

The Small Forest Landowner's Guide to Alternate Plan Interdisciplinary Team Meetings

Introduction:

Washington's Forest Practices Rules allow landowners to develop alternate plans, which are harvest or management plans that propose alternatives to the Forest Practices Rules. The alternate plan process can address site-specific issues and provide greater management flexibility than the standard rules.

An ID Team meeting is intended to advise the landowner on how to successfully complete and implement an alternate plan to adequately maintain or enhance riparian functions. All parties are expected to be courteous, provide detailed pertinent information on the project, and work collaboratively to ensure the project meets the legal requirements of the Forest Practices rules, while respecting the landowner's ecological and economic objectives.

What's the first step?

Before completing an alternate plan and forest practices application (FPA), it is recommended to schedule an onsite visit with a Forest Practices Forester from DNR. The Forest Practices Forester can review your draft detailed alternate plan description and help you understand what information is critical to add for a complete FPA. Additionally, the DNR's Small Forest Landowner Office can help navigate you through the process and provide technical assistance on alternate plans and other Forest Practices related issues.

Who is on the Interdisciplinary (ID) Team?

The ID Team is comprised of subject matter experts who are best able to respond to technical questions in assuring your alternate plan meets the alternate plan approval standard. The team is led by the Forest Practices Forester who serves as the representative of DNR. The other specialists serve as advisors to help the Forest Practices Forester reach a decision about your alternate plan.

These ID teams are composed of:

- Landowner or a designated representative such as a forestry consultant, forest engineer, or Qualified Expert for geology (licensed engineering geologist) if unstable landforms are suspected to be on the site,
- DNR Forest Practices Forester and/or an engineer or a DNR Qualified Expert (if applicable for the site),
- Department of Fish and Wildlife habitat biologist or engineer,
- Department of Ecology field staff,
- Representative(s) for the affected Native American Tribe(s),
- Interested parties, such as county or federal government field staff,
- Any other interested parties, which may attend at the discretion of the landowner.

Note: Parties not identified as experts attending per DNR or the landowner's request attend only as observers. Observers do not participate in discussions about the alternate plan or make any recommendations. It is beneficial that the landowner be present at ID Team site visit, even if the alternate plan is prepared by a consulting forester. This is important as the landowner's presence conveys their interest in and need for the alternate plan to successfully reach their forest management objectives. Their presence also allows the ID Team to work with the landowner on alternative prescriptions should those initially proposed by the landowner not be approvable.

What Types of Issues Does the ID Team Address?

The ID Team questions are often associated with riparian functions, fish and wildlife habitat, unstable slopes, water type modifications, cultural resource protections, road maintenance or abandonment issues, or proposals to mitigate public resource damage associated with proposed forest practices activities.

Interdisciplinary Team Process:

1. Upon submission of your alternate plan, the regional Forest Practices Forester will review the FPA and alternate plan document for completeness. DNR generally has 30 days to approve or disapprove the FPA, with the first 15 days designated as the time to review the FPA and send it out to the other ID Team members.

Note: Incomplete or inadequate descriptions of any one of the following will result in disapproval of the alternate plan FPA: a) current

Ask a DNR Forest Practices Forester to review a draft of your alternate plan

The Forest Practices Forester represents DNR and leads the ID Team

Technical experts on the ID Team advise the Forest Practice Forester

It helps the process if the landowner attends the ID Team's site visit

ID Teams look at riparian functions, habitat, unstable slopes, roads and other issue.

DNR generally has 30 days to make a decision about an FPA

Alternate plan FPAs must give complete descriptions of conditions, objectives, etc.

site conditions; b) management objectives and methods; and c) a description of if and how the five riparian functions may be impacted on your specific site. Without complete management prescriptions and an alternate plan to maintain or restore riparian function the ID team cannot assess the site.

2. The Forest Practices Forester will then determine the need for an ID team review. All **“complex”** alternative plans (those using the “FPA/N Alternate Plan Form”) will require an onsite ID team visit. However, when an **alternate plan template** is used, the onsite review by an ID Team is generally not necessary if the field review by the Forest Practices Forester confirms the site meets the template eligibility criteria. However, all ID team representatives are notified of the template alternate plan and provided an opportunity to ask for a site review.
3. The Forest Practices Forester will schedule the ID Team at least three days before the decision due date and will notify you upon scheduling, though generally they are scheduled well in advance of this.
4. On the day of your scheduled ID Team visit, all members will arrive at your property at the pre-determined time. On site, the discussion can be wide ranging, but the approval decision is based on issues directly related to the alternate plan submitted. The discussions often include suggestions to help the landowner implement their alternate plan successfully and questions as to how the landowner intends to meet their stated alternate plan goals including long term recovery of the five riparian functions as required by the alternate plan approval standard. In most cases, the ID Team agrees on a course of action based on the technical experts’ discussion. In more complex reviews of proposed forest practices activities, written reports from the technical experts are requested to assist DNR make a final decision.
5. The ID Team is primarily responsible for helping the Forest Practices Forester determine if the proposed alternate plan meets the approval standard. Each team member is there to advise and make recommendations to the Forest Practices Forester, who makes the final decision. Throughout, and at the end, of the ID Team review, suggestions might be made to help you better meet the approval standard. Final approval of the FPA might hinge on you making those changes to the alternate plan; the Forest Practices Forester and/or staff in the Small Forest Landowner Office can assist in this process.
6. Before all participants of the ID Team leave the site, an Informal Conference Note (ICN) is prepared by the Forest Practices Forester. It is a high-level summary and documents specific decisions made during the review. All participants on the Team are asked to sign the ICN, including the landowner. The ICN is not a technical or enforceable document, it is a tool used only to document the discussion and decisions made.
7. After the ID Team visit is completed, the Forest Practices Forester will make the final decision regarding your FPA and alternate plan. You will receive confirmation of approval, conditional approval, or disapproval, in writing via mail to the address you provided on the FPA.

“FPA/N Alternate Plan Template Forms” typically do not require ID Team visits unless requested by the DNR Forester

ID Team visits are scheduled at least 3 days before the decision due date

ID Teams may make suggestions

ID Teams ask how the landowner meet goals and recover key riparian functions

Information conference notes (ICNs) are high-level summaries prepared onsite.

The landowner and ID Team members are asked to sign the ICN onsite

The ICN documents the site visit — it is NOT an enforceable document

The Forest Practices Forester makes the final decision and mails it to the landowner

Background:

Washington’s Forest Practices (FP) Rules have allowed landowners to develop alternate plans (AP) since the early 1980’s. Alternate plans are intended to provide landowners with a means to develop site-specific management plans for all timber activities within chapters 222-22 through 222-38 WAC regulated under state FP Rules. An alternate plan may alter the prescriptions outlined in the Rules as long as the alternate plan meets the approval standard laid out in WAC 222-12-040 (1), which says a plan must provide protection to public resources at least equal in overall effectiveness to the protections the regular Rules would provide.

The AP process is described in WAC 222-12-040; the application process, alternate plan preparation responsibilities, required content and review procedures are described in WAC 222-12-0401 and Part 1 of Board Manual Section 21. Board Manual Section 21 has specific guidance when preparing an AP. This document is meant to assist small forest landowners in understanding the interdisciplinary (ID) team process. For further information on alternate plans, please see the above-referenced WACs, Board Manual section 21, and http://file.dnr.wa.gov/publications/fp_sflo_altplanfaq.pdf