

Eastside Forest Health Strategy

Draft 2/17/2022

Background

At the May 2021 Policy meeting, members expressed an interest/desire to meet with other interested Policy and CMER members to discuss concerns about forest health/the health of eastside Washington forests, including and forest fire in RMZs/Riparian Management Zone's (RMZs), and attempt to develop a research and monitoring strategy that could be handed down to to inform future refinement by SAGE/CMER for further development. An Eastside Forest Health Strategy workgroup was formed and after several meetings from June 2021 to February 2022, the resulting the following guidance was developed, which includes and questions based on stakeholder concerns for eastside forest health was created.

Strategy Overview

The Eastside Forest Health Strategy workgroup believes/recommends the development of a research and monitoring strategy should continue to be that is focused on investigating active RMZ management approaches that build on current 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/buffers may be appropriate where RMZs are not fire dependent, 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 and will likely require a multi-scale approach (site, watershed, landscape), close coordination with others, and creativity of each approach/creativity given diverse ownership/management objectives and limited AMP funding to test alternative prescriptions. 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 that the maximum extent of thinning allowed in current eastside RMZ rules 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 EMEP is that overstocked, suppressed and stagnant riparian stands are likely to remain in this condition for several decades. Absent of/Depending on their degree of active management, these stands may eventually burn, which, and this could likely possibly lead to be in 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 address/investigate alternative pre-fire riparian management strategies designed to reduce wildfire potential and improve forest health/fire resiliency and,
- post-fire restoration actions that will restoration of riparian functions through active management.

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

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Commented [MAP(1)]: Clarify TFW or Timber, Fish and Wildlife?

Commented [MAP(2)]: Is this really just an interest, or more of a clearly articulated need?

Commented [MAP(3)]: All I'm trying to do here is clearly articulate up front that the concern is specific to eastside forests.

Commented [MAP(4)]: Are these proposed critical questions?

Commented [MAP(5)]: I was trying to come up with language that was more assertive than "believes" I think you more than believe it? I think you are proposing it. This is your recommendation after many months of meetings and discussions.

Commented [MAP(6)]: I don't know what this means?

Commented [MAP(7)]: Like whom?

Commented [MAP(8)]: Among workgroup members, or more broadly?

Commented [MAP(9)]: Which rules? Do you mean specifically ones that allow for entry into the RMZ but require a special permitting or review process? Clearly articulate. Obviously, eastside harvests on FP managed lands subscribe to the current rule, so I think what is meant here is that they do not take advantage of certain aspects of the rule that would allow for harvest in the RMZ.

Commented [MAP(10)]: Define.

Commented [MAP(11)]: Specify fire suppressed? And articulate what you mean by "stagnant". Maybe just a short description of what these stands are like, how they got that way, and how management can help. this would really provide some good contextual background and support. Meaning, why are we "worried" about eastside forest health specifically?

I would also mention that under historic conditions forest fires were less likely to impact the riparian area (or less likely than the uplands and/or to a lesser extent than in the uplands) due to proximity to water, etc., but that because of a history of land management (or lack thereof) they in sor ...

Commented [MAP(12)]: Why? Because current rules are not applied to the fullest extent (management in RMZ is not undertaken)? Until when? Until fire or active management?

Commented [MAP(13)]: Can you say something even more strongly than they "may eventually burn", but rather that the fact that they will burn becomes more and more ...

Commented [MAP(14)]: Is this also a research opportunity, or do we already know enough to design and implement this? Such that investigation of active ...

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~~address forest health and fire resiliency?
2. What are the factors limiting implementation of RMZ prescriptions?
 - a. What percentage of the time and to what degree are landowners applying active thinning management prescriptions under these current RMZ Rules?
 - b. What are the operational and forest stand limitations for applying current RMZ~~these~~ Rules?
 - c. Are the current RMZ Rules the limiting factor for whether the prescriptions are applied to the RMZ?
 - d. When and under what conditions are RMZ's are being managed under current RMZ Rules, and is this the primary consideration based on revenue or for enhanced riparian function?
3. What variable/variables 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 this 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 WMZ prescriptions applied more often than RMZ prescriptions?
 - a. Are If so, Are there layout and/or operational benefits associated with~~to~~ the WMZ Rules?
 - b. Could If so, Could these be used to modify the RMZ Rules to make them easier to apply on the ground while still maintaining similar stream functions/protections?

Commented [MAP(15): What does "address" mean in this context? Clearly articulate that the goal of this question is to evaluate how effective the current rules are in achieving the objectives for forest health and fire resiliency when actually used in the RMZ.

Commented [MAP(16): Are you more interested in the percent of time or the proportion of the FP managed landscape to which they are applied?

Commented [MAP(17): What could other limiting factors be? What about the current rules might be limiting?

Commented [MAP(18): What about the kinds of upland activities that may contribute to fire entering the RMZ? (Forest health of the upland invariably influences the risk of forest fire, including in the RMZ).

Commented [MAP(19): define

Commented [MAP(20): What are "these"? The layout and operational considerations/rules that make (maybe??) WMZ more broadly applied than RMZ?

Commented [MAP(21): there is an assumption here that, while possibly valid, has yet to be evaluated (hence questions related to bullet 2 above).

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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.

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 trout).

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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.

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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 are 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 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?

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Commented [MAP(22): Are stand characteristics for fire resiliency clearly defined in the literature? Do we need to define what characteristics of an eastside WA RMZ contribute to fire resiliency of those stands?

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