



Registration is Open: AFRC's 2026 Annual Meeting, Skamania Lodge, April 7-9



Registration is now open for the 2026 AFRC Annual Meeting, April 7-9, at Skamania Lodge in Stevenson, Washington. [Click here](#) to view registration and lodging information. While we are working to finalize the agenda, we can confirm Forest Service Chief Tom Schultz will be a keynote speaker on Wednesday, April 8.

Discounted lodging is available at Skamania Lodge, though rooms always go fast. Be sure to book your stay before the cutoff on March 8.

Once again, we are excited to offer opportunities to support and sponsor AFRC's Annual Meeting.

Sponsorships provide special benefits for members, businesses, and partner organizations while continuing to enhance and grow our conference every year. Sponsorship benefits can be found on our [Annual Meeting page](#) and you can download a [sponsorship form here](#). Please contact Cindi Kaneshige at ckaneshige@amforest.org or 503-222-9505 for more information.

We look forward to hosting another engaging conference with excellent speakers, panels, timely information, and networking opportunities. Consider registering now to secure your spot. See you at Skamania Lodge! /Travis Joseph

Washington DC Update

As reported in the [January 2026 Newsletter](#), Congress reached agreement on the Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations bill, which funds the U.S. Forest Service and Department of the Interior. President Trump signed that bill into law on January 23, which largely provides these agencies with level-funding through the end of the fiscal year and avoids cuts proposed by the Trump Administration.

After the enactment of the most recent funding package on February 3, only the Homeland Security bill remains in limbo as Congress and the White House discuss potential reforms at Immigration and Customs Enforcement following the recent events in Minnesota.

Farm Bill? House Agriculture Committee Chairman GT Thompson (R-PA) recently announced that his committee plans to advance a Farm Bill reauthorization during the month of February. The last Farm Bill was passed in 2018 and has seen continued extensions since it expired in 2023. With the House and

Senate both in Republican control (at least for now), this might be Chairman Thompson’s last chance to move a Farm Bill.

Some of the costliest programs and partisan fights, including food stamp (SNAP) benefits, were addressed through reconciliation and H.R. 1, also known as the “One Big Beautiful Bill.” That could create a lane to move a more bipartisan policy-focused Farm Bill, which has been a key vehicle for forestry reforms in the past. The last draft released by House Republicans in 2024 included expanded Categorical Exclusions, a fix to the *Cottonwood* decision, and bipartisan changes to the Good Neighbor Authority and Stewardship Contracting.

Similar policy provisions are also in the Fix our Forests Act, which remains idle in the U.S. Senate. The Farm Bill could provide another avenue to advance forestry reforms.

Boren sworn in at USDA. Michael Boren was sworn in as the USDA Undersecretary of Natural Resources and Environment on January 20 – three months after being confirmed for the position by the U.S. Senate. His Senate confirmation was held up for 10 months due to objections from Democrats.

Boren had been serving as the Acting Assistant Secretary of Policy, Management, and Budget at the Department of the Interior, a position with wide ranging duties. AFRC had the opportunity to meet with Boren during his stint at Interior and looks forward to working with him at USDA, which recently saw the departure of Kristin Sleeper. Sleeper had served as the Deputy Undersecretary and recently moved to Idaho to serve as the Policy Director for Idaho Governor Brad Little. /Heath Heikkila

Forest Service Proposes Nationwide Post Fire EA

Last month, the Forest Service solicited public comment on a proposal to develop a Nationwide EA to analyze the effects of post-fire recovery actions on National Forest System (NFS) land. The EA would create consistency and efficiency in post fire decision making by identifying general actions common to post fire activities across the nation. The EA would not authorize any site-specific actions, nor would it be accompanied by a formal Decision. Rather, it would facilitate and inform future project-specific analyses carried out at the local level.

AFRC submitted [comments](#) in response to the solicitation and applauded the agency’s attention to the critical need of streamlining post-fire activities, particularly timber salvage and hazard tree removal. Both actions have, in recent years, become extremely cumbersome for the Forest Service to implement in a timely manner. Recovery of dead and damaged trees for use in wood product manufacturing has become increasingly risky due to the excessive analysis timelines coupled with the need for expediency in the face of wood deterioration.



Unsalvaged area of the Chetco Bar Fire: Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest, 2017

Additionally, forest roads have often remained closed to the public for multiple years following wildfires due to the agency’s inability to remove dead and dying trees, posing a hazard to roads and the public that uses them. In some situations, these delays have forced the Forest Service to spend taxpayer dollars to

fund the removal of these trees, rather than having local timber manufacturers pay the Forest Service to remove them and turn them into wood products. These failures have largely stemmed from litigation by special interest groups who oppose hazard tree removal. Notably, following the 2020 Labor Day fires in western Oregon, one such group opposed removing hazard trees, [asserting that](#) “people use national forests at their own risk every day.”

AFRC’s comments also highlighted the safety risks to future firefighting efforts posed by the absence of timber salvage and hazard tree removal. Specifically, those comments referenced the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) that [stated](#) “Snags and other hazard trees present a significant hazard to wildland firefighters. Snags typically have much lower fuel moisture than live, green trees; they are subject to rot and they burn more readily. In the process, they often throw firebrands far in advance of the main fire and often burn through more quickly than green trees, falling with little or no warning.” The Forest Service expects to publish the EA in April 2026. More information can be found [here](#). /Andy Geissler

Oregon District Court Sets Aside the Forest Service’s Timber Stand Improvement CE

On January 13, Oregon District Court Judge McShane [ruled](#) in favor of Plaintiffs (Oregon Wild, WildEarth Guardians, and Go Alliance) in their challenge to the Forest Service’s promulgation of the timber stand improvement categorical exclusion (CE-6, formerly 36 C.F.R. § 220.6(e)(6)), which was relied on by the Forest Service’s Baby Bear, Bear Wallow, and South Warner Projects on the Fremont-Winema National Forest. *See Oregon Wild et al. v. U.S. Forest Service et al.*, 1:22-cv-01007-MC (D. Or.).

The Forest Service established CE-6 in 1992 to allow “timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities that do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than 1 mile of low standard road construction” and includes “[t]hinning or brush control to improve growth or to reduce fire hazard.” The Ninth Circuit interpreted CE-6 to include both non-commercial and commercial thinning that reduces wildfire risk and, unlike some other CEs, the CE contains no acreage limitation. For that reason, CE-6 has been an important tool for the Forest Service to reduce wildfire risk across the West in an expeditious manner.

This case is “round two” of the litigation challenging these three projects. Plaintiffs initially challenged the projects, which each involve 3,000 to 16,000 acres of commercial thinning, on the grounds that the Forest Service violated the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) by relying on CE-6 to approve the projects. [October 2024 Newsletter](#). Plaintiffs argued that CE-6 should not apply to “large-scale” projects that involve commercial treatments.

The Ninth Circuit ruled that CE-6 contains no acreage limitation, affirming that the Forest Service appropriately applied CE-6 to improve forest stand conditions and wildlife habitat. However, the Ninth Circuit remanded a portion of the case back to the district court for further review of Plaintiffs’ second claim—that CE-6 itself violates NEPA—in light of the U.S. Supreme Court’s recent decision in *Corner Post, Inc. v. Bd. of Governors of the Fed. Rsrv. Sys.*, 603 U.S. 799 (2024), which held that the six-year statute of limitations does not begin to accrue until the plaintiff is first injured by the final agency action, not the date of the final agency action itself.

In this round, there were two issues before the Court: (1) whether Plaintiffs’ second claim is time-barred by the six-year statute of limitations; and (2) whether CE-6 violates NEPA because the Forest Service

failed to demonstrate that commercial harvest thinning without an acreage limitation is not significant under NEPA. AFRC filed an *amicus curiae* brief in support of the Government.

In his decision, Judge McShane found that all three Plaintiffs had standing but only WildEarth Guardians and Go Alliance had timely brought their claim that the Forest Service violated NEPA when promulgating CE-6. The Court found that Oregon Wild should have brought its claim against CE-6 over a decade ago. Next, the Court held that the Forest Service's decision to promulgate CE-6 and allow unlimited commercial thinning was arbitrary and capricious because the Forest Service failed to make a reasoned decision.

The Court recognized the expertise and deference that must be given to the Forest Service but clarified that "an agency's bare assertion that its decision is informed by its experience and expertise is not a substitute for explaining the basis of its decision." The Court found that the administrative record did not show that the Forest Service considered the impacts of thinning at any scale under CE-6, let alone thinning with no acreage cap. The Court considered the error to be serious and found that it is unlikely that the Forest Service could adopt the same rule on remand.

Accordingly, the Court vacated CE-6 for all activities allowed under that CE. Recognizing the implications of its ruling, given that CE-6 has been in place since 1992, the Court set aside CE-6 "as to all future Forest Service actions that are not final agency actions as of the date of this Order." Although the Court also set aside the approvals of the Baby Bear, Bear Wallow, and South Warner Projects, it explicitly ruled that "[e]xisting contracts regarding the sale of commercially thinned timber from the Projects are not affected by this Order." The Court also clarified that the Forest Service could issue future environmental assessments or environmental impact statements, or rely on a different CE, to resume the three projects.

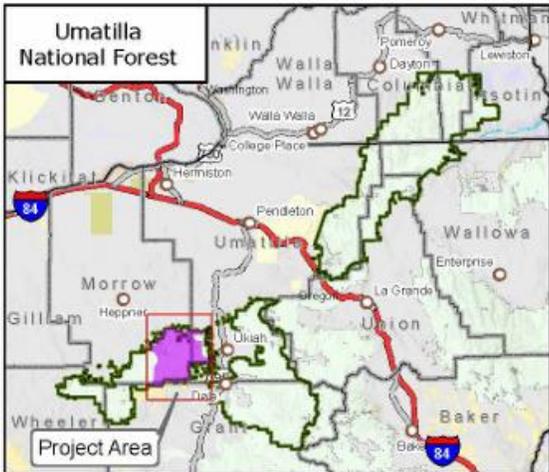
Judge McShane's decision to vacate CE-6 in its entirety is akin to a nationwide injunction. For that reason, this decision will have disruptive effects, as many National Forests were planning to rely on that CE for its Fiscal Year 2026 program for both noncommercial and commercial thinning activities. However, another CE that allows commercial thinning is still available to the agency—the restoration CE, which allows commercial thinning on up to 2,800 acres (7 C.F.R. § 1b.4(d)(47)). Anti-forestry groups' challenge to the restoration CE was recently dismissed by Western District of Virginia Judge Jones. [December 2025 Newsletter](#).

While we are pleased that AFRC members can implement their timber sales associated with the Baby Bear, Bear Wallow, and South Warner Projects, Judge McShane's decision to set aside CE-6 is problematic. This case is an example of the problems with the Supreme Court's *Corner Post* decision, as it allows a plaintiff to challenge agency actions that occurred decades ago. The Federal Government has 60 days to appeal Judge McShane's ruling to the Ninth Circuit. /Sara Ghafouri & Greg Hibbard

Forest Service Signs Decision on the Ellis Project

Last month, the Umatilla National Forest signed a final Record of Decision (ROD) on the [Ellis Project](#). The project was initiated in November 2018 and authorizes over 95,000 acres of treatment, including approximately 23,000 acres of commercial thinning, designed to reduce tree density in overstocked stands and improve ecosystem health. The ROD also authorizes over 87,000 acres of "landscape prescribed burn."

The Umatilla published a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) in 2022 with an alternative that considered harvest of live trees over 21-inches in diameter to meet the project's purpose & need. However, that alternative was dropped from the Final EIS to adhere to the Eastside Screens following a court ruling that struck down a 2021 Forest Plan Amendment that authorized an adaptive management approach to preserve old forest structure in place of the arbitrary 21-inch limitation.



The Forest Service received nine administrative objections in response to the Draft ROD. Following the objection review process, 2,232 acres of commercial thinning were dropped due to concerns over Rocky Mountain Elk security cover as required by the Forest's Land Management Plan (LMP). AFRC filed an objection, urging the Forest to reconsider options to implement thinning treatments analyzed in alternative 5 in the DEIS, free of the 21-inch diameter limitation. Ultimately, the Forest Service opted to move forward with the project as designed in the FEIS.

Conversely, the neighboring Malheur National Forest just published a [DEIS](#) for the Austin project that includes a project-specific amendment to the Eastside Screens to allow the harvest of young grand and Douglas-fir over 21 inches in diameter. AFRC remains optimistic that the Forest Service will eventually address the Eastside Screens across the region, rather than continuing to rely on project-specific amendments. An effort to revise the Blue Mountains National Forests LMPs is ongoing and AFRC has urged the Forest Service to develop those revised LMPs in a manner that will allow them to manage their forest land to meet desired end results without the confines of arbitrary limitations such as tree size or age. Until that time, projects like Ellis will continue to yield end results that fall short of the Forest Service's desired forest density objectives. */Andy Geissler*

The Partner Paradigm- Timber Contracting in the Golden State

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (BIL), and Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) provided hundreds of millions of dollars to the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and selected 'Keystone Partners' to address the wildfire crisis in California. The size and scope of these Keystone Master Stewardship Agreements (MSA) is unique, and have created opportunities for a few of our National Forests. These Forests have capitalized on an additional workforce as well as implementation funding to increase the number of acres treated. These agreements allow for the partners to act as an extension of the USFS in many stages of project design, preparation, contracting, and administration.

Background. The USFS is undergoing its most significant operational shift in decades. Facing a mandate to treat millions of acres and a historic infusion of federal cash, the agency is increasingly delegating forest management to non-profit partners. The shift is driven by a stark reality: the scale of the wildfire crisis is beyond what the agency can address alone. In response, the USFS established a "Shared Stewardship" strategy with the goal of treating one million acres annually by 2025.

In California, the Tahoe National Forest (TNF) has become a primary staging ground, with projects like the North Yuba Landscape Resilience Project receiving approximately \$160 million to treat 275,000 acres. The TNF and the National Forest Foundation (NFF) entered a 20-year Keystone Agreement with the intention of executing priority projects quickly and efficiently.

NFF began their work in 2023 and have been successful in preparing and implementing fuels reduction work across thousands of acres of the Forest. These projects were packaged and advertised to forestry consultants, contractors, and sawmills. Project preparation was completed by NFF employees and multiple California consultants. Projects were advertised to interested parties as ‘service work’ contracts and were paid on a per acre basis. Forest products were advertised on a ‘delivered log’ rate, with delivery of logs included as a service work item in the awarded contractor’s service contract. The ‘NFF Tahoe Pilot Model’ has not been without the expected, and unexpected, issues that arise when a new model is introduced. At the base of these issues was NFF’s lack of experience in their acting role of contracting officer, timber management officer, and sale administrator. These were not skill sets that NFF could bring to the table when given the authorities in their agreement.

Moving Forward. To resolve these issues, AFRC has worked with our membership, the Tahoe National Forest, and National Forest Foundation. Standards are being developed through extensive discussion, a framework of expectations, and protocols. Monthly meetings will continue to occur to ensure that all parties have clarity on NFF offerings from the TNF’s projects. The NFF staff have created a ‘contract and communications plan’ that provides a detailed outline of the organization’s expectations and policies. This plan looks to ensure that issues with the timing of deliveries, log quality, and quantity are addressed on a weekly basis. A work in progress and a movement in the direction our members need to be successful. Future items to address include:

- BIL and IRA funding being obligated prior to the end of 2028 rather than 2032.
- The Plumas National Forest adopting and implementing the NFF Tahoe standards.
- Allocation and use of retained receipts between the National Forests and their Partners.
- Contract content, authorities and administration.

This partner paradigm aims to accelerate forest restoration and allow for greater flexibility and creativity to implement treatments. As the USFS continues to shift its authorities and responsibilities to its partners, AFRC will continue to engage with USFS and its partners in California to ensure our industries needs and concerns are addressed. */Jake Blaufuss*

Idaho Panhandle Partner Meeting

Over 120 people attended the Idaho Panhandle Active Forest Management Partner Meeting in Coeur d’Alene on February 3-4. The Panhandle Forest is facing significant challenges due to forest health conditions, as well as an increase in the frequency and extent of high-severity wildfires. These elements were the driving force behind the meeting as well as providing certainty for a consistent flow of sawlogs to the local milling infrastructure.

The two-day event provided an overview of the current management program, an outline of the Forest’s plan to ramp up deliverables and identify partners to help achieve those goals. The Idaho Department of Lands (IDL) provided lunch on the first day and snacks both days.



The Forest has a current manageable timber base of 960,000 acres and sold 90 mmbf of timber last year which was the fourth highest in the nation. Of that volume roughly one third or 30 mmbf was sold through the IDL's GNA program. The Forest wants to ramp up to its Forest Plan Long-Term Sustained Yield Volume of 120 mmbf, and a good portion of the session focused on how the Forest can use its partners and new tools to meet the 120 mmbf target consistently in the future.

The Forest gave an overview of the NEPA planning process, including some of the new tools that are available for expediting projects. The timber department then went over the current year's timber plan, and the 5-year projected timber sales and volume. The Forest has completed a mapping of the landscape that will be treated during the next 20 years. Each District discussed the active management projects being planned on their District and how partners and available tools can help them achieve their goals.

The attendees were then divided into three groups whose task was to identify obstacles that impede the Forest from achieving their 120 mmbf target. Several issues that were identified included needing help for NEPA planning, help with road engineering and layout, help with surveying land lines and accurate road locations, and using new methods of contracting such as A-Z, G-Z, stewardship, and direct sales.

On the second day attendees were again divided into groups and identified several short-term goals which include:

Timber Sale Contracting

- The Forest will have a meeting on February 18 to discuss using G-Z contracting on the Pair of Spades IRTC timber sale which will generate over 22 mmbf.
- Explore areas for the first A-Z project on the Forest.
- Explore opportunities for Direct Sales to be larger than the \$10,000 current value cap.

NEPA Planning and Policy

- Hold annual NEPA trainings for all Forest planners.
- Expand the NEPA work force when practical.
- Allow A.C.E.S. retirees working in planning to become permanent employees.
- Make Forest Service NEPA planning training available to all partners.

Roads and Other Infrastructure

- Focus on design features for safety including bridges, rolling dips, out-sloped roads and road width.
- Utilize local rock sources when available and closer to the project.
- The Forest will meet with the logging community within 45 days to discuss pressing road issues.
- Use private sources of mapping for existing road locations and survey lines when available and appropriate.

AFRC and our members would like to thank the Idaho Panhandle, Idaho Department of Lands, and interested partners that made Active Forest Management Meeting a success. This effort looks like a blueprint for future success on the Idaho Panhandle. The next meeting is tentatively being planned for November. / *Tom Partin*

Stilly Revisited Timber Sale Upheld in Superior Court

On January 13, the Snohomish County Superior Court upheld the Department of Natural Resources' (DNR) Stilly Revisited Timber Sale. *See Legacy Forest Defense Coalition v. Washington State*

Department of Natural Resources et al., No. 24-2-05089-31 (Snohomish County Superior Court). This marked the latest defeat for Legacy Forest Defense Coalition (LFDC) who challenged approximately 30 timber sales the past few years in several Washington State superior courts. AFRC intervened on behalf of Sierra Pacific Industries (SPI) as a defendant-intervenor and was represented by David Bechtold from Northwest Resource Law PLLC.

Like its other challenges, LFDC argued that DNR's approval of the Stilly Revisited Timber Sale was arbitrary and capricious because it allegedly violated DNR's 1997 State Lands Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP), DNR's 2006 Policy for Sustainable Forests (PSF), and DNR's procedures for identifying and managing structurally complex forests to meet older forest targets. The HCP contained targets to obtain 10 to 15 percent of older growth forests across individual planning units identified in the HCP. LFDC argued that those targets were incorporated into DNR's PSF and subsequent older forest policies. According to LFDC, no harvests of older forests can occur until DNR achieves those targets. LFDC also alleged that DNR's approval of the sale violated the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) because it failed to adequately assess whether the sale was in compliance with its policies and procedures when making a threshold determination of no significance.

DNR and SPI argued that the targets are not binding requirements and that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the federal agency monitoring implementation of the HCP, agrees that LFDC's interpretation of the targets is incorrect. Furthermore, both DNR and SPI explained that DNR is on pace to achieve the targets in the relevant planning unit by 2070 and that DNR is permitted to approve harvests while it works towards those targets.

The Snohomish County Superior Court issued two orders on January 13. Shortly before oral argument on December 1, 2025, DNR filed a motion arguing that it was unnecessary for the Court to reach the merits of the challenge. DNR argued that LFDC was "collaterally estopped" from raising the same issues in the Stilly Revisited Timber Sale litigation that had been rejected by so many other superior courts—specifically the Mason County Superior Court's ruling on the Next Contestant Timber Sale. The Court denied DNR's motion after acknowledging that approval of a timber sale is specific to the lands at issue and that one other superior court had denied a similar motion from DNR.

In a second order, the Court dismissed LFDC's appeal on the merits. The Court acknowledged that LFDC disagrees with DNR's interpretation of the HCP, the PSF, and DNR's procedures but found that DNR's interpretations of those authorities are reasonable. Therefore, the Court held that LFDC could not demonstrate that the approval of the Stilly Revisited Timber Sale was arbitrary, capricious, or contrary to law. Under SEPA, the Court concluded that LFDC failed to demonstrate that DNR's determination of non-significance was clearly erroneous.

The Snohomish County Superior Court's ruling is consistent with the previous courts that have addressed LFDC's challenges on these issues. To date, none of LFDC's challenges have been successful on the merits. LFDC's deadline to appeal is February 12 but it remains unclear whether LFDC will appeal this ruling. LFDC has been very selective about appealing unfavorable rulings. AFRC will continue to monitor these lawsuits and support DNR timber sales as necessary. AFRC thanks outside counsel David Bechtold, from Northwest Resource Law PLLC, for his representation in this matter. /*Greg Hibbard*

AFRC Washington Legislative Update

The Washington Legislature convened on January 14 for a 60-day "short" session. Commissioner of Public Lands Dave Upthegrove and DNR have two key agency-request bills:

- [HB 2170](#) – authorizing DNR to enter carbon offset and ecosystem services markets.
- [SB 5838](#) – adding a tribal representative to the Board of Natural Resources.

During a January 14 Clark County Council meeting, Upthegrove [laid out his vision](#) for drastic harvest reductions on DNR state trust lands and [said that](#) passing HB 2170 and SB 5838 will give him needed “flexibility.” Upthegrove’s vision extends beyond his unilateral order setting aside 77,000 acres of state trust lands that could cost the state and beneficiaries about \$2 billion in timber revenues.

HB 2170. During a [January 28 hearing](#), the House Agriculture and Natural Resources (AGNR) Committee [received testimony from a broad coalition](#) of state trust land beneficiaries, local elected officials, and the forest products sector in opposition to HB 2170. Commissioner Upthegrove was unavailable to testify in support of the bill.

HB 2170 provides DNR sweeping authority to shift harvestable trust lands into carbon or ecosystem service markets that Upthegrove has [admitted](#) generate only pennies on the dollar compared to timber harvests. It also lacks critical sideboards and transparency measures, including requirements for DNR to analyze and disclose likely revenue losses and socioeconomic impacts to beneficiaries and rural communities.

Rep. Kristine Reeves (D-Federal Way), who chairs the Committee, expressed concern with DNR’s lack of stakeholder work on the legislation, which stood in stark contrast to her efforts to develop compromise ecosystems services legislation that fell short during the 2023 legislative session (HB 1789). HB 2170 did not advance out of the Committee before policy cutoff and appears dead.

SB 5838. During a January 19 Senate AGNR Committee hearing, Commissioner Upthegrove testified in support of his proposal to add a tribal member to the Board of Natural Resources. The Board sets policy for the management of DNR state trust lands and is currently comprised of [six members representing beneficiaries](#).

Upthegrove faced questions from Republicans skeptical about his true motives for adding a tribal member to the Board. Upthegrove [said](#) “I would be leery to presume how any individual would vote,” but just five days earlier during the Clark County Council meeting, Upthegrove expressed a very different view.

The Washington State Association of Counties and a local economic development group [expressed concerns](#) with the precedent of adding a non-beneficiary to a Board overseeing state trust lands. Senator Mike Chapman (D-Port Angeles), the Committee Chair, [took exception](#) with their focus on the trusts. On February 2, the Senate AGNR Committee considered an amended version of the bill authored by Senator Chapman to add two tribal members to the Board – one from eastern Washington and one from western Washington. Republican amendments requiring the tribal representative to come from a tribe that actively manages forests and another to revert back to one tribal representative rotating between eastern Washington and western Washington were rejected on party line votes. The bill to add two tribal members to the Board passed on a party line vote and will next go to the Rules Committee.

Other bills. AFRC supports a couple of other bills of interest:

- [HB 2348/SB 6216](#) - updating outdated process requirements for DNR timber sales, adopting consistent language for land sales. The bill nearly passed two years ago and has advanced out of both the Senate and House AGNR committees.
- [HB 2327](#) - requiring a legislative audit of the management of state forest (county) trust lands. The bill received a hearing, but a large fiscal note is likely to keep it from advancing this session. It did initiate a valuable discussion in the committee.

Wildfire funding. Commissioner Upthegrove has said his agency’s highest priority is securing an additional \$60 million in wildfire preparedness and mitigation funding, which the Legislature only partially funded last year. One bill to accomplish this using Climate Commitment Act funds, SB 5893, received a hearing in the Senate Ways and Means Committee on January 27. AFRC [testified](#) in support of the bill and has been supportive of wildfire funding.

Upthegrove was not available to testify in support of the bill, so DNR was represented by George Geissler, the Washington State Forester and DNR deputy overseeing wildfire operations, who appeared remotely. Mr. Geissler fielded [skeptical questions](#) from the Committee’s Chair, Senator June Robinson (D-Everett), who was concerned with the lack of detail provided by DNR for how the funds would be spent. Mr. Geissler’s responses did not seem to go over well with the Chair.

With Washington’s snowpack currently at 54% of normal, it could be a difficult wildfire season. It will be important for DNR to make a compelling case for state funding for aggressive initial attack of wildfires.
/Heath Heikkila

The AFRC Podcast



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

Nick Smith is joined by AFRC Washington team members Matt Comisky and Heath Heikkila to discuss the growing challenges facing Washington state trust lands. These lands are required to support schools and public services but are now under strain as timber sales fall and active management declines. The conversation explores what is driving these changes and why the future of trust lands matters to rural communities across Washington.

Click here to listen to [Episode 53](#). Our podcast is also available on Spotify and Apple Podcasts

Episode 53: Washington State Trust Lands at a Crossroads



Can Washington State DNR Turn the Timber Sale Program Around?

As in the January 2026 Newsletter, the first half of FY2026 produced the lowest timber sale volumes in Western Washington in 22 years. DNR was only able to sell 114,391 mbf (thousand board feet), just 25% of the 459,000 mbf it told the Board of Natural Resources (BNR) at the January BNR meeting that the Department planned to sell this fiscal year. While the focus of our reporting and the Commissioner’s “Pause” has been on Western Washington timber sale outputs, the sale program in Eastern Washington is not looking positive either.

One challenge to accountability is the ever-changing “target” DNR tells the BNR it plans to hit in Fiscal Year 2026. At the January BNR meeting, DNR staff presented a plan to offer for sale a total of 544,000 mbf in FY ’26, or 459,000 mbf in Western Washington and 85,000 mbf in Eastern Washington (see fig 1). DNR maintains two separate and distinct Sustainable Harvest Calculations, one for Western Washington and one for Eastern Washington, which is why the numbers reported are broken out as shown below.

But let’s look back just a short seven months ago at what DNR staff then presented to the Board as a planned FY ’26 target. The July presentation showed a planned combined sale volume of 641,000 mbf statewide (see fig 2). An ambitious Western Washington plan and a roughly average Eastern Washington goal.

However, after reviewing the draft timber sale presentation for the February BNR meeting, we see another decrease in the planned sale volume. DNR is now forecasting a Western Washington volume at 440,000 mbf and Eastern Washington volume at 81,000 mbf, for a total statewide volume of 521,000 mbf (see fig 3). This 120,000 mbf reduction in planned volume would be enough to operate roughly 1.5 to 2 sawmills for a year, or about 7,500 standard-size homes.

Since this article was written DNR updated their slide in Figure 3. The current version now shows Current Planned as WS 433,000 mbf and ES as 78,000 mbf. Further questioning what the fiscal year target even is. Since July 1, 2025 the planned volume has now fallen by 147,000 mbf in Western Washington.



Figure 1 - From January 6th, 2026, BNR meeting DNR "Draft" Timber Sales Presentation as found on BNR website 12/29/2025



Figure 2 - From July 1st, 2025, BNR meeting DNR Timber Sales Presentation as found on the BNR website 1/20/2026



Figure 3 - From February 3rd BNR meeting, DNR "Draft" Timber Sales Presentation as found on the BNR website 1/26/2026

Additionally, the value of these sales is also decreasing, which could affect the economic viability of the Department.

What is driving the ever-changing and decreasing volume predictions in Western Washington? We know that field staff have been and continue to work hard to meet targets and bring sales to the auction table, despite constant shifts in policy and decision-making from leadership. Add to the shifting changes at the Executive level, the efforts by some Board of Natural Resources members, such as Superintendent of Public Instruction Chris Reykdal, to manage on a ‘sale by sale’ or even a ‘unit by unit’ basis within a timber sale, make it even more difficult to keep timber sale volumes up. Fellow Board member, Dr. Dan Brown, Director of the School of Forestry and Environmental Sciences at the University of Washington, raised the concern about this piecemeal decision-making at the January BNR meeting stating that approving timber sales on a ‘sale by sale’ or ‘unit by unit’ basis is “reckless.”

In the updated chart to the right (fig 4), you can see the monthly change in the Western Washington volume target, as presented to the Board.



Figure 4 Western Washington Planned Auction Volume for FY2026 as presented to the Board of Natural Resources (Chart created from DNR public data)

The green line in the chart to the right represents the total year-to-date Western Washington Sold Volume through the December auction. The red line is a simple linear trendline fitted to the data. It is expected that this trendline will flatten in the months ahead, but indicates the challenges DNR faces in offering timber sales.



Figure 5 Eastern Washington Planned Auction Volume for FY2026 as presented to the Board of Natural Resources

The chart for Eastern Washington (see fig. 5) looks promising, but history may tell a different story. We need to look back to Fiscal Year 2022 to find the last time DNR sold more than 70,000 mbf in a single year in Eastern Washington. The last time they broke the 80,000 mbf threshold was in FY 2007. As you can see, the green line showing year-to-date (through the December auction) sold volume has a long way to go to reach the current proposed target of 81,000 mbf. The red line represents the historical average annual sold volume of 65,776 mbf in Eastern Washington for Fiscal Years 2005 to 2025.

It is expected that DNR will bring several fire salvage sales to auction in the coming months, including the Crown Creek Fire Salvage project, with roughly 11,874 mbf. But time will tell whether these sales will sell at auction, as they can be high-risk, especially given the time since the fire occurred. With only four months of auctions left in Fiscal Year 2026, it is unclear whether the Department will reach the 25-year sold-volume auction level.

Q3 Outlook. In the [January 2026 AFRC Newsletter](#), we noted that DNR will need to sell 97,440 mbf in March to meet the Q3 target of 168,000 mbf. However, that now appears unlikely after DNR published its February 2026

“draft” timber sale presentation for the February Board meeting. That document shows only 42,600 mbf proposed for Board approval. This would result in them missing their Q3 target by 17% or 27,960 mbf.

However, the February 2 update of the timber sale presentation now shows only 40,600 mbf to be offered in March.

It is possible that, as with the January auction, DNR will add timber sales to the February and March auctions to help make up the nearly 28,000 mbf shortfall for Q3. But where these sales occur is critical to both the targets and the beneficiaries. As previously mentioned, the Western and Eastern Washington volume targets are separate. While DNR shows the Q3 gross target in the chart below, it is critical to understand how the Western and Eastern Washington numbers factor into both the Q3 and Q4 targets. The distribution of revenue DNR receives from managing these lands varies not only between east- and west-side lands but also among the various trusts.

DNR receives a management fee for the work it conducts on state trust lands. For lands in Trust 01 – State Forest Transfer Lands, this is 25% of the sale revenue, deposited into the Forest Development Account (FDA), plus any additional road fees, deposited into the Access Road Revolving Account (ARRA). For most Federally Granted lands, such as Trust 03 – Common School, the management fee is 31%, which is primarily deposited into the Resource Cost Management Account (RCMA), and road fees are deposited into the ARRA fees. For most of the forested trust lands in Eastern Washington, revenue initially flows to the Forest Health Revolving Fund (21Q) to cover expenses. This fund has a \$10 million cap; any non-encumbered amount above that cap is distributed to the beneficiaries. DNR also captures ARRA fees with the Forest Health (aka 21Q or just Q) sales.

These management funds cover staffing, contracting services, seedling purchases, road maintenance, and other forestry-related land management services. Sunk costs associated with timber sales prepared for but never auctioned, less volume sold resulting in reduced ‘day of sale fee’ revenue, and changing market conditions will impact these management funds. We will examine the management funds and DNR's financial health in future articles. */Matt Comisky*



Figure 6 From February 3rd, 2026, BNR meeting DNR "Draft" Timber Sales Presentation as found on BNR website 1/26/2026 – March proposed Board Sales

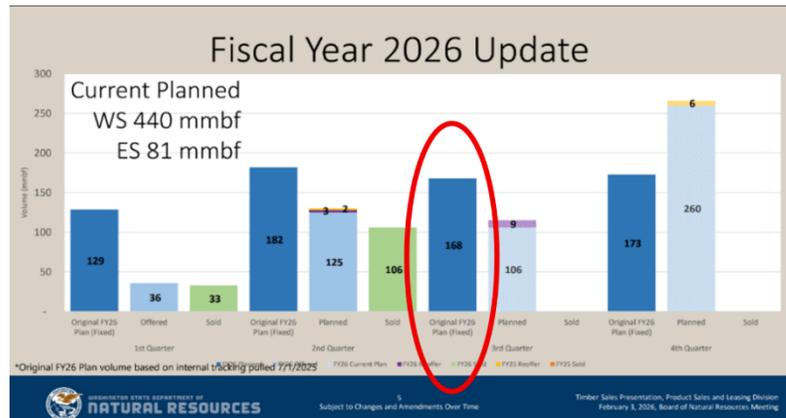


Figure 7 From February 3rd, 2026, BNR meeting DNR "Draft" Timber Sales Presentation as found on the BNR website 1/26/2026

Honoring the Life and Legacy of Paul Beck



The American Forest Resource Council mourns the passing of Paul Beck, a respected leader whose decades of service strengthened the forest products industry and the communities it supports. AFRC President Travis Joseph reflected on Paul's impact:

“The American Forest Resource Council mourns the passing of Paul Beck. Through his life and work, Paul inspired and motivated multiple generations of the forest products industry. He helped build and lead forestry associations, serving as an effective, passionate, and formidable advocate for the timber industry and working people. Paul was persuasive and

funny. He was kind and generous. AFRC, an organization Paul chaired and where he invested so much of his time, is honored to continue his work and vision for our forests and communities in his memory.”

Paul devoted more than three decades to AFRC leadership, including serving as chair from 2008 to 2011. He also served on the Douglas Timber Operators board from 1995 to 2001 and was board chair from 2002 to 2003.

Over his career, Paul worked as a procurement forester and timber manager, later leading in log scaling and measurement, including the merger that formed the Mountain Western Log Scaling and Grading Bureau. He also helped guide the Elliott State Forest's transition toward a research forest while maintaining a strong working-forest focus. Beyond forestry, Paul helped build the Umpqua Fishery Enhancement Derby into a major source of funding for stream restoration and youth education, surpassing \$1 million raised and granted.

AFRC extends our heartfelt condolences to Paul's wife Mariah, his children Colin and Kelsi, and grandchildren Riley and Bode. We are grateful for Paul's leadership and honored to carry his legacy forward.