

Eastside Forest Health Strategy

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Background

At the May 2021 Forest and Fish Policy Committee meeting, members expressed a desire^[MAP(1)] to meet with interested Policy and CMER members to discuss concerns about the health of eastside Washington forests^[MAP(2)] in S/F and Np, including forest fire in Riparian Management Zones (RMZs), and attempt to develop a research and monitoring strategy to inform future refinement by SAGE/CMER. An Eastside Forest Health Strategy workgroup was formed and after several meetings from June 2021 to February 2022, the following guidance was developed, which includes questions^[MAP(3)]^[TB4] based on stakeholder concerns for eastside forest health.

Strategy Overview

The Eastside Forest Health Strategy workgroup recommends the development of a^[MAP(5)] research and monitoring strategy ~~continue to be~~ that is focused on investigating active RMZ management approaches that build on current RMZ prescriptions, ~~in rule~~ and are designed to balance disturbance resiliency and resource protection objectives outlined in the FP HCP (Schedule L-1 functional objectives and performance targets, Appendix N). Current riparian buffer prescriptions may be appropriate where RMZs are not fire dependent^[MAP(6)]^[TB7] but may not be successful in achieving functional objectives and performance targets across the entire landscape subject to the Forest Practices Rules (FPRs). Determining the if, where, when, and how of additional management is the responsibility of the Adaptive Management Program (AMP). Given diverse ownership and management objectives and limited AMP funding to test alternative prescriptions, the strategy will likely require a multi-scale approach (site, watershed, landscape) and close coordination with other landowners. Significant public and private funding and efforts have been invested in forest health and fuels treatments in eastern Washington, but this emphasis has been primarily on upslope stands and not in regulatory RMZs.

It is generally agreed^[MAP(8)]^[TB9] that the maximum extent of thinning allowed in current eastside RMZ rules^[MAP(10)]^[TB11] are rarely implemented making it difficult to find enough examples to study their effectiveness related to fire and forest health. What we do know based on feedback from a non-random tally of stakeholders and analysis of existing condition with the results of the Eastside Modeling Effectiveness Project (EMEP)^[MAP(12)], is that overstocked, suppressed and stagnant^[MAP(13)] riparian stands are likely to remain in this condition for several decades^[MAP(14)]^[TB15]. Absent of active management, these stands may eventually burn^[MAP(16)]^[TB17], which^[MAP(16)]^[TB17], could possibly lead to a catastrophic stand-replacing fire significantly impacting both ecological and monetary values of the RMZ.

The questions discussed by the subgroup fall into one or both of the following categories:

- Research to investigate alternative pre-fire riparian management strategies designed to reduce wildfire potential and improve forest health/fire resiliency and,
- post-fire actions that will restore riparian function through active management.^[MAP(18)]^[TB19]

The following questions should be considered by CMER / SAGE for guidance when scoping upcoming research:

1. To what degree do the current DNR water Types S/F and Np Rules, when applied to the RMZ, achieve functional objectives ~~and performance targets~~ related to address^[MAP(20)]^[TB21] forest health and fire resiliency?

2. What are the factors limiting implementation of RMZ prescriptions?
 - a. What percentage of the time are landowners applying current RMZ Rules?
 - b. What are the operational and forest stand limitations for applying current RMZ Rules?
 - c. Are the current RMZ Rules the limiting factor for whether the prescriptions are applied to the RMZ?^[MAP(22)]^[TB23]
 - d. When and under what conditions are RMZs are being managed under current RMZ Rules, is the primary consideration revenue or enhanced riparian function?

3. What variable/variables^[MAP(24)]^[TB25] contribute to wildfires entering the RMZ and how do these factors affect fire behavior within the RMZ-s?
 - a. Does post-harvest slash management impact the risk of wildfire entering an RMZ?
 - b. How do the fires behave once they enter the RMZ?
 - c. What percentage of landowners are applying PCT to the RMZ?
 - d. Does PCT application in RMZs vary by landowner class?
 - e. How does hydrology and geophysical characteristics (e.g., stream size, valley confinement, soil wetness, topographic position) influence susceptibility/risk to wildfire?

4. Are Wetland Management Zone (WMZ)^[MAP(26)] prescriptions applied more often than RMZ prescriptions?
 - a. If so, are there layout and/or operational benefits associated with the WMZ Rules?
 - b. If so, could these^[MAP(27)]^[TB28] be used to modify the RMZ Rules to make them easier to apply on the ground^[MAP(29)] while still maintaining similar stream functions/protections?

FP HCP Schedule L-1 (Appendix N) attached.

Example:

Heat/Water Temperature

Functional objective: Provide cool water by maintaining shade, groundwater temperature, flow, and other watershed processes controlling stream temperature.²

Measures Performance targets Time-Frame Stream temperature

Water quality standards—current and anticipated in next triennial review [What active management approaches](#) (e.g., for bull trout³).

Shade • Type F & S streams, except Eastside bull trout habitat: that produced by shade model or, if model not used, 85-90% [prescribed fire, thinning, both](#) and intensities of all effective shade.

- Eastside: all available shade within 75' of designated bull trout habitat per predictive model.

LWD/Organic Inputs

Functional objective: Develop riparian conditions that provide complex habitats for recruiting large woody debris and litter⁴.

Measures Performance targets Time-Frame Riparian condition

- Westside and high elevation Eastside habitats: riparian stands [implementation](#)

on pathways to meet Desired Future Condition (DFC) targets (species, basal area, trees per acre, growth, mortality).

- Eastside (except high elevation): DFC; current stands on
 - 5. pathways best to achieve Eastside condition ranges for each habitat fire resiliency MAP(30) and resource protection objectives?
 - a. series. What stand types/conditions and topographic characteristics (e.g., aspect, valley morphology) would most benefit from active RMZ management?