

DETERMINATION OF SIGNIFICANCE AND REQUEST FOR COMMENTS ON SCOPE OF EIS

Description of proposal: The proposal is to establish a sustainable harvest level for the 2025 to 2034 fiscal year planning decade for forested state trust land in eastern Washington.

Proponent: Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR)

Location of proposal: All forested state trust lands located east of the Cascade Crest in Washington State (refer to attached map).

Lead agency: DNR

Determination: *Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) required.* The lead agency has determined this proposal potentially will have a significant adverse impact on the environment. An EIS is required under Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 43.21C.030(2)(c) and will be prepared.

Deadline for comments: Thursday, February 22, 2024 by 5:00 pm

Scoping notice invites comments:

Scoping is the first formal step in preparing an EIS and initiates public involvement. Through scoping, DNR seeks public input on identifying the areas that require in-depth analysis, and those areas for which a more limited discussion is appropriate. This process helps to focus DNR's consideration on the issues that are truly significant, and avoids obscuring those issues with unnecessary detail. The primary purposes of scoping are to:

- Narrow the focus of the EIS to significant environmental issues;
- Eliminate issues that would have insignificant impacts, or that are not directly related to the proposal;
- Identify alternatives to be analyzed in the EIS; and
- Identify mitigation measures that address potential environmental impacts of the proposal.

Areas for public comment:

Agencies, affected tribes, and members of the public are invited to comment on the scope of the EIS. You may comment on alternatives, mitigation measures, probable significant adverse impacts, and licenses or other approvals that may be required.

DNR welcomes all comments relevant to the scope of the EIS. If you are suggesting a particular approach or impacts to consider, please explain why. The more evidence provided in support of a comment, such as peer-reviewed studies or reports, the more useful that comment will be to DNR in its analysis. Detailed and supported comments will help in developing a robust EIS. Suggested comment topic areas include the following:

- Probable significant environmental impacts that need to be considered in the adoption of the sustainable harvest level.
- Key environmental issues that need to be addressed and analyzed by one or more of the alternatives.
- Alternatives that need to be considered that will meet the need for, and the purpose of, the proposal.
- Specific mitigation measures that DNR should consider to avoid or minimize impacts.
- Identification of additional environmental information, studies, or reports relevant to the development of sustainable harvest level alternatives.

In the EIS, DNR will analyze the No Action Alternative and reasonable action alternatives (to be identified as a result of scoping). Alternatives to be considered in the EIS must meet the following parameters:

- DNR's trust mandate

- Applicable forest practices rules (Title 222 WAC)
- All other applicable state and federal regulations
- All current DNR policies, including the objectives of the *State Trust Lands Habitat Conservation Plan*
- Proposed purpose and need statement (attached to this notice)

You may submit these comments via one of the following methods:

- Online comment form, via: <https://wadnr.commentinput.com/?id=HtPRZf7Vj>
- USPS mail: SEPA Center, P.O. Box 47015, Olympia, WA 98504-7015

Background Information:

In Washington, DNR manages approximately 5.6 million acres of state trust lands. State trust lands are lands held in trust for specific trust beneficiaries, such as public schools and universities. The term “state trust lands” refers to both State lands and State forest lands:

- State lands (RCW 79.02.010(14)) are lands granted to the state by the federal government at statehood. State lands are also referred to as Federal Grant Lands.
- State forest lands (RCW 79.02.010(13)) are lands acquired by Washington State from the counties. There are two types: State Forest Purchase Lands, which are lands purchased or acquired by the state as a gift, and State Forest Transfer Lands, which are lands transferred to the state from the counties.

As a trust lands manager, DNR’s responsibility is to manage these lands consistent with fiduciary principles, which include producing a perpetual supply of revenue for specific trust beneficiaries. On forested state trust lands, revenue is produced primarily through the harvesting of trees.

Providing a perpetual supply of revenue requires responsible management with an emphasis on long-term sustainability. A major component of DNR’s approach to sustainable management is calculation of a sustainable harvest level, which is the volume of timber to be scheduled for sale during a planning decade according to applicable laws, policies, and procedures (RCW 79.10.300)(5). Put another way, the sustainable harvest level is the amount of timber DNR can harvest from forested state trust lands on a continuing basis without major prolonged curtailment or cessation of harvest.

The eastern Washington sustainable harvest level applies to all forested state trust lands located east of the Cascade Crest in Washington (approximately 675 thousand acres). These lands are divided into sustainable harvest units, each of which is assigned its own sustainable harvest level for the decade.

The sustainable harvest level is defined in board feet, which is a unit of volume equivalent to a 12-inch square, one-inch thick piece of wood. The level is recalculated every 10 years. To ensure one generation of beneficiaries is not favored over another, the next decade’s level cannot rise or fall more than 25 percent from the previous decade’s level.

DNR is required to set a sustainable harvest level by Washington state law. Specifically, DNR must periodically adjust acreages designated for inclusion in the sustained yield management program and calculate a sustainable harvest level (RCW 79.10.320). Sustained yield means harvesting on a continual basis without major prolonged curtailment or cessation of harvest (RCW 79.10.310). The sustainable harvest level is a policy decision that requires approval from the Board of Natural Resources.


DNR calculates the sustainable harvest level through a forest estate modeling process. The forest estate model is a mathematical, computer-based representation of the forest. Capable of manipulating vast quantities of data, the model is able to look across landscapes and decades to determine the sustainable harvest level that is the best balance of DNR’s management objectives, which include both revenue production and ecological values such as wildlife habitat.

Notice of Public Meeting:

<p>Live webinar</p> <p>Meeting Date: Wednesday, January 24, 2024 Meeting Time: 6:00 – 7:00 pm Meeting Location: https://dnr-wa-gov.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_p-ygPYvERTqON2er75212g</p>	<p>Recorded webinar</p> <p>Meeting Location: https://www.dnr.wa.gov/programs-and-services/forest-resources/sustainable-harvest-calculation/eastern-washington-2025-34</p>
---	--

Responsible official: Dale Mix
Position/Title: Engineering and General Services Division Manager
Phone: 360-902-1199
Address: 1111 Washington St. SE, Olympia, WA 98504-7030

Date: January 8, 2024

Signature:  _____

There is no DNR administrative SEPA appeal.

Eastern Washington Sustainable Harvest Calculation

Purpose and Need

PROPOSAL

The proposal is to establish a sustainable harvest level for the 2025 to 2034 fiscal year planning decade for forested state trust lands in eastern Washington.

PURPOSE

The purpose describes what DNR is trying to achieve:

- The purpose of the proposed action is to recalculate a sustainable harvest level consistent with DNR policies, including the [Policy for Sustainable Forests](#), the [1997 HCP](#), and applicable local, state, and federal laws and to evaluate the environmental impacts of revising or rescinding the 1999 procedure (PR 14-004-120) related to managing spotted owl habitat in eastern WA HCP units in order to bring northern spotted owl habitat conservation practices into alignment with HCP landscape-level conservation strategies and forest health and catastrophic loss prevention strategies and policies.

NEED

The need describes why DNR is seeking to accomplish the purpose:

- Revised Code of Washington (RCW) [79.10.320](#) requires DNR to “manage the state-owned lands under its jurisdiction which are primarily valuable for the purpose of growing forest crops on a sustained yield basis insofar as compatible with other statutory directives. To this end, the department shall periodically adjust the acreages designated for inclusion in the sustained yield management program and calculate a sustainable harvest level.” This RCW is reflected in the Policy for Sustainable Forests ([Policy on Recalculation of the Sustainable Harvest Level](#)) with a specific requirement to “recalculate the statewide sustainable harvest level, for Board of Natural Resources adoption no less frequently than every ten years.”
- RCW [79.10.330](#) states that “[i]f an arrearage exists at the end of any planning decade, the department shall conduct an analysis of alternatives to determine the course of action regarding the arrearage which provides the greatest return to the trusts based upon economic conditions then existing and forecast, as well as impacts on the environment of harvesting the additional timber. The department shall offer for sale the arrearage in addition to the sustainable harvest level adopted by the Board of Natural Resources for the next planning decade if the analysis determined doing so will provide the greatest return to the trusts.” This RCW is reflected in the department’s policy on arrearage ([Policy on End of Decade Analysis: Arrearage](#)), a 2019 addition to the Policy for Sustainable Forests.
- [RCW 79.10.520](#) requires the department to “develop and implement a policy for prioritizing investments on forest health treatments to protect state lands and state forestlands . . . to: (i) Reduce wildfire hazards and losses from wildfire; (ii) reduce insect infestation and disease; and (iii) achieve cumulative impact of improved forest health and resilience at a landscape scale.” The intent of this RCW is reflected in the Policy for Sustainable Forests [Policy on Forest Health](#) and [Policy on Catastrophic Loss Prevention](#). PR 14-004-120 is limiting DNR’s ability to effectively manage for forest health and catastrophic loss prevention.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives describe how the purpose and need are fulfilled:

- Objective #1: Incorporate new information into a forest estate model to calculate the sustainable harvest level that will inform the Board of Natural Resources when setting the decadal harvest level. New information includes changes in the land base, changes in forest inventory (including requirements of [2SHB 1168](#)), information concerning decadal arrearage and its causes, and changes in technology.
- Objective #2: Consider climate change as part of the affected environment, analyze climate change impacts and benefits of the alternatives, and identify possible mitigation measures that will reduce or eliminate any identified adverse environmental climate change impacts of the proposal.
- Objective #3: Support implementation of DNR's Forest Health Treatment Prioritization and Implementation Plan on State Trust Lands in Eastern Washington as required by [E2SHB1711](#) and broader implementation of [DNR's 20-Year Forest Health Strategic Plan](#).
- Objective #4: Ensure alternatives analyzed are reasonable, feasible, and consistent with DNR's trust management obligations, existing DNR policies, [Habitat Conservation Plan](#) and [Amendments](#), and applicable local, state, and federal laws.

