land. The Bureau should focus on reducing the program's facilities footprint, and no funds are provided for construction of new recreational facilities within the program.”

NEPA and Government Reorganization. On June 20, the White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) published an [advanced notice of proposed rulemaking](#) in the Federal Register. The document outlines 20 questions CEQ is considering as it looks to update implementing regulations for the procedural provisions for NEPA. The nature of the questions suggests that CEQ is considering actions to harmonize and streamline the regulations to make federal environmental reviews more efficient.

AFRC will be working with the Washington, D.C. based Federal Forest Resource Coalition (FFRC) and other partners to provide comment. We hope to better understand how this effort may impact the Forest Service's regulatory reform effort and any proposed changes to its NEPA handbook. The 30-day comment period ends July 20.

On June 21, the Trump Administration released a proposed plan for reorganizing the federal government. The most sweeping change would merge the Departments of Labor and Education into one department. The most significant proposal in the natural resources arena would merge the National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) from the Department of Commerce with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service of the Department of the Interior, thereby centralizing ESA authority in one agency. The proposal would also shift the civil works functions of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to the Department of the Interior but does not recommend moving the U.S. Forest Service out of the Department of Agriculture.

Congressional committees with oversight of government reform are planning hearings on the Trump proposal. Many of the changes would require congressional action, which won't be easy and would likely involve multiple committees with overlapping jurisdictions. Some of the changes could be implemented through executive action, including shifting NOAA Fisheries to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. NOAA was created through executive order by President Nixon within the Department of Commerce, rather than the Department of the Interior – an action some believe may have been in response to Interior Secretary Walter J. Hickel's criticism of Nixon's Vietnam War policies. */Heath Heikkila*

A Legal Winning Streak!

AFRC is pleased that May and June brought several positive decisions on forestry projects in the courts. These indicate careful work by the agencies involved, rigorous review by the courts, and hopefully a growing recognition of the need for active management of our federal forests.

May 4 & June 7 – The district court denied a preliminary injunction and the Ninth Circuit denied a motion for injunction pending appeal on the Pioneer North and Pioneer South projects on the Boise National Forest. This comes after the district court denied a motion for a Temporary Restraining Order in November 2017. ([November 2017 Newsletter](#)) These projects are essential to maintaining the management infrastructure in southern Idaho. AFRC represents Boise County and the Boise Forest Coalition.

May 18 – The Ninth Circuit affirmed the district court’s approval of the Frog Project only three days after oral argument. This brought an end to over a decade of litigation on a modest forest health project. The project was approved in 2000 and first contracted to Sierra Forest Products in 2001. After a fire and a first round of litigation, the project was on hold from 2005 to 2014, and was halted again in 2016 to collect additional tree mortality data. AFRC represented Sierra Forest Products as an intervenor. ([May 2018 Newsletter](#))

May 30 – The district court granted summary judgment in favor of the Lava Project on the Modoc National Forest. The primary purposes of the project’s 8,400 acres of treatments are fuel reduction and protecting valuable electrical infrastructure. The court rejected plaintiffs’ claims regarding effects to wolves and spotted owls, as well as claims regarding the need for an EIS and the range of alternatives. AFRC Staff Attorney Sara Ghafouri represented intervenors AFRC, Loggers Association of Northern California, and Associated California Loggers. AFRC member Franklin Logging has purchased one of the sales. ([May 2018 Newsletter](#))

June 7 – Plaintiffs challenging the Joey and Bald Mountain projects on the Sequoia and Sierra National Forests dismissed their case because of the Frog decision. AFRC represented Sierra Forest Products as an intervenor. (Full article below.)

June 8 – The Ninth Circuit approved the Forest Service’s use of emergency authority under NEPA to build a community protection line and acknowledged that yes, fires are emergencies. AFRC represented amicus Lake Wenatchee Fire and Rescue. (Full article below)

June 11 – The magistrate judge issued a positive Finding and Recommendation regarding the Lostine Project on the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest. Judge Sullivan agreed with AFRC that uses of the Farm Bill Categorical Exclusion (CE) do not require analysis of whether there are “extraordinary circumstances” under NEPA regulations. AFRC participated as an amicus. (Full article below)

AFRC appreciates the efforts of our members, staff, and allies on these important issues.

/Lawson Fite

Ninth Circuit Rules in Favor of Common Sense: Wildfires Are Emergencies

On June 8, the Ninth Circuit ruled in favor of logic and common sense: massive wildfires on public lands are emergencies that threaten lives, property, and natural resources. The Court's ruling backed a decision by the Forest Service to build a community protection line – a fuel break – to safeguard families and homes near Lake Chelan during last year's Wolverine Fire.

As described in AFRC's [December 2017](#) and [July 2017 Newsletters](#), the Wolverine Fire was a severe fire that lasted over two months, burning over 62,000 acres along Lake Chelan. The fire threatened 936 homes and structures and resulted in a series of evacuation orders. The months-long wildfire smoke choked the surrounding recreational areas. In the interest of public safety, fire managers decided to remove vegetation along a 300-foot-wide community protection line to help stop the fire's spread. The Forest Service relied on emergency authority to construct the protection line in order to ensure people could get to safety if the fire continued to spread and to protect homes. The emergency authority allows the Forest Service to act when necessary before preparing lengthy and duplicative environmental paperwork. Without this authority, the Forest Service could have been forced to divert resources, personnel, money, and time away from immediately responding to the fire.

After the fire was out, the Forest Service was sued for its proactive efforts. Plaintiff, Forest Service Employees for Environmental Ethics (FSEEE), argued that wildfire events are not "emergencies" and thus cannot enable the use of emergency authorities that explicitly allow the Federal Government to respond quickly in times of crisis. FSEEE also argued forest fires are viewed as a common occurrence in the western United States, therefore FSEEE reasoned that they are not "unforeseen."

AFRC Staff Attorney Sara Ghafouri represented Lake Wenatchee Fire & Rescue (LWFR), an all-volunteer fire department, as an *amicus curiae* party in the case. LWFR worked closely with the Forest Service, the Incident Management Team, and other local stakeholders daily regarding the construction of the community protection line. LWFR supported the Forest Service's ability to act quickly to reduce the risks to isolated communities and local firefighter personnel during the wildfire event.

The Ninth Circuit rejected FSEEE's argument and concluded, "While it is true that fires happen every year, it defies plain language and common sense to conclude that no individual fire – or its course, intensity, or duration – could be unforeseeable. It is unreasonable to argue that forest fires can never present emergency situations when viewed at the time the fire is raging." The Ninth Circuit issued its ruling acknowledging the common sense understanding that wildfires can be emergencies. With wildfire season approaching, it is critical more than ever for the Forest Service to have the ability to rely on its emergency regulation authority and act quickly when attempting to mitigate harm to vulnerable, nearby communities. /Sara Ghafouri

Plaintiffs Dismiss Joey and Bald Mountain Lawsuit

On June 7, the district court dismissed plaintiffs' challenge to the Joey Project on the Sequoia National Forest and the Bald Mountain Project on the Sierra National Forest based on the parties' stipulation that the action be dismissed with prejudice. This case presented similar

issues that were raised in the Frog Project appeal and shortly after the Ninth Circuit ruling, the parties stipulated to dismiss this case.

Sequoia ForestKeeper and Earth Island Institute had brought a lawsuit alleging that the Forest Service violated NEPA by proceeding with the projects without analyzing “significant new circumstances” regarding the “drought-related, massive die-off” of trees in the Sierra Nevada area. According to plaintiffs, the changed forest conditions have affected the baseline conditions for the Pacific fisher, the California spotted owl, and the northern goshawk. AFRC intervened on behalf of Sierra Forest Products, who holds the contract on Joey Project and one of the contracts on the Bald Mountain Project.

The Joey Project will treat 6,153 acres using a combination of hand and mechanical fuels reduction and tree thinning in the Wildland-Urban Intermix (WUI) defense and threat zones. The treatments of mixed conifer units and pine-dominated stands will generate approximately 2.353 mmbf. The Forest Service developed the Bald Mountain Project with the support of the Dinkey Collaborative to reduce hazardous fuels and restore ecological components within the Dinkey Landscape Restoration Project area. The project proposes approximately 5,728 acres of treatment and includes logging activities in Pacific fisher habitat, California spotted owl and northern goshawk territories. The timber volume for both projects, almost 17 mmbf, is extremely important to Sierra Forest Products and our other members active in the southern Sierras. /Sara Ghafouri

Environmental Groups’ Arguments on Collaboration Rejected

On June 11, Magistrate Judge Sullivan offered a strong rebuke to Greater Hells Canyon Council and Oregon Wild’s legal challenge to an important public safety project on the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest in Northeast Oregon (the Lostine Corridor Public Safety Project).

This case is the first to challenge the meaning of a “collaborative process” under the Farm Bill. Magistrate Judge Sullivan rejected plaintiffs’ arguments about the lack of collaboration. Judge Sullivan noted that plaintiffs repeatedly insisted that a “formal collaborative group” was required for project development, “even though there is no legal authority for such requirement.”

“Contrary to plaintiffs’ arguments, this does not require a structured nonexclusive working group from initial design stage nor the widespread dissemination of every piece of information on Project design and impacts at every stage of the development process.” Magistrate Judge Sullivan highlights how the Forest Service did in fact collaborate with plaintiffs and how they seek “to impose a more demanding definition for, and requirements of, a collaborative process.”

The Lostine Corridor provides access into the Eagle Cap Wilderness in Wallowa County. It not only provides important scenic, fishery, and wildlife values, but is also home to historic and recreational values including: a Civilian Conservation Corps-era guard station, seven campgrounds, and three developed trailheads. The corridor is interspersed with family homes, small residential developments, and private lands. Residents, visitors, and emergency services agencies who operate in the area have expressed serious concerns about downed hazard trees along the roads, trails, and campgrounds. Declining forest health, heavy fuel loads, and the risk of catastrophic fire threaten the many values of the Lostine Corridor.

In response, the Forest Service worked with stakeholders on a project to remove hazard and danger trees that pose a risk to the public, create defensible space around residential and historical areas, reduce fuel loads and the risk of high intensity fires, and thin dense forest stands to improve forest resiliency to insects, disease, and wildfire.

AFRC filed an *amicus* brief highlighting three narrow issues: (1) the Lostine Project was developed through the type of collaborative process required under the Farm Bill; (2) the Farm Bill does not require the Forest Service to assess whether “extraordinary circumstances” exist, a requirement for regulatory but not statutory Categorical Exclusions (CE); and (3) the Forest Service reasonably interpreted its Lostine River Wild and Scenic River Management Plan to allow the silvicultural techniques that are authorized under the project.

Plaintiffs’ objection to Judge Sullivan’s Findings and Recommendation is due on July 3, which will be resolved by U.S. District Court Judge Simon. /Sara Ghafouri

Monument Litigation Continues: Administration and Enviro Groups Defend Expansion, But for Different Reasons

AFRC challenged President Obama’s unlawful expansion of the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument by filing suit in early 2017. ([March 2017 Newsletter](#)) Over 80% of the land within the expansion is O&C land designated for permanent forest production and subject to a Congressional mandate to produce timber on a sustained basis. The O&C Act reserves these lands for permanent forest production, and [requires](#) “the timber thereon shall be sold, cut, and removed in conformity with the princip[le] of sustained yield... .”

AFRC’s suit is about following the law. The suit asks a simple, but important, question: can the president unilaterally designate public lands for a specific purpose, in this case a national monument, that directly nullifies and contravenes an Act of Congress that requires these exact same lands to be managed for an entirely different purpose – supporting local governments through sustainable forest management? Or, once authority has been delegated to the president, is it absolute?

In December 2017, Secretary of the Interior Zinke released his [final report](#) and recommendations which favored changes to the Cascade-Siskiyou. Specifically, the report suggested to the president: “The boundary should be revised through the use of appropriate authority, including lawful exercise of your discretion granted by the Act, in order to address impacts on private lands and to address issues concerning the designation and reservation of O&C Lands as part of the monument and the impacts on commercial timber production.” AFRC’s case was stayed while the president reviewed Secretary Zinke’s recommendation and litigation resumed in April with the filing of AFRC’s opening brief. ([April 2018 Newsletter](#))

AFRC’s brief showed how the president lacked authority to expand the Monument. The Proclamation expanding the Monument is diametrically opposed to the direction of the O&C Act, which reserved the majority of the expansion acres for sustained-yield timber production. The [Property Clause](#) of the U.S. Constitution reserves power to Congress, not the president, to make rules and regulations regarding public lands. With the Cascade-Siskiyou expansion, the

president improperly claimed the power to override the authority of Congress which reserved the lands for timber production.

On June 15, the government and intervening environmental groups filed their opening briefs defending the designation. The administration, consistent with the last major round of [monument litigation](#) in the early 2000s, argues that presidential action under the Antiquities Act is not subject to judicial review. In doing so, it claims that there is no limit on presidential action under the Antiquities Act because of the president's discretion under that Act. It also argues that discretion in the O&C Act to plan for sustained yield includes discretion to set aside acres in reserves, because the Act does not require BLM to cut "every tree on every acre" of the O&C lands. Environmental groups contend, contrary to the historical record and the words of the statute, that the O&C's timber-production mandates are actually direction to manage for multiple use. Neither the government nor environmentalists grapple with the [finding of FDR's Interior Solicitor](#), only three years after the passage of the O&C Act, that the president lacks authority to reserve O&C lands under the Antiquities Act.

The litigation looks to continue with AFRC's reply brief on July 31 and the government/environmental replies on September 13, with a hearing likely in the late fall.

/Lawson Fite

Marbled Murrelet Long Term Conservation Strategy Updates

There were several developments in June related to the Marbled Murrelet Long Term Conservation Strategy (MMLTCS) for Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) state trust lands.

On June 6, Congresswoman Jaime Herrera Beutler (R-WA) attached an amendment to the Fiscal Year 2019 House Interior Appropriations spending bill that would prevent the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) from approving a MMLTCS that includes forested acres "*in excess of those identified as occupied habitat, existing old growth stands, stands that will become old growth within 70 years, and associated buffers.*"

Congresswoman Herrera Beutler argued that the MMLTCS would set aside thousands of non-suitable murrelet habitat and unfairly undermines the economic foundation of Southwest Washington's rural communities, as well as the counties' ability to provide basic services to residents. The Congresswoman's leadership on the MMLTCS also included a March [letter](#) sent to Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke.

AFRC believes the acreage being proposed for set aside under the MMLTCS far exceeds the DNR's responsibility under the 1997 Habitat Conservation Plan and the ESA – potentially in direct conflict with the DNR's trust mandate. On June 1, AFRC sent a [letter](#) to Commissioner Hilary Franz and the Board of Natural Resources outlining these and other concerns with the process and approach being taken by the USFWS. One of key concerns identified by AFRC is the inclusion of tens of thousands of acres that are not currently suitable habitat and won't develop into habitat during the life of the HCP. Congresswoman Herrera Beutler's amendment seeks to address this serious concern with the plan.

On June 5, AFRC staff and beneficiary representatives highlighted concerns in public testimony before the Board of Natural Resources. This included a reminder about the Board's legal mandate under trust law. The presentation covered the legal and policy concerns outlined in AFRC's June 1 letter to the Board.

An archived webcast of the June 5 BNR meeting is available at TVW's [website](#) (comments start at 30:15).

You can also review a [press release](#) issued by Congresswoman Herrera Beutler on the Appropriations amendment and [Commission Hilary Franz's statement](#) in response.

/Heath Heikkila

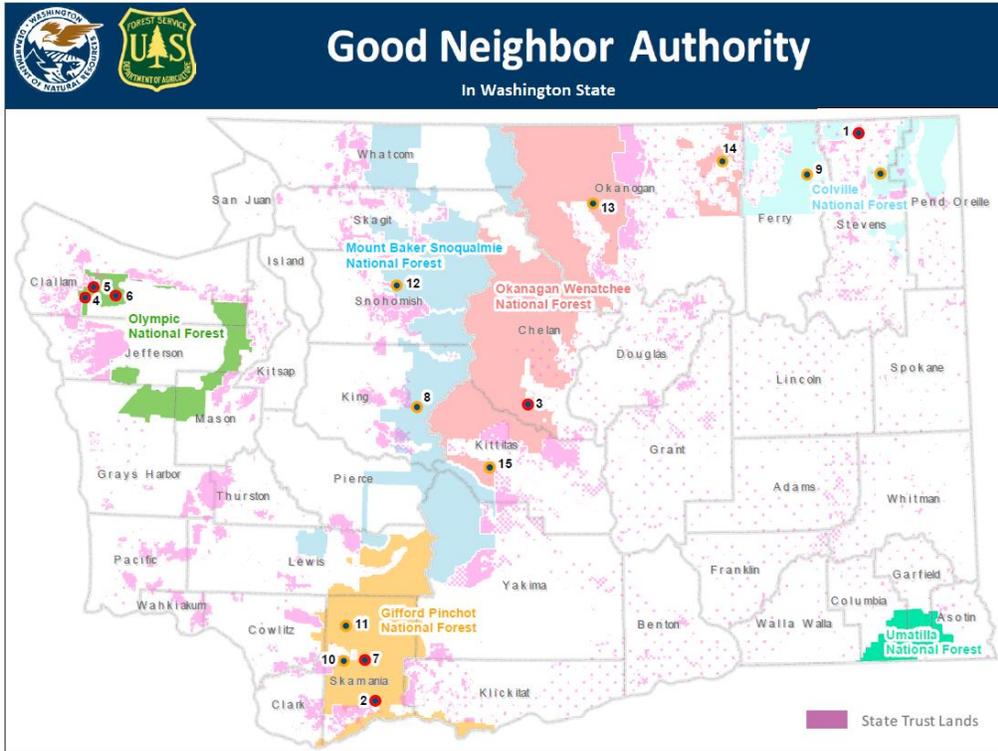
Washington DNR Continues to Progress on GNA

Washington DNR continues to make progress on implementation of the Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) in Washington State. As reported in our [June 2017 Newsletter](#), DNR and Region 6 of the U.S. Forest Service signed the Master Agreement to conduct GNA projects in Washington State. The first DNR project on Forest Service land was the Ursa Thin Stewardship Sale on the Gifford Pinchot National Forest.

DNR has also conducted field work on the Block of Nine timber sale on the Colville National Forest. This represents the second Supplemental Project Agreement signed by DNR and the Forest Service. It is anticipated DNR will auction this sale in August as the first DNR administered *timber sale* under GNA. Currently there are projects in various stages of completion on each National Forest in Washington. In addition to the Colville project, there are projects on the Gifford Pinchot, Olympic, and Mount Baker-Snoqualmie that include proposed timber sales. The Okanogan-Wenatchee has a non-commercial stand management project in the works.

Revenue from these projects will cover the Forest Service "base rate." Project income above the "base rate" will first cover DNR's costs and excess revenue will be deposited into the new GNA revolving fund that the legislature approved this last session. Funds in the revolving account can be used for a variety of future project needs. It should be noted that the funds are tied to the Forest they are created on. For example, money received on the Colville will remain on the Colville.

To learn more about the GNA program visit DNR's [website](#). You can download the following [map](#) that identifies the first seven projects that are under way and the next nine proposed projects. AFRC will continue to monitor the program as it develops. */Matt Comisky*



Western Oregon Timber Salvage Update

In response to the wildfires that impacted much of western Oregon last summer, the U.S. Forest Service developed a strategy for salvaging timber resources on portions of its burnt landscape. The general focus was to salvage on lands where the provision of a sustainable supply of timber resources is a primary objective and to remove hazard trees along open roads. Advertisements for the first of these salvage sales were initiated in May and have continued to be released through June. To date, the Forest Service has had mixed results in response to their solicitations for bids: four salvage sales have been purchased and four have received no bids. These results come in the wake of broad support from the timber industry and others of the Forest Service’s proactive approach to salvaging timber resources on appropriate lands.

The demand for timber products is high and local operators are busy logging throughout western Oregon on timber being sold by private landowners and public land agencies. The apparent lack of interest in salvage timber sales being offered by the Forest Service is due to a lack of capacity by the local logging infrastructure. This capacity issue is a repercussion of the reductions of timber supply off federally managed land in Oregon that began in the 1990s. As the amount of raw material supplied locally in Oregon has dwindled, so has the logging infrastructure that was once responsible for delivering this material to the mills. As the public demand for wood products remains high, the remaining mills in western Oregon have been forced to outsource portions of their timber supply from neighboring states and regions. Naturally, logistical difficulties arise when more timber volume – in this case significant salvage volume – appears in a region where those capable of delivering it to a local mill have since left the region to work elsewhere.

The task at hand is finding a way to treat the burnt acres appropriately and ensuring that those affected acres of our National Forest Service land are reforested in a timely manner, while delivering useful timber products to the local mills that are demanding it. During the week of June 18, the Regional Forester responded to the “no-bid” salvage sales by providing some useful direction to the field staff. The general message focused on the fact that *“It is in the Government’s best interest to get this work accomplished utilizing our timber sale contracts as soon as possible in order to mitigate hazards and capture merchantable value as trees will continue to diminish in value.”*

Below are additional recommendations included in this written direction:

- Contract Term Adjustments will be granted on Purchaser’s green sales for harvesting salvage and Roadside Hazard Removal (RHR) sales.
- Consider Industrial Fire Precaution Level waivers for logging operations in the burned area or along narrow strips on roadsides as there may not be a need to shutdown at 1 PM while working in these areas.
- Allow concurrent road work with logging operations which will assist Purchasers and Contracting Officers to get work moving forward quickly and allow flexibility in unforeseen road issues.

AFRC appreciates this direction from Region 6 and will continue to work locally with each National Forest and interested purchasers to ensure that the efforts put forth by the Forest Service to capture the value of damaged timber products and treat their land responsibly does not go to waste. /Andy Geissler

Hope and Help on the Okanogan-Wenatchee on the Horizon

The Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest is the largest Forest in Region 6 and encompasses more than four million acres in Washington State. The Forest has seven Ranger Districts stretching from the Tonasket Ranger District to the Naches Ranger District west of Yakima and covers approximately 180 miles from north to south. This large landscape creates multiple challenges that stymy much of the needed restoration work and cripple its timber sale program. The unpredictability of the timber program is the reason that no sawmills exist within the boundaries of the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest.

AFRC staff and member companies who participate in the North Central Washington Forest Health Collaborative and Little Naches Working Group, have held out hope that solutions can be found and the needed work on the Forest can begin. While no sawmills exist in the area, the raw material is very important to mills in Washington and Northeast Oregon.

The long-term problem on the Forest is how to manage the Late Successional Reserve (LSR) lands, designated under the Northwest Forest Plan and found on six of the seven Ranger Districts. The question is can LSR lands with trees over 80 years of age be managed on the east slopes of the Cascades? Trees in this age class in the east are much smaller and exhibit far different qualities than 80-year-old trees west of the Cascades. In order to help answer this question, a field trip to the Forest was required but it took a decade or more to get the decision makers (the LSR working group) out to the Forest to view the scope of these challenges. Last month, the LSR working group, comprised of professionals from the Forest Service, BLM, U.S.

Fish and Wildlife, and others spent a week on the Forest to look at projects that have been halted. The working group outlined if LSR projects are for risk reduction (fuels reduction, fire prevention) they could be carried out in stands over 80 years old. If LSR projects are for *silvicultural* reasons only, management in stands over 80 years could be accomplished only if the Forest applied for a Forest Plan Amendment.

Several factors drive the urgent need for solutions. In the decades since implementation of the Northwest Forest Plan, the Forest has experienced several large wildfires which burned nine times as much spotted owl habitat as they have been able to mechanically treat to reduce fire danger. The Tapash CFLRP located on the Naches and Cle Elum Districts has struggled to move any projects forward. The CFLRP authority expires in 2019. Many of the new projects planned on the Forest such as the Upper Wenatchee Pilot and Twisp are in additional LSR lands and need management direction if they are to be implemented.

Key members of the collaboratives include AFRC, The Nature Conservancy, Sustainable Northwest, Conservation Northwest, Upper Columbia Salmon Recovery Board, Chelan County, Okanogan County, Washington DNR, Vaagen Brothers, and Boise Cascade. Collaborative members have volunteered hundreds of hours and invested thousands of dollars trying to help implement restoration projects and are losing patience.

The LSR working group has finally given the go-ahead to move the Swauk Pine project, which is part of the Tapash CFLRP and focuses on risk reduction management. The Little Crow Project, also in the Tapash and focusing on silvicultural improvements, will have to go through a Forest Plan Amendment (which the District has begun).

AFRC views this new clarification as an important breakthrough for the Forest, and one they need to utilize to move stalled projects forward and expedite projects now being planned. If the Forest's staff cannot take advantage of this opportunity, AFRC and other collaborative partners will be forced to look at investing resources and time into Forests that lead to real results on the ground. */Tom Partin*

Sun Mountain Lumber Joins AFRC

AFRC is pleased to welcome Sun Mountain Lumber Company of Deer Lodge, Montana as its newest member. Sun Mountain is a privately-held, family owned company formed in 2004 when Sherm and Bonnie Anderson acquired the stud mill and finger joint facilities formerly owned by Louisiana Pacific Corporation.

Sun Mountain is now the largest private employer in the Deer Lodge Valley and helps keep the local economy thriving. The family company is proud to participate in local charities through generous financial contributions, lumber materials, and volunteer work. Other key Sun Mountain management staff includes Plant Manager, Tony Colter, and Resource Manager, Nick Jose.

Federal timber is critical to supporting Sun Mountain's operations. AFRC will be working with the nearby Federal forests to help increase the pace and scale of forest management, timber outputs, and forest health and resiliency to make Montana's forests less susceptible to catastrophic wildfires which were prevalent in the summer of 2017.

On June 20, AFRC held its first timber purchasers meeting with Forest Supervisor Melany Glossa and staff from the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest – the largest forest in Region 1 comprising 3.4 million acres. The Beaverhead-Deerlodge Forest Plan was completed in 2009 and allocates 300,000 acres for timber production and another 1.6 million acres for commercial harvest to improve other resources. The timber staff outlined a target of 26 mmbf for this fiscal year, eventually ramping up to 34 mmbf over the next 5 years. AFRC is currently working with the Forest to expedite salvage from the Little Hogback-Meyers fire which burned in 2017 and should yield an estimated 10 mmbf.

AFRC looks forward to partnering with Sun Mountain, a company that so clearly prides itself in operating outstanding facilities, manufacturing great products, and passionately supporting the local community. */Travis Joseph*