



AFRC Concludes 2025 Annual Meeting, “The Time is Now”

AFRC hosted its Annual Meeting from April 22-24 at Skamania Lodge in Stevenson, Washington. The conference theme, **The Time is Now**, captures the unique moment the forest products industry, federal agencies, counties, and forest partners are experiencing. With obstacles and challenges come opportunities and growth.

It was another engaging and substantive conference with keynotes from U.S. Forest Service Acting Associate Chief Chris French and Congressman Cliff Bentz. Senators Steve Daines and Tim Sheehy (MT) provided recorded remarks. Participants heard about: Supreme Court updates from legal experts; the innovative “A-Z” project on the Colville National Forest from Duane Vaagen of Vaagen Bros.; updates on U.S.-Canadian trade disputes from the U.S. Lumber Coalition; and, from expert communicators from the forest products industry about telling our compelling story.



Photos, clockwise: Keynote Speaker, U.S. Forest Service Acting Associate Chief Chris French; a full house at Skamania Lodge; Duane Vaagen of Vaagen Bros. Lumber and AFRC President Travis Joseph discuss the “A to Z” model. AFRC Tillicum Award recipients Commissioner Tim Freeman and Supervisor Ray Haupt with Nick Smith and Tom Partin..

AFRC's Annual Meeting is regularly attended by top forest policy experts, federal and state agency decision makers, forest product sector leaders and CEOs, and elected officials. It provides excellent networking and business opportunities for those interested in and connected to the management of public lands throughout the West.

Team AFRC extends a huge thank you to this year's speakers and participants, as well as our event sponsors: Haglund Kelly, Natural Resources Law, Cascade Hardwood, Hampton Lumber, Western Forest Products, Brownstein, Carollo Law Group, and Venable. If you missed it, mark your calendar for 2026. **We'll be back at Skamania Lodge for AFRC's 2026 Annual Meeting April 7-9.** /Travis Joseph

Washington DC Update

Reconciliation. Congress recently returned from its two-week Spring recess and the focus will again turn to advancing President Donald Trump's "Big Beautiful Bill" through the reconciliation process, which unlocks the ability to move legislation through the Senate with a simple majority vote. After narrowly adopting a broad budget framework, the focus in the House shifts to the various committees as they advance legislation for programs within their jurisdiction.

House Republicans will have to overcome internal divisions between budget hawks who want to reduce federal spending and offset the \$4.6 trillion ten-year cost of extending Trump's 2017 tax cuts with the views of members from competitive districts concerned about potential cuts to Medicaid and other programs. Republicans have a narrow 220-213 House majority, so there is little margin for error.

The budget framework adopted by the House and Senate instructs the House Natural Resources Committee to develop policies that would reduce the deficit by at least \$1 billion over 10 years. On May 1, the Committee released [the text](#) of its reconciliation proposal, which mandates additional oil and gas leases in the Gulf of Mexico and Alaska. It would also streamline environmental analysis and prohibit judicial reviews for offshore oil and gas permit applications where project applicants pay for the environmental reviews.

The reconciliation proposal would also require the Forest Service and BLM to within one year direct "timber harvest levels" 25% higher than the Fiscal Year 2024 harvest levels. The bill would also require the Forest Service to enter into not less than one 20-year stewardship contract annually in each Forest Service region. The BLM would be required to enter into at least one contract each year. The House bill does not include a proposal to sell federal land, which was discussed as a possibility but is strongly opposed by some Republicans.

The House Natural Resources Committee will begin marking up the bill on May 6. Any proposal that advances to the Senate will be subject to the "Byrd Rule" to determine whether there is a sufficient connection to the budget. That determination is made by the Senate Parliamentarian.

Senate Fix our Forests Act. On April 11, a bipartisan group of four U.S. Senators – Alex Padilla (D-CA), Tim Sheehy (R-MT), John Curtis (R-UT), and John Hickenlooper (D-CO) introduced a [Senate version](#) of the Fix our Forests Act. The legislation includes many of the provisions in the House-passed bill, including expanding the size of Categorical Exclusions (CEs). It also includes a fix to the Ninth Circuit's nonsensical *Cottonwood* decision.

However, it does not go as far in providing injunctive relief for forest restoration projects. The bill includes many provisions unrelated to forest management, including wildfire risk reduction for buildings and mitigating for the health impacts of wildfire smoke. In fact, the bill includes provisions responsive to one-third of the 148 recommendations in the 2023 [Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission's](#) report to Congress. With a Farm Bill reauthorization looking increasingly unlikely this Congress, compromise will likely be necessary to secure 60 votes for stand-alone legislation in the U.S. Senate.

The Senate Agriculture Committee has scheduled a hearing for the Senate Fix our Forests Act on Tuesday, May 6 at 3:00 pm Eastern. Forest Service Acting Associate Chief Chris French will be the only witness. /Heath Heikkila



The AFRC Podcast is a monthly discussion examining key issues and news relating to forestry, forest products and public lands management.

AFRC President Travis Joseph joins the podcast to talk about some of the big issues shaping the future of our forests and rural communities. We'll dive into key takeaways from our annual meeting, the latest news out of Washington and the Trump Administration, what the news media is getting wrong, and why public understanding of forest management matters now more than ever.

[Click here to listen to Episode 44.](#) Our podcast is also available on Spotify and Apple Podcasts.

The AFRC Podcast

**Episode 44:
Travis Joseph
'The Time is Now'**



USDA Secretary Issues Memorandum on Timber Production

On April 3, Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins issued Secretarial Memorandum [Increasing Timber Production and Designating an Emergency Situation on National Forest System Lands](#) in response to Executive Order 14225, [Immediate Expansion of American Timber Production](#). The Memo acknowledges a wildfire crisis affecting National Forest System (NFS) lands and calls for immediate action to mitigate the risk. The primary directive to respond to that risk is the identification of an emergency on approximately 112 million acres of NFS land through an Emergency Situation Determination (ESD).

Contrary to some assertions that this directive is “opening up NFS lands for logging,” the reality is that this ESD simply provides some process-related streamlining intended to expedite high-priority activities to mitigate wildfire risk. Authority to make ESDs was originally established under [36 C.F.R. § 218.21](#) and expanded in 2021 by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). The original authority

waived the predecisional administrative objection process, allowing projects to move toward implementation faster. Depending on the substance of administrative objections, this waiver could typically save the Forest Service a few months' time.

Updates in IIA created sideboards for the types of activities permitted through an ESD while adding two additional streamlining items. The first clarifies that projects analyzed through Environmental Assessments or Environmental Impact Statements on lands within an ESD need only consider a single action alternative; it's routine for most projects to analyze two or more action alternatives, potentially extending the analysis timeline. Second, if litigated, a court would not enjoin the project "if the court determines that the plaintiff is unable to demonstrate that the claim of the plaintiff is likely to succeed on the merits."

The Memo also includes direction to the Forest Service to consider additional emergency authorities on this land base related to consultation with regulatory agencies, contracting mechanisms, and internal hiring processes. Finally, the Memo called on the Forest Service to issue guidance to increase timber production in general.

Largely in response to this final guidance, Acting Associate Chief Chris French distributed [a letter](#) to Regional Foresters the same day the Memo was issued, outlining an array of directives aimed at bolstering and streamlining the agency's timber program. Notable among these directives is a call to increase the agency's total timber offerings by 25% over the next 4-5 years. However, the letter is unclear on what baseline amount of timber volume is being used to assess this 25% increase.

One reasonable possibility is that the agency will consider its most recent year's timber outputs as the baseline—if so, the Forest Service sold 2.9 billion board feet (BBF) in fiscal year 2024. Therefore, a 25% increase would be an additional 725 million board feet (MMBF), resulting in an agencywide total of 3.6 BBF in 4-5 years—only 400 MMBF more than President Trump's last year in office (2020). For context, attainment of timber outputs described in existing Land Management Plans would result in approximately 6.0 BBF agencywide.

The Bureau of Land Management's initial response to EO 14225 was brief in comparison to what the Forest Service issued. Their Memorandum included direction to utilize all available Categorical Exclusions for timber harvest, updates to current and future year timber sale plans to reflect increased harvest volume projections, and identification of land use plan amendments or necessary revisions to increase timber outputs. */Andy Geissler*

AFRC Leads Coalition in Challenge to FWS's Northern Spotted Owl Critical Habitat Designation

On April 7, AFRC along with a coalition of counties (Lewis and Skamania Counties, Washington, and Siskiyou County, California) and the Association of O&C Counties filed a [legal challenge](#) against the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (FWS) November 2021 decision to withdraw critical habitat exclusions for the Northern Spotted Owl (NSO) on federal lands in California, Oregon and Washington (November 2021 Rule).

This lawsuit follows a string of litigation against FWS regarding its NSO critical habitat designation and delay rules, which delayed the effective date of those habitat designations. In April 2020, AFRC, a coalition representing counties, and a labor union reached a [settlement agreement](#) with FWS over its 2012

NSO critical habitat designation that included millions of acres of forests not occupied by the species. That settlement initiated a public rulemaking process resulting in a new critical habitat designation ([January 2021 Rule](#)) that excluded non-habitat from critical habitat and excluded other federal lands that are required to be managed for timber production. Shortly thereafter, AFRC, joined by the Association of O&C Counties and counties in Washington, Oregon, and California, [challenged](#) FWS’s unlawful delay of the effective date of the January 2021 Rule. The D.C. Circuit later [upheld](#) the dismissal of that challenge on mootness grounds because FWS had issued a new critical habitat designation rule, the November 2021 Rule.

AFRC and the coalition now bring a challenge to FWS’s November 2021 Rule, which sweepingly designates 9,373,676 acres as critical habitat for the NSO—an area roughly twice the size of New Jersey. Our challenge under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and the Administrative Procedure Act asserts that the November 2021 Rule:

- Fails to use the best scientific and commercial data available, including critical data on forest conditions and barred owl encounter rates, and instead relies on the results of a flawed model developed over a decade ago on obsolete inputs;
- Refuses to apply the applicable regulatory definition of “habitat,” designates as critical habitat millions of acres that are not currently habitat for the NSO, and fails to justify designating areas that were not occupied by the NSO at the time the species was listed under the ESA;
- Fails to comply with the ESA’s economic analysis requirement;
- Fails to evaluate several areas identified in public comments from the designation and misinterprets the ESA in finding that areas could not be excluded consistent with section 4(b)(2) of the ESA;
- Wrongly assumes that the January 2021 Rule never excluded 3.5 million acres from the NSO’s critical habitat designation and thus FWS was only excluding areas from designation in issuing the November 2021 Rule; and
- Violates the settlement agreement related to AFRC’s challenge to the 2012 critical habitat designation for the NSO.

The November 2021 Rule’s critical habitat designation restricts the use of active forest management tools that help reduce the risk of severe wildfires—such as the fire that burned over 560 square miles of suitable nesting and roosting NSO habitat in Oregon in 2020. A [2020 study](#) found the 2012 critical habitat designation cost Pacific Northwest communities over \$1 billion and over 1,000 family-wage jobs, while providing little benefit for species conservation. The November 2021 Rule threatens jobs, reduces domestic timber supply, increases reliance on imports, and impedes active forest management that could mitigate wildfire risks in a region already devastated by extraordinarily large and severe wildfires. Moreover, this designation also includes vast areas that are not actual NSO habitat, violating the Supreme Court’s [ruling](#) in *Weyerhaeuser Co. v. U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service*, 586 U.S. 9 (2018), in which the Supreme Court made clear that only actual habitat—not potential future habitat—can be designated as critical habitat.

AFRC and its coalition partners are asking the court to reinstate FWS’s January 2021 Rule, which provided a balanced approach to species conservation while supporting efforts to reduce wildfire risks and boosting economic stability for rural communities. /Sara Ghafouri

Services Release Proposed Rule Removing ‘Harm’ from the Definition of Take

On April 17, FWS and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) (collectively, Services) [issued](#) a joint proposed rule that would remove “harm” from ESA regulations. *See* [50 C.F.R. Parts 17](#) (FWS) and [222](#) (NMFS). Acting in their roles as administrators of the ESA, the Services have concluded that existing ESA regulations containing the definition of harm runs contrary to the best reading of the statutory term “take.” Comments on the rescission of the definition on harm are due by May 19, and the joint proposed rule seeks input for both FWS and NMFS. *See* Departments of the Interior and Commerce, Rescinding the Definition of Harm Under the Endangered Species Act, [90 Fed. Reg. 16102 \(Apr. 17, 2025\)](#).

The ESA generally prohibits the take of endangered species, which means to harm, harass, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect, or to attempt to do so. [16 § U.S.C. 1532\(19\)](#); *see* 50 C.F.R. §§ 17.21 (FWS), 216.11 (NMFS). Currently, the existing regulatory definition of harm takes an expansive view within the meaning of take to include significant habitat modification or degradation that actually kills or injures wildlife by significantly impairing essential behavioral patterns, including breeding, feeding or sheltering, and for marine wildlife, also spawning, rearing, or migrating. 50 C.F.R. §§ 17.3 (FWS), 222.102 (NMFS).

In 1995, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld this expansive regulatory definition of harm, invoking *Chevron* deference, holding that the Services had reasonably construed Congressional intent when including “significant habitat modification or destruction” within the definition of “harm.” *Babbitt v. Sweet Home Chapter of Communities for a Great Or.*, 515 U.S. 687, 708 (1995). In his dissent, however, Justice Scalia argued that the definition including habitat modification as a form of take ran counter to the best reading of the ESA. *Id.* at 735-36.

According to the joint proposed rule, the existing regulatory definition of harm that includes habitat modification runs contrary to the best meaning of take. The proposed rule aims to align the definition of take with the plain text of the ESA, as informed by historical legal interpretations of take as an affirmative act directly affecting wildlife. The joint proposed rule would rescind the regulatory definition of harm, limiting the ESA’s take prohibitions to actions that directly injure or kill listed species. For example, harassing or hunting the northern spotted owl would remain illegal under the proposed rule, but building a home or harvesting timber in a habitat where the owl is known to roost arguably would not.

The joint proposed rule’s rescission of harm would also be consistent with the Supreme Court’s recent decision in *Loper Bright Enterprises v. Raimondo*, 603 U.S. 369, 400 (2024), which overruled *Chevron* deference and held that an agency’s regulation should follow the single, best meaning of the statute and not necessarily an agency’s interpretation. *See* [August 2024 Newsletter](#). Here, the Services propose that the statutory definition of take is sufficient without further elaborating on habitat modifications through regulation. If adopted, this change would apply prospectively and not affect existing take permits. The joint proposed rule will need to make its way through the federal rule-making process, and legal challenges are certain to follow.

Specifically, the Services are requesting comments on whether there are legitimate reliance interests on the definition of harm, citing *Dep’t of Homeland Sec. v. Regents of the Univ. of California*, 591 U.S. 1, 30 (2020). In that case, the Supreme Court held that when an agency changes course, the agency must be “cognizant that longstanding policies may have engendered serious reliance interests that must be taken into account.” *Id.* The Services explained, however, that any “reliance interests likely will be outweighed

by the constitutional interest in repealing regulations that do not reflect the vest ready of the statute.” 90 Fed. Reg. at 16104.

AFRC will be submitting comments on behalf of our members, but we encourage our members and other interested parties to submit comments reflecting your own unique viewpoints and perspectives. /Sarah Melton

Ninth Circuit Upholds Condition-based Management for the Twisp Project

On May 2, the Ninth Circuit issued a mixed [opinion](#) regarding Eastern Washington District Court Judge Bastian’s [decision](#) in the challenge to the U.S. Forest Service’s 24,000-acre Twisp Restoration Project on the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest. Most notably, the Ninth Circuit made a seminal decision upholding the agency’s use of condition-based management and a maximum effects analysis under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). See *N. Cascades Conservation Council v. U.S. Forest Serv.*, No. 24-1422. AFRC participated as an *amicus curiae* party before the [district court](#) and [Ninth Circuit](#) in support of the Project and condition-based management. AFRC member Hampton Lumber is the purchaser of two contracts authorized under the Project, the Lookout stewardship contract and the Woodpecker DXP Timber Sale. The Ninth Circuit’s decision comes after oral argument was held on February 14 in Seattle before Judges Fletcher and Gould, both Clinton appointees, and Judge Nguyen, an Obama appointee.

This was the first time a challenge to condition-based management had come before the Ninth Circuit, which is an important forest management tool enabling the Forest Service to make landscape-level decisions while reserving flexibility to respond to current, on-the-ground stand conditions. The court’s favorable ruling on this issue will have important implications for other projects authorized to use condition-based management—such as AFRC’s defense of the South Plateau Project on the Custer Gallatin National Forest. See [March 2025 Newsletter](#).

The court held that the Forest Service’s use of condition-based management did not inherently violate NEPA, had been properly applied to the Twisp Project, and found that the agency’s site-specific maximum effects analysis had provided sufficiently quantified and detailed information about where proposed activities may occur and which specific methods would be used. The court, however, stated that this was a “close” case and that it shared concerns voiced in *Southeast Alaska Conservation Council v. United States Forest Service*, 443 F. Supp. 3d 995 (D. Alaska 2020), that excessive reliance on condition-based management could detract from the ability to assess a proposed action’s environmental consequences. But here, unlike in *Southeast Alaska*, the comparatively small size of acreage authorized for condition-based management and the extensive, unit-by-unit mapping the agency provided of the maximum effects of each proposed treatment satisfied NEPA’s requirements for an Environmental Assessment (EA).

The court also held that the Forest Service had considered a reasonable range of alternatives under NEPA for the Project and was not required to repeat the public comment process between issuance of the Project’s Draft and Final EAs because the intervening 2021 Cedar Creek Fire had not posed new questions requiring further analysis or rendered public comments on the Draft EA irrelevant. However, due to the Cedar Creek Fire, the Forest Service revised the original project area to carve out those areas affected by fire, reducing it in size by almost 70 percent from just over 77,000 acres initially to 24,000 acres, reduced the duration of the Project from 30 to 20 years, and reduced the acreage of some of the Project’s proposed treatment activities. The court determined that those fire-affected carve-outs, which

shortly thereafter were incorporated into the proposed Midnight Restoration Project, constituted a separate project and the EA's discussion of cumulative effects was deficient because 1) the Final EA did not include discussion or analysis of the cumulative effects of the Twisp Project in combination with the Midnight Project; and 2) the Midnight Project was originally part of the Twisp Project, as envisioned in the Draft EA.

The Ninth Circuit concluded that because it is not vacating but remanding the Project back to the Forest Service for a reassessment of the EA in light of the Midnight Project and the EA's deficiencies, it does not need to determine at this time whether preparation of an environmental impact statement is warranted. /Sarah Melton

AFRC Welcomes New Forest Supervisors

The Willamette and Umpqua National Forests have announced new leadership. Robert Sanchez [has been named](#) Supervisor of the Willamette, while Melany Glossa will [take the helm](#) at the Umpqua.

Robert Sanchez joins the Willamette from the Region 6 Regional Office, where he has served as Deputy Regional Forester since 2023. AFRC members may remember his previous role as Supervisor of the Siuslaw National Forest, which he began in 2018. He now steps into the Willamette during a particularly challenging time.

Once a key contributor to the local wood basket—offering at least 80 MMBF annually as recently as 2020—the Willamette has seen output decline sharply following the catastrophic 2020 Labor Day Fires and subsequent wildfire seasons. Today, fire recovery dominates the Forest's priorities, and average green timber volume offered has fallen to just 27 MMBF annually since 2021.

Melany Glossa brings extensive leadership experience from across the agency, most recently serving in the Washington Office. Her past roles include Regional Forester in Region 1 and Supervisor of two national forests. Like the Willamette, the Umpqua has endured significant wildfire impacts in recent years.

Despite these challenges, the Umpqua has maintained relatively stable timber offerings. Over the past decade, awarded volume has averaged around 26 MMBF. Still, this level falls short of meeting demand from local purchasers that rely on a consistent federal timber supply. For perspective, prior to the Northwest Forest Plan's adoption in 1994, the Umpqua produced approximately 300 MMBF annually—nearly 1 percent of the nation's softwood harvest.

AFRC and our members look forward to working with Robert and Melany as they begin this new chapter. We remain committed to partnering with both Forests to help achieve shared goals of resilient, healthy, productive and safe public lands. /Corey Bingaman

AFRC Meets with Region 1 Forests

During the week of April 7, AFRC staff and members met with all nine National Forests in Region 1 to review their current and future timber sale programs and discuss other issues affecting their ability to get work done. These meetings are held biannually—once at the beginning of each fiscal year and again midway through the fiscal year.

The meetings were very well attended, largely due to new direction stemming from President Trump's Executive Order focusing on timber production and a directive to reduce the Forest Service's workforce. Forest Supervisors from all nine National Forests participated, demonstrating the importance of the immediate issues facing their Forests.

Much of the conversation focused on President Trump's Executive Order "Immediate Expansion of American Timber Production"; Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollin's Memorandum "Increasing Timber Production and Designating an Emergency Situation on National Forest System Lands"; and the directive from Chris French, Acting Associate Chief, outlining implementation of Secretary Rollin's Memo. The Forests are absorbing this new information while simultaneously being asked to significantly reduce their workforce.

The discussions were very productive, with the Forests exploring ways to meet the new directives' goals—including a 25 percent increase in timber output over the next four years—with fewer staff. Secretary Rollin's Memorandum designated over 112million acres at high risk from wildfire, insects, and disease. These acres can now be treated more expeditiously under an ESD, which requires planning using only an action and no-action alternative and eliminates the objection period. The Memorandum also encourages expanded use of Categorical Exclusions, Designation by Prescription, Good Neighbor Authority, and the use of A-Z and G-Z type projects by third parties to help treat more acres.

While the Forests are eager to meet the Administration's goals, they acknowledged that outside help would be needed due to several workforce reduction measures, including the Employee Buyouts which allow employees to collect a salary until September 30; the dismissal of probationary employees; and the Voluntary Early Retirement Authority (VERA), which permits employees over 50 years old with at least 20 years of federal service—or employees of any age with at least 25 years of service—to retire early. Notably, those opting for retirement or VERA include Regional Forester Leanne Marten and Tami Kerr, Director of Forest Management.

In other regional news, David Haupt, Regional Sale Prep Program Manager, reported that the Region has not received their Fiscal Year 2025 timber target from the Washington Office but has directed the Forests to use 317 MMBF for planning purposes—about the same as last year. Litigation remains high, with about 500 MMBF currently tied up. To date, the Region has sold about 142 MMBF of timber, with much of the final sale volume expected in the fourth quarter.

AFRC would like to thank all those who attended. A special thanks to David Haupt for helping schedule the meetings and providing updates from the Regional Office at each meeting. All agree that the milling infrastructure remaining in Region 1 is heavily dependent on Forest Service timber, and we are counting on the Forests to implement the new directives to increase timber sales and preserve the remaining facilities. /Tom Partin

Washington Legislature's Approved Budget Impacts State Trust Lands, Cuts Funding for Forest Health

The Washington Legislature adjourned on April 27, the last day of the 105-day regular legislative session. Democrats used the expanded majorities they gained in the 2024 election to pass a massive \$77.9 billion two-year general fund budget for state government, including more than \$7 billion in new spending. Overall, state spending has doubled over the last decade. The new budget was built on \$12.5 billion in additional state and local taxes over the next four years, as well as various fee increases.

Unfortunately, the Capital Budget includes another \$20 million in Climate Commitment Act (CCA) funds for the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to purchase more private working forests, with half this funding earmarked to replace additional set asides of “carbon dense, structurally complex forests” currently available for harvest on DNR state trust lands in western Washington. This would result in a net loss of working forests and a reduction in available timber for local mills.

This is the third year in a row that the Capital Budget has included funding to set aside more DNR state trust lands. However, this year the language allows counties to request a portion of the timber value to make up for the lost revenue associated with setting aside state forest transfer lands (also known as county trust lands). This will likely make more counties interested in participating in this program to shut down more working forests. Rep. Steve Tharinger (D-Port Townsend) chairs the House Capital Budget Committee and was behind this proposal.

The other \$10 million would be spent purchasing replacement lands for previously encumbered state forest transfer lands in Clallam, Skamania, Pacific, and Wahkiakum counties. The same proviso also includes \$3 million for “DNR to prepare commercial thinning timber sales for the purposes of restoring habitat, increasing carbon storage and sequestration and facilitating access to more timber volume.”

The Capital Budget also includes \$16.9 million [for four Trust Land Transfer proposals](#), as well as an analysis of DNR lands in the Elwha watershed for possible designation as a Natural Areas Preserve or Natural Resources Conservation Area. The Elwha provision was championed by Sen. Mike Chapman (D-Port Angeles), who has been under heavy pressure by local activists who want to stop all DNR harvests in the area – despite evidence that DNR’s modest harvest activities in the watershed have no impact on water quality or quantity.

The Operating Budget includes \$60 million in forest health funding with \$40 million available in FY26 and \$20 million in FY27. This is a reduction from what was intended under House Bill 1168, which the legislature passed in 2021. DNR received over \$200 million in fire suppression funding, but there are questions about where this funding is sufficient for DNR to continue exclusive use contracts with private companies to supplement its aerial firefighting fleet. These exclusive use contracts have proven important in past fire seasons. */Heath Heikkila*