



**DEPARTMENT OF
NATURAL RESOURCES**

PACIFIC CASCADE REGION

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November 14, 2024

Notice of Final Determination

Dabbler Timber Sale, App. No. 30-106156

SEPA File No. 24- 100101

FP No. 2942570

The Department of Natural Resources issued a Determination of Non-significance (DNS), Mitigated Determination of Non-significance (MDNS), Modified DNS/MDNS on 10/01/2024 for this proposal under the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) and WAC 197-11-340(2).

This determination is hereby:

Retained.

Modified. Modifications to this proposal include the following:

Withdrawn. This proposal has been withdrawn due to the following:

Delayed. A Final Determination has been delayed due to the following:

Responsible Official: Michael Kearney

Position/title: Division Manager, Product Sales & Leasing

Phone: (360) 902-1088

Address: 1111 Washington Street SE, PO Box 47014
Olympia, WA 98504-7014

Date: 11/14/2024

Signature: Michael Kearney

Summary of Comments and Responses (if applicable):

Informational Comment Summary:

Squaxin Island Tribe Cultural Resources Department – Informational Comment stating the Dabbler Timber Sale project is outside the Squaxin Island Tribe's traditional area stating they do not need any further consultation for this project.

Response: No Response.

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American Forest Resource Council – Informational Comment on behalf of its members in support of the Dabbler Timber Sale, concerns with changing or removing planned timber harvests as it violates basic tenets of sustainable forest management, support of the contributions the timber sale program provides in form of wood fiber to manufacturing facilities, DNR timber sale contributions to the greater community’s well-being.

Response: No Response.

Specific Comment Summary:

Auto-generated form letter comments: Received multiple comments (approximately 79) from October 12, 2024 through the end of the comment period on October 15, 2024. Each comment was based on templated auto-generated comments from environmental groups’ websites. The comments opposed the harvest of the proposal based on ecological and recreational importance, wildlife habitat, and climate concerns.

Response: See attached Appendix A.

Comments Received Post SEPA Review Period: Concerns with stand age, carbon sequestration and carbon emissions, forest revenues, Northern Spotted Owl Management, wildlife habitat, forest management, and older forest thresholds.

Response: See attached Appendix A.

Legacy Forest Defense Coalition – Concerns with stand age, Northern Spotted Owl Management, wildlife habitat and older forest thresholds.

Response:

Thank you for providing comments in your October 15, 2024 letter regarding the Dabbler timber sale, SEPA File No. 24-100101. This letter is in response to your comments and provides information outlining how this proposal is consistent with all the applicable laws, rules, policies and procedures, including the Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) and Policy for Sustainable Forests (PSF).

The Dabbler Timber Sale is located within Siouxon Block in Clark County. This proposal is in the Columbia Planning Unit within the Siouxon Spotted Owl Management Unit (SOMU) in designated habitat. The DNR HCP’s northern spotted owl conservation strategy is the foundation for the proposed harvest activities and this proposal is consistent with the HCP for conservation of northern spotted owl (NSO).

In the Dabbler Timber Sale 140 net acres are being harvested, while 16 acres (10.3% of the proposal area) are being conserved from the overall proposal area that was evaluated for harvest. These conservation areas may include potentially unstable slopes, riparian and wetland management zones and other conservation areas. Many of these conservation areas are regeneration harvest deferred and

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will contribute to older-forests over time. The stage of stand development for the harvest areas within this proposal on the stand level scoring using the Van Pelt guide (Van Pelt 2007) includes Maturation 2.

The Department of Natural Resources has a multi-species Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service concerning threatened and endangered species and their habitats, which requires the Department to manage landscapes to provide and sustain long-term habitat in exchange for an Incidental Take Permit. This agreement substantially helps the Department to mitigate for cumulative effects related to management activities. The Department follows Forest Practices Rules as applicable to roads and potentially unstable slopes. The Department follows Forest Protections related to fire hazard mitigation.

The General Silviculture Strategy (policy) in the Policy for Sustainable Forests (PSF) emphasized that older-forest targets will be accomplished over time and that DNR intends to actively manage structurally complex forests to achieve older-forest structures (i.e. stands with older-forests identified by structural characteristics) across 10 to 15 percent of each western Washington HCP planning unit in 70 to 100 years from the adoption of the PSF.

In September 2024, the DNR revised a document titled '*Landscape Assessment to Identify and Manage Structurally Complex Stands to Meet Older-Forest Targets in Western Washington, May 2024*' (landscape assessment). This document describes the background, historical analyses regarding attainment of older-forest conditions in western Washington, and updated data and modeling analyses showing when the various HCP planning units across western Washington are expected to attain a level of older-forest conditions through implementation of the HCP and other conservation objectives, and outlined as targets within the PSF.

This landscape assessment identifies the existing structurally complex stands, and additional suitable stands, to be managed for older-forest targets over time. The identified stands are located in conservation areas and deferred stands unavailable for regeneration harvest. These stands include areas identified as long-term forest cover under the marbled murrelet long-term conservation strategy, riparian areas, areas conserved under the multispecies conservation strategy, potentially unstable slopes, spotted owl nest patches, old growth, Natural Areas and Natural Resource Conservation Areas, and other conservation areas permanently deferred from regeneration harvest.

Some of these conservation areas are based on specific HCP strategies that are spatially fixed and conserved on the landscape, such as marbled murrelet occupied sites or spotted owl nest patches. **However, other conservation areas are modeled and must be field verified based on HCP strategies, such as riparian areas or unstable slopes. There is naturally some adjustment to the location, absence, or presence of conservation areas upon field verification. This timber sale has been field verified for compliance with all conservation objectives and the planned harvest units are determined not to be regeneration harvest deferred and are available for harvest. These harvest areas also do not count towards the attainment of older-forests over time and have been excluded from the calculations and tables included in the landscape assessment. Conversely, when field verification identifies specific**

areas required for conservation, they will be protected from harvest and included in future conservation area modeling.

The landscape assessment demonstrates that while the COLUMBIA HCP Planning Unit does not currently contain 10 to 15 percent older-forest conditions, the structurally complex and other suitable stands designated to be managed for older-forest targets are projected to develop into older-forest structure that meets or exceeds this threshold by 2100 through implementation of the HCP and other policies and laws. Stands identified to be managed toward older-forest targets, including currently older-forests and stands projected to develop older-forest structure in the future, are depicted in associated maps within the landscape assessment document for each western Washington HCP planning unit.

DNR has designated forest stand acreage within regeneration harvest deferred areas in each HCP planning unit to meet or exceed the policy's 10% older-forest target. This identified acreage is designated in DNR's GIS database as the Westside Forest Cover (Conservation Areas) and Older-Forest in Conservation Areas layers.

The Dabbler Timber Sale is not identified as one of those stands designated to meet older-forest targets over time. Following the timber sale, the variable retention harvest units will be replanted with native, conifer tree species that will be supplemented by natural regeneration expected to occur as a result of the conservation areas in and around the harvest units.

The site contains habitat suitable for the Northern spotted owl. The Northern spotted owl is federally-listed as threatened, and state-listed as endangered. However, the DNR has a multi-species Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the National Marine Fisheries Service concerning threatened and endangered species and their habitats, which was in part specifically designed to address the needs of the Northern spotted owl as a species. The DNR's HCP anticipated that DNR would remove some timber capable of supporting spotted owls in management areas where the habitat for the owl was greater than a minimum threshold. These minimum thresholds have been exceeded in the management unit where the Dabbler timber sale is planned. DNR's HCP was specifically designed to provide this suitable mitigation for spotted owls, while allowing for the removal of some habitat that exceeds the minimum threshold. While the removal of some habitat in the Dabbler proposal may cause moderate, theoretical impacts to spotted owls, these impacts have been mitigated to insignificant levels through HCP-based land management.

The Trust Lands Habitat Conservation Plan covers and applies to this proposal, and this proposal follows the DNR HCP Northern Spotted Owl Conservation Strategy for this proposed harvest activity. The HCP's conservation objective for the northern spotted owl is to provide habitat that makes a significant contribution to demographic support, maintenance of species distribution, and facilitation of dispersal. In areas designated to provide Nesting, Roosting, and Foraging (NRF) habitat, DNR shall provide a target condition of at least 50 percent of its managed lands measured within each Spotted Owl Management Unit (SOMU) in a suitable habitat condition. Suitable habitat constitutes sub-mature or higher habitat types. Harvests and proposals that are not located within this target condition (50% habitat) may reduce habitat as long as at least 50% remains within the SOMU.

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In addition, the USFWS very recently reviewed DNR's HCP with regards to northern spotted owls and the impacts of barred owls. USFWS concluded that competition from the barred owl is now the primary driver behind spotted owl population declines and that the continued implementation of the HCP/ITP is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the spotted owl and is not likely to destroy or adversely modify designated critical habitat for the species (Reinitiated Biological Opinion on the Incidental Take Permit (PRT-812521, USFWS; March 21, 2024).

This proposal is located in the Siouxon SOMU, which DNR manages for NRF habitat. The DNR HCP Northern Spotted Owl Conservation Strategy is being implemented for the proposed harvest activities occurring within identified non-habitat and habitat areas. The Siouxon SOMU is currently above the 50% minimum habitat threshold at 58.3%. This sale is proposing removal of approximately 96.6 acres of High Quality Habitat and 44.8 acres of Sub-Mature habitat. The sale will remove 0.9% of the habitat in the Siouxon SOMU, which will result in a residual of 57.4% habitat after harvest activities are complete. Thus, the Siouxon SOMU will remain above the HCP-required habitat threshold of 50%.

DNR delineated Northern spotted owl habitat on State Trust Lands in accordance with the State Lands Habitat Conservation Plan. The HCP allows for harvesting of habitat within the spotted owl management units when above minimum 50% threshold. Stand metrics were measured using a field plot based method and were utilized to determine the habitat classification for each inventory unit. The VRH unit(s) within the Dabbler timber sale unit(s) are within habitat.

Unit 1, 2, and 3 are located entirely within habitat. Unit 5 ROW and a portion of Unit 4 ROW involve only non-habitat. All units are in the DNR's HCP Columbia Planning Unit. Harvest of habitat that is in excess of the target amount for a SOMU is done considering landscape factors such as maintaining larger patches of existing habitat, limiting fragmentation of large, contiguous habitat patches, location of nest core sites or habitat patches that are contiguous with larger habitat considering existing spatial distribution patterns within the SOMU.

The SEPA Environmental Checklist describes specific mitigation measures proposed, in addition to the mitigation provided by plans and programs listed in A-13-b (i.e. above and beyond expectations) in A-13-c. This proposal included specific mitigation measures beyond the HCP and Forest Practices requirements. While this proposal required 1,120 leave trees to be retained, this proposal includes 1,404 leave trees. The Dabbler timber sale achieved the 8 trees per acre documented as there were 892 Clumped and Scattered Leave Trees associated with Unit 1, 122 Clumped and Scattered Leave Trees associated with Unit 2, and 390 Clumped and Scattered Leave Trees associated with Unit 3. These Leave Tree Areas were added around most Type 5 streams and stream headwalls to provide additional protection, extra leave trees were preserved around potentially unstable areas in Unit 1, and extra leave trees were included around legacy trees in Unit 3. For more information on leave trees, please visit our website and read our HCP and PSF.

Your letter does not raise new concerns, or substantive concerns specific to the Dabbler Timber Sale that have not been previously raised in your prior comment letters and responded to by DNR. In its

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responses to your prior correspondences, DNR explained its policy to protect old growth, its procedure to identify and manage structurally complex forest, its obligations under the 1997 HCP, and the 2006 Policy for Sustainable Forests. As you identify in your letter, DNR staff provided information to the Board of Natural Resources in a series of Board meetings to address your concerns about the amount of structurally complex forests that is expected to be on the DNR-managed landscape at the termination of the 1997 HCP, fifty years in the future.

The Dabbler timber sale was designed to be consistent with DNR's framework (WAC 332-41-665 (1)(f)). The harvest was designed in accordance with DNR's Habitat Conservation Plan and Policy for Sustainable Forests. While your comment letter expresses disagreement with that framework, it does not identify a probable, significant, adverse environmental impact which was not analyzed in the environmental impact statements for the programmatic decisions or an inadequacy in the SEPA checklist prepared for the Dabbler timber sale. The Dabbler timber sale is located in lands available for harvest.

Thank you for your comments.

Friends of Clark County – Concerns with stand age, carbon sequestration and carbon emissions, forest revenues, Northern Spotted Owl Management, wildlife habitat, forest management, and older forest thresholds.

Response –

Thank you for providing comments in your October 11, 2024 letter regarding the Dabbler Timber Sale, SEPA File No. 24-100101. This letter is in response to your comments, as well as similar comments we received in 5 other letters that referenced Friends of Clark County. This response provides information outlining how this proposal is consistent with all applicable laws, rules, policies and procedures, including the Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP), the Policy for Sustainable Forests (PSF) and the Riparian Forest Restoration Strategy (RFRS).

- I. **“Clearcutting approximately 140 acres of mature, structurally complex forest – which is located next to a rare 30-acre patch of verified old growth forest flies in the face of DNR’s commitment to restore old growth forests to Western Washington and ignores the state legislature’s landmark climate legislation.”**

“The DNR is required under its Habitat Conservation Plan as well as the Intra-Service Biological Opinion for the HCP, PR-004-046, and the policy for Sustainable Forests to restore “fully functional” or “old growth-like” forests across 10 to 15 percent of state forestlands. The Dabbler timber sale would be an excellent candidate to meet these old forest targets.”

The stage of stand development for the harvest areas within this proposal on the stand level scoring using the Van Pelt guide (Van Pelt 2007) includes Maturation 2, and no old growth trees will be

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harvested or cut as part of this proposal. As noted in the SEPA checklist, an Old Growth Report was completed as part of this proposal and is available upon request.

Recognizing the climate and carbon benefits of working forests in Washington's Climate Commitment Act (RCW 70A.45.005), the legislature found that Washington should maintain and enhance the state's ability to continue to sequester carbon through natural and working lands and forest products. Further, "Washington's existing forest products sector, including public and private working forests and the harvesting, transportation, and manufacturing sectors that enable working forests to remain on the land and the state to be a global supplier of forest products, is, according to a University of Washington study analyzing the global warming mitigating role of wood products from Washington's private forests, an industrial sector that currently operates as a significant net sequester of carbon. This value, which is only provided through the maintenance of an intact and synergistic industrial sector, is an integral component of the state's contribution to the global climate response and efforts to mitigate carbon emissions." RCW 70A.45.090(1)(a).

The General Silviculture Strategy (policy) in the Policy for Sustainable Forests (PSF) emphasized that older-forest targets will be accomplished over time and that DNR intends to actively manage structurally complex forests to achieve older-forest structures (i.e. stands with older-forests identified by structural characteristics) across 10 to 15 percent of each western Washington HCP planning unit in 70 to 100 years from the adoption of the PSF.

In September 2024, the DNR revised a document titled 'Landscape Assessment to Identify and Manage Structurally Complex Stands to Meet Older-Forest Targets in Western Washington, May 2024' (landscape assessment). This document describes the background, historical analyses regarding attainment of older-forest conditions in western Washington, and updated data and modeling analyses showing when the various HCP planning units across western Washington are expected to attain a level of older-forest conditions through implementation of the HCP and other conservation objectives, and outlined as targets within the PSF.

DNR has designated forest stand acreage within regeneration harvest deferred areas in each HCP planning unit to meet or exceed the policy's 10% older-forest target. This identified acreage is designated in DNR's GIS database as the Westside Forest Cover (Conservation Areas) and Older-Forest in Conservation Areas layers. The Dabblers Timber Sale is not identified as one of those stands designated to meet older-forest targets over time.

II. "By leaving the Dabblers units intact, we can reduce the effect of increasing CO2 levels for many years to come and continue storing carbon."

"Recently, a court ruled that the DNR did not adequately consider the climate impacts of other timber sales."

"The claims made in the environmental checklist do not consider all carbon emissions from clearcutting."

“The DNR must consider the cumulative effects of these activities on our area’s climate change resilience.”

DNR analyzed carbon sequestration and carbon emissions from projected land management activities within its final environmental impact (FEIS) statement for the 2015-2024 Sustainable Harvest Calculation and the FEIS for the 2019 HCP Long-Term Conservation Strategy for the Marbled Murrelet. At the western Washington scale, land management activities on DNR-managed lands sequester more carbon than emitted. Individual activities, such as this proposal, are likely to emit some greenhouse gases, including CO₂; however, at the landscape scale, DNR’s sustainable land management activities, including this proposal, sequester more carbon than they emit. Evaluating carbon sequestration at the western Washington scale is appropriate because a determination of net carbon emissions must consider both the carbon sequestered and the carbon emissions from management within the same analysis area (western Washington).

The legislature also found that the 2019 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report “identifies several measures where sustainable forest management and forest products may be utilized to maintain and enhance carbon sequestration. These include increasing the carbon sequestration potential of forests and forest products by maintaining and expanding the forestland base, reducing emissions from land conversion to non-forest uses, increasing forest resiliency to reduce the risk of carbon releases from disturbances such as wildfire, pest infestation, and disease, and applying sustainable forest management techniques to maintain or enhance forest carbon stocks and forest carbon sinks, including through the transference of carbon to wood products” (2020 Washington Laws Ch. 120 §1(2)).

The timber harvested from DNR-managed lands is used to produce climate-smart forest products. The climate impacts of DNR’s land management are analyzed in multiple environmental impact statements that have informed the Board of Natural Resources’ decisions and are consistent with the IPCC, which states that “meeting society’s needs for timber through intensive management of a smaller forest area creates opportunities for enhanced forest protection and conservation in other areas, thus contributing to climate change mitigation.”

The King County Superior Court ruling on Center for Sustainable Economy et al. vs. DNR (No. 23-2-11799-9-KNT) is applicable to a specific timber sale proposal on DNR managed trust lands in King county and is not applicable to this proposal.

III. “The Siouxon is the ONLY place in Clark County that has large amounts of mature forest”

“The DNR must seriously consider the impacts of losing a mature and complex forest ecosystem in the Dabbler timber sale”

There are 3 separate DNR managed trust landscapes within Clark county, all of which contain some mature forest stands. As noted in the response above in reference to comments under I., DNR has

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designated forest stand acreage to meet or exceed the requirements for older-forest targets as outlined by PR 14-004-046.

- IV. “The Legacy Forest Defense Coalition has determined, through DNR information and their own research, including viewing area photos taken in 1952 that these trees are closer to 122 years old”**

“The Dabbler Timber Sale contains remnant trees that survived the Siouxon Fire in 1902. These mature and old-growth trees provide structural complexity to the forest and are critical for biodiversity as well as providing nesting, roosting and foraging habitat for northern spotted owls.”

The stand origin dates for the harvest areas within the timber sale proposal units range from approximately 1944 to 1954 based on DNR’s inventory data. Older, larger trees, including those that have old growth characteristics are contained within areas that will not be harvested, including: leave tree areas, riparian management zones, and protected HCP features. No old growth trees will be harvested or cut as part of this proposal. Please see response to comments under **VI.** below in reference to habitat for the northern spotted owl.

- V. “On July 13, 2022, Chris Reykdal, Washington State Superintendent of Public Education commented on the state of the CST (Common School Trust) specifically about the forest revenues. He wrote, “Timber harvests are not a driving force for school construction. Timber harvests have become an almost insignificant share of total school construction, and timber counties are primarily shipping their wood products, and the tax revenues derived from those products to the benefit of urban counties...”**

Less than 18% of the Dabbler timber sale proposal is designated as common school trust land. Although there have been proposals to redirect revenue generated from common school trust lands to other potential trust beneficiaries, no laws, policies, or procedures have been changed or created to change the current funding process.

In addition to complying with laws of general applicability, as a trust manager DNR follows the common law duties of a trustee. These include, but are not limited to: administering the trust in accordance with the provisions that created it; maintaining undivided loyalty to each of the trusts and its beneficiaries; managing trust assets prudently; making the trust property productive, while recognizing the perpetual nature of the trusts; dealing impartially with beneficiaries; and reducing the risk of loss to the trusts.

The Board of Natural Resources is charged with guiding DNR’s management of the lands and resources in its care. The Board of Natural Resources establishes policies to ensure that acquisition, management and disposition of these lands and resources are based on sound principles and are consistent with applicable laws. The *Policy for Sustainable Forests* is one way the Board of Natural Resources fulfills that charge for forested state trust lands.

VI. “The environmental checklist recognizes that the "Dabbler" forest is entirely within a Northern Spotted Owl Management Unit (SOMU) and owls have been observed on or near the site. The Northern Spotted owl is identified as a Species of Greatest Conservation Need under the State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) and is identified as a Priority Species under WDFW#39’s Priority Habitat and Species Program.”

DNR has a multi-species Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the National Marine Fisheries Service concerning threatened and endangered species and their habitats, which was in part specifically designed to address the needs of the Northern spotted owl as a species. The DNR’s HCP anticipated that DNR would remove some timber capable of supporting spotted owls in management areas where the habitat for the owl was greater than a minimum threshold. These minimum thresholds have been exceeded in the management unit where the Dabbler timber sale is planned. DNR’s HCP was specifically designed to provide this suitable mitigation for spotted owls, while allowing for the removal of some habitat that exceeds the minimum threshold. While the removal of some habitat in the Dabbler proposal may cause moderate, theoretical impacts to spotted owls, these impacts have been mitigated to insignificant levels through HCP-based land management.

The Trust Lands Habitat Conservation Plan covers and applies to this proposal, and this proposal follows the DNR HCP Northern Spotted Owl Conservation Strategy for this proposed harvest activity. The HCP’s conservation objective for the northern spotted owl is to provide habitat that makes a significant contribution to demographic support, maintenance of species distribution, and facilitation of dispersal. In areas designated to provide Nesting, Roosting, and Foraging (NRF) habitat, DNR shall provide a target condition of at least 50 percent of its managed lands measured within each Spotted Owl Management Unit (SOMU) in a suitable habitat condition. Suitable habitat constitutes sub-mature or higher habitat types. Harvests and proposals that are not located within this target condition (50% habitat) may reduce habitat as long as at least 50% remains within the SOMU.

In addition, the USFWS very recently reviewed DNR’s HCP with regards to northern spotted owls and the impacts of barred owls. USFWS concluded that competition from the barred owl is now the primary driver behind spotted owl population declines and that the continued implementation of the HCP/ITP is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the spotted owl and is not likely to destroy or adversely modify designated critical habitat for the species (Reinitiated Biological Opinion on the Incidental Take Permit (PRT-812521, USFWS; March 21, 2024).

This proposal is located in the Siouxon SOMU, which DNR manages for NRF habitat. The DNR HCP Northern Spotted Owl Conservation Strategy is being implemented for the proposed harvest activities occurring within identified non-habitat and habitat areas. The Siouxon SOMU is currently above the 50% minimum habitat threshold at 58.3%. This sale is proposing removal of approximately 141.4 acres of habitat, or approximately 0.9% of the habitat in the Siouxon SOMU, which will result in a residual of 57.4% habitat after harvest activities are complete. Thus, the Siouxon SOMU will remain above the HCP-required habitat threshold of 50%.

- VII. **“Other species utilize the varied biodiversity of the area, including woodpeckers, bats, fishers, land snails and springtails, voles, shrews, squirrels, elk and deer – to name a few as well as several varieties of edible and nonedible mushrooms, lichen and mosses.”**

This sale has been designed to comply with the Department’s State Lands HCP and provides for the protection of wildlife and their habitats. Scattered and clumped leave trees will be retained to provide nesting, roosting and foraging areas for avian species and retention tree clumps are identified across the harvest area. Some clumps were selected for their species diversity of native flora. These clumps will provide a local seed source for native overstory and understory species. Wildlife trees were left in areas to protect snags, large down logs, and potentially unstable slopes. Trees with defects such as split or broken tops, dominant crowns, large diameters and large limbs were favored as leave trees to enhance wildlife potential. Well-engineered and constructed roads reduce the potential water quality impacts for downstream fish populations. Revegetating exposed soils aids water quality and provides forage for ungulates. In addition, RMZs are no-harvest riparian buffers. Trees within RMZs may be cut for safety or operational needs, and any trees cut will be left in place adding to down woody debris within riparian zones.

- VIII. **“It could be relatively easy to negotiate a new reconveyance as one alternative to clearcutting the 4 timber. Although the Dabbler area is currently not as recreationally popular as Hantwick, the old roads are beautiful, offering rare hiking opportunities, views of Mt. St. Helens and the historical significance of immersion in a regenerated forest after the Yacont burn.”**

DNR has not been approached about possible reconveyance of these trust lands. Although one of the access routes into the proposal areas across private land does not allow for general public access, the roads across DNR and the Forest Service do allow for access to dispersed public recreation in areas not posted as closed for activities such as hiking and other non-motorized forms of recreation. DNR encourages recreationists to obtain a Discover Pass and explore the many recreation opportunities provided by these multiple use working forests.

The Dabbler Timber Sale was designed to be consistent with DNR's management framework (WAC 332-41-665(1) (f)). The harvest was designed in accordance with DNR's Habitat Conservation Plan, Policy for Sustainable Forests and Riparian Forest Restoration Strategy. Your comment letter does not identify a probable or significant adverse environmental impact that was not analyzed in the environmental impact statements for programmatic decision making or an inadequacy in the SEPA checklist prepared for the Dabbler Timber Sale. The Dabbler Timber Sale is within lands available for harvest. Thank you for your comments.

Thank you for your comments.

Cascade Forest Conservancy - Concerns with Northern Spotted Owl Management, re-issuing of the SEPA Environmental Checklist, old-growth and mature forests, Climate Change, and wildlife habitat.

Response:

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Thank you for providing comments in your October 14, 2024 letter regarding the DABBLER timber sale, SEPA File No. 24-100101. This letter is in response to your comments and provides information outlining how this proposal is consistent with all the applicable laws, rules, policies and procedures, including the Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) and Policy for Sustainable Forests (PSF).

This proposal is in the Columbia Planning Unit within the Siouxon Spotted Owl Management Unit (SOMU) in designated habitat. The DNR HCP's northern spotted owl conservation strategy is the foundation for the proposed harvest activities and this proposal is consistent with the HCP for conservation of northern spotted owl (NSO).

The Department of Natural Resources has a multi-species Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service concerning threatened and endangered species and their habitats, which requires the Department to manage landscapes to provide and sustain long-term habitat in exchange for an Incidental Take Permit. This agreement substantially helps the Department to mitigate for cumulative effects related to management activities. The Department follows Forest Practices Rules as applicable to roads and potentially unstable slopes. The Department follows Forest Protections related to fire hazard mitigation.

Northern Spotted Owl Management:

The site contains habitat suitable for the Northern spotted owl. The Northern spotted owl is federally-listed as threatened, and state-listed as endangered. However, the DNR has a multi-species Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the National Marine Fisheries Service concerning threatened and endangered species and their habitats, which was in part specifically designed to address the needs of the Northern spotted owl as a species. The DNR's HCP anticipated that DNR would remove some timber capable of supporting spotted owls in management areas where the habitat for the owl was greater than a minimum threshold. These minimum thresholds have been exceeded in the management unit where the Dabbler timber sale is planned. DNR's HCP was specifically designed to provide this suitable mitigation for spotted owls, while allowing for the removal of some habitat that exceeds the minimum threshold. While the removal of some habitat in the Dabbler proposal may cause moderate, theoretical impacts to spotted owls, these impacts have been mitigated to insignificant levels through HCP-based land management. This is further discussed below.

The Trust Lands Habitat Conservation Plan covers and applies to this proposal, and this proposal follows the DNR HCP Northern Spotted Owl Conservation Strategy for this proposed harvest activity. The HCP's conservation objective for the northern spotted owl is to provide habitat that makes a significant contribution to demographic support, maintenance of species distribution, and facilitation of dispersal. In areas designated to provide Nesting, Roosting, and Foraging (NRF) habitat, DNR shall provide a target condition of at least 50 percent of its managed lands measured within each Spotted Owl Management Unit (SOMU) in a suitable habitat condition. Suitable habitat constitutes sub-mature or higher habitat types. Harvests and proposals that are not located within this target condition (50% habitat) may reduce habitat as long as at least 50% remains within the SOMU.

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In addition, the USFWS very recently reviewed DNR's HCP with regards to northern spotted owls and the impacts of barred owls. USFWS concluded that competition from the barred owl is now the primary driver behind spotted owl population declines and that the continued implementation of the HCP/ITP is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the spotted owl, and is not likely to destroy or adversely modify designated critical habitat for the species (Reinitiated Biological Opinion on the Incidental Take Permit (PRT-812521, USFWS; March 21, 2024).

This proposal is located in the Siouxon SOMU, which DNR manages for NRF habitat. The DNR HCP Northern Spotted Owl Conservation Strategy is being implemented for the proposed harvest activities occurring within identified non-habitat and habitat areas. The Siouxon SOMU is currently above the 50% minimum habitat threshold at 58.3%. This sale is proposing removal of approximately 96.6 acres of High-Quality Habitat and 44.8 acres of Sub-Mature habitat. The sale will remove 0.9% of the habitat in the Siouxon SOMU, which will result in a residual of 57.4% habitat after harvest activities are complete. Thus, the Siouxon SOMU will remain above the HCP-required habitat threshold of 50%.

DNR delineated Northern spotted owl habitat on State Trust Lands in accordance with the State Lands Habitat Conservation Plan. The HCP allows for harvesting of habitat within the spotted owl management units when above minimum 50% threshold. Stand metrics were measured using a field plot based method, and were utilized to determine the habitat classification for each inventory unit. The VRH unit(s) within the Dabbler timber sale unit(s) are within habitat.

Unit 1, 2, and 3 are located entirely within habitat. Unit 5 ROW and a portion of Unit 4 ROW involve only non-habitat. All units are in the DNR's HCP Columbia Planning Unit. Harvest of habitat that is in excess of the target amount for a SOMU is done considering landscape factors such as maintaining larger patches of existing habitat, limiting fragmentation of large, contiguous habitat patches, location of nest core sites or habitat patches that are contiguous with larger habitat considering existing spatial distribution patterns within the SOMU.

As for alternatives to the proposal, the purpose of the proposal is to generate revenue for the institutional beneficiaries of the lands included in this proposal. Making the trusts productive is one of DNR's responsibilities as a trust manager, and DNR's statutes include directives to harvest timber in accordance with its sustainable harvest level. RCW 79.10.340. This timber sale implements in part this statutory directive, and alternatives such as thinning or partial cutting, or not cutting at all what is currently proposed for harvest inherently produces less revenue than DNR's current proposal. The Department has proposed and implemented substantial mitigation measures as part of its development of this site, including providing protections to riparian and wetland areas that exceed Forest Practices minimums, as well as green retention trees within the extent of the harvest boundaries which together with the riparian and wetland protections amount to 16 acres. Mitigating measures are properly considered as alternatives in SEPA, and properly considered as part of the threshold determination process. WAC 197-11-792(2)(b); -786; 330(1)(c); and 197-11-350(1).

Less than 18% of the Dabbler timber sale proposal is designated as common school trust land. The remaining is designated as State Forest Purchase and State Forest Transfer trust lands, producing a

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significant amount of revenue for junior taxing districts including Clark County, Clark County Roads, Fort Vancouver Library, Battleground School District Enrichment, North Country EMS General, State School Property Tax 1 & 2 while concurrently affording the public opportunity to use these lands for recreational opportunities such as hiking, horseback riding, mushroom gathering, fishing, and hunting. Although there have been proposals to redirect revenue generated from common school trust lands to other potential trust beneficiaries, no laws, policies, or procedures have been changed or created to change the current funding process.

In addition to complying with laws of general applicability, as a trust manager DNR follows the common law duties of a trustee. These include but are not limited to: administering the trust in accordance with the provisions that created it; maintaining undivided loyalty to each of the trusts and its beneficiaries; managing trust assets prudently; making the trust property productive, while recognizing the perpetual nature of the trusts; dealing impartially with beneficiaries; and reducing the risk of loss to the trusts.

The Board of Natural Resources is charged with guiding DNR's management of the lands and resources in its care. The Board of Natural Resources establishes policies to ensure that acquisition, management and disposition of these lands and resources are based on sound principles and are consistent with applicable laws. The *Policy for Sustainable Forests* is one way the Board of Natural Resources fulfills that charge for forested state trust lands.

Re-Issuing of the SEPA Environmental Checklist:

As we stated in the withdrawn Notice of Final Determination for Dabbler timber sale, In September 2024, the DNR revised a document titled '*Landscape Assessment to Identify and Manage Structurally Complex Stands to Meet Older-Forest Targets in Western Washington, May 2024/Revised September 3, 2024*' (landscape assessment). This document describes the background, historical analyses regarding attainment of older forest conditions in western Washington, and updated data and modeling analyses showing when the various HCP planning units across western Washington are expected to attain a level of older forest conditions through implementation of the Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP, DNR 1997) and other conservation objectives, and outlined as targets within the Policy for Sustainable Forests (PSF, DNR 2006).

Within this landscape assessment, some of these conservation areas are based on specific HCP strategies that are spatially fixed and conserved on the landscape, such as marbled murrelet occupied sites or spotted owl nest patches. However, other conservation areas are modeled and must be field verified based on HCP strategies, such as riparian areas or unstable slopes. There is naturally some adjustment to the location, absence, or presence of conservation areas upon field verification. When field verification identifies specific areas required for conservation, they will be protected from harvest and included in future conservation area modeling. This timber sale has been field verified for compliance with all conservation objectives and the planned harvest units are determined not to be regeneration harvest deferred and are available for harvest. These harvest areas also do not count towards the attainment of older forests over time and have been excluded from the calculations and tables included in the landscape assessment.

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The revised landscape assessment corrected misidentified Variable Retention Harvest (VRH)-deferred acreage in the COLUMBIA HCP Planning Unit and reduced accumulated rounding errors. During the SEPA public comment for the Dabbler Timber Sale in the Columbia HCP planning unit, it was pointed out that the sale was within an area that our assessment had designated as permanently VRH deferred. DNR analyzes all SEPA comments and we appreciate receiving this input and the opportunity to respond. After reviewing the landscape assessment, it was evident that while the timber sale was not identified as needed to meet older forest targets over time, the conservation area around the timber sale was incorrectly identified as permanently VRH deferred. Digging further into the analysis it was discovered that the query misidentified 3,475 acres in the Columbia HCP planning unit as permanently VRH deferred when in fact these areas would not attain a level of older forest conditions through implementation of the HCP and other conservation objectives, and outlined as targets within the PSF.

The Dabbler Timber Sale was laid out accurately, ensuring compliance with our HCP, PSF and forest practices rules. The error was related to a GIS mapping layer and the landscape assessment was revised to account for this error. As a reminder, the landscape assessment was limited to identifying permanently VRH-deferred conservation areas. The data query to locate permanently VRH deferred conservation areas within each HCP planning unit included several types of areas such as areas permanently conserved for marbled murrelets. Marbled Murrelet conservation areas often overlap with Northern Spotted owl conservation areas. However, while murrelet conservation areas are permanently deferred from variable retention harvest, owl habitat is not permanently deferred unless it overlaps a murrelet conservation area or other permanently deferred areas. Owl habitat that does not overlap these areas may be available for harvest in planning units that have exceeded threshold habitat amounts set by our northern spotted owl conservation strategy in our Habitat Conservation Plan. These areas were excluded from the permanently VRH-deferred conservation areas set aside to meet older forest targets within the landscape assessment.

The query correctly identified murrelet conservation areas in all HCP units except for part of the Columbia HCP Planning Unit. In the Columbia HCP Planning Unit, the query erroneously identified high-quality owl habitat as permanently conserved murrelet habitat even though a large portion of the Columbia HCP Planning Unit is outside of the range of the marbled murrelet. Having been identified in this query, these acres were included in the May 7th calculation of permanently VRH-deferred acreage that will contribute to older forest stand structures over time. As a result of this, approximately 3,475 acres within the Columbia HCP planning unit were mis-categorized as permanently VRH-deferred areas. Therefore, projections of older forest stand structure over time were inaccurate in Columbia HCP planning unit.

Now that this error has been corrected, the Columbia HCP planning unit is projected to meet the 10% older forest target by the year 2100 rather than by the year 2090 as previously published. We also took the opportunity to streamline the spatial processing for this analysis to reduce some accumulated rounding errors and this resulted in some 0.1 to 0.2% corrections in the data across planning units. This did not result in any changes to the decade when those units would meet older forest targets. These numbers are conservative estimates of projected older forest conditions and include a 32% plot

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discount, a disturbance factor, and are limited to permanently VRH deferred acreage. This was a mapping error that misidentified protected acreage. The field foresters are looking at all our conservation areas and designing timber sales that comply with all HCP, PSF, and forest practice requirements.

The first time Dabblers went out for SEPA Environmental Checklist public commenting period on July 30, 2024, a large number of comments were received in opposition to the proposal. Concerns about the proposal include, but are not limited to harvest of mature timber, climate change, neighbor concerns, recreational concerns, wildlife concerns (including Northern Spotted Owl habitat) and carbon emissions. Although the Dabblers Timber Sale proposal was not projected to attain older forest conditions in the May 2024 landscape assessment, the department recognizes the changes to the '*Landscape Assessment to Identify and Manage Structurally Complex Stands to Meet Older-Forest Targets in Western Washington, May 2024/Revised September 3, 2024*'. Additionally, there were specific comments concerning the May 2024 landscape assessment. The department desires to provide a transparent and open process and therefore the department submitted a new updated SEPA checklist and DNS for the Dabblers timber sale based on the September 3, 2024 revisions to the landscape assessment. This provided an opportunity for public commenting with the updated information.

Your letter does not raise new concerns, or substantive concerns specific to the Dabblers Timber Sale that have not been previously raised responded to by DNR. In its responses to similar correspondences, DNR explained its policy to protect old growth, its procedure to identify and manage structurally complex forest, its obligations under the 1997 HCP, and the 2006 Policy for Sustainable Forests.

The Dabblers timber sale was designed to be consistent with DNR's framework (WAC 332-41-665 (1)(f)). The harvest was designed in accordance with DNR's Habitat Conservation Plan and Policy for Sustainable Forests. While your comment letter expresses disagreement with that framework, it does not identify a probable, significant, adverse environmental impact which was not analyzed in the environmental impact statements for the programmatic decisions or an inadequacy in the SEPA checklist prepared for the Dabblers timber sale. The Dabblers timber sale is located in lands available for harvest.

Thank you for your comments.

Tonya Enger - Concerns with DNR fiduciary responsibilities, carbon emissions and carbon sequestration, HB1181, alternatives, forest ecosystems and wildlife habitat, older forest management and stand age.

Response –

Thank you for providing comments in your October 15, 2024 letter, your emails dated October 3, 6, and 10, 2024, and your phone calls to our staff regarding the DABBLER timber sale, SEPA File No. 24-100101. Your pictures were received, and we have worked diligently to provide answers to your inquiry. This letter is in response to your comments and provides information outlining how this proposal is consistent with all the applicable laws, rules, policies and procedures, including the Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) and Policy for Sustainable Forests (PSF).

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This proposal is in the Columbia Planning Unit within the Siouxon Spotted Owl Management Unit (SOMU) in designated habitat. The DNR HCP's northern spotted owl conservation strategy is the foundation for the proposed harvest activities and this proposal is consistent with the HCP for conservation of northern spotted owl (NSO).

In the Dabbler Timber Sale 140 net acres are being harvested, while 16 acres (10.3% of the proposal area) are being conserved from the overall proposal area that was evaluated for harvest. These conservation areas may include potentially unstable slopes, riparian and wetland management zones and other conservation areas. Many of these conservation areas are regeneration harvest deferred and will contribute to older-forests over time. The stage of stand development for the harvest areas within this proposal on the stand level scoring using the Van Pelt guide (Van Pelt 2007) includes Maturation 2.

The Department of Natural Resources has a multi-species Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service concerning threatened and endangered species and their habitats, which requires the Department to manage landscapes to provide and sustain long-term habitat in exchange for an Incidental Take Permit. This agreement substantially helps the Department to mitigate for cumulative effects related to management activities. The Department follows Forest Practices Rules as applicable to roads and potentially unstable slopes. The Department follows Forest Protections related to fire hazard mitigation.

In your email on October 10th, you replied with several questions regarding the Dabbler timber sale and the Dabbler timber sale SEPA Checklist. One question you asked is "When are watershed analysis reports necessary?"

A Watershed Analysis Report would be necessary if the project is within a completed Watershed Analysis Unit and if prescriptions apply. Landowners are required to use Approved Watershed Analysis prescriptions and cannot substitute standard practice rules. WAU prescriptions were generally more restrictive than the standard forest practice rules when they were approved in the late 1990s. Since standard forest practice rules have become more restrictive. Specific to this proposal, this proposal is associated with both the Siouxon and Canyon Creek/Fly Creek Wau(s). Watershed Analyses prescriptions were not warranted in the 1990s for the Siouxon or Canyon Creek/Fly Creek WAUS. Prescriptions do not apply to these Wau(s). A Watershed Analysis for a given WAU, is the assessment completed under WAC 222-22-050 or 222-22-060, together with the prescription selected under WAC 222-22-070, including assessments completed under WAC 222-22-050 where there are no areas of resource sensitivity (WAC222-16-010).

In the same email you ask "Can you remind me of why you said that this harvest site does not contribute to Older Forest targets?"

The General Silviculture Strategy (policy) in the Policy for Sustainable Forests (PSF) emphasized that older-forest targets will be accomplished over time and that DNR intends to actively manage structurally complex forests to achieve older-forest structures (i.e. stands with older-forests identified by structural

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characteristics) across 10 to 15 percent of each western Washington HCP planning unit in 70 to 100 years from the adoption of the PSF.

In September 2024, the DNR revised a document titled '*Landscape Assessment to Identify and Manage Structurally Complex Stands to Meet Older-Forest Targets in Western Washington, May 2024*' (landscape assessment). This document describes the background, historical analyses regarding attainment of older-forest conditions in western Washington, and updated data and modeling analyses showing when the various HCP planning units across western Washington are expected to attain a level of older-forest conditions through implementation of the HCP and other conservation objectives, and outlined as targets within the PSF.

This landscape assessment identifies the existing structurally complex stands, and additional suitable stands, to be managed for older-forest targets over time. The identified stands are located in conservation areas and deferred stands unavailable for regeneration harvest. These stands include areas identified as long-term forest cover under the marbled murrelet long-term conservation strategy, riparian areas, areas conserved under the multispecies conservation strategy, potentially unstable slopes, spotted owl nest patches, old growth, Natural Areas and Natural Resource Conservation Areas, and other conservation areas permanently deferred from regeneration harvest.

Some of these conservation areas are based on specific HCP strategies that are spatially fixed and conserved on the landscape, such as marbled murrelet occupied sites or spotted owl nest patches. However, other conservation areas are modeled and must be field verified based on HCP strategies, such as riparian areas or unstable slopes. There is naturally some adjustment to the location, absence, or presence of conservation areas upon field verification. This timber sale has been field verified for compliance with all conservation objectives and the planned harvest units are determined not to be regeneration harvest deferred and are available for harvest. These harvest areas also do not count towards the attainment of older-forests over time and have been excluded from the calculations and tables included in the landscape assessment. Conversely, when field verification identifies specific areas required for conservation, they will be protected from harvest and included in future conservation area modeling.

The landscape assessment demonstrates that while the COLUMBIA HCP Planning Unit does not currently contain 10 to 15 percent older-forest conditions, the structurally complex and other suitable stands designated to be managed for older-forest targets are projected to develop into older-forest structure that meets or exceeds this threshold by 2100 through implementation of the HCP and other policies and laws. Stands identified to be managed toward older-forest targets, including currently older-forests and stands projected to develop older-forest structure in the future, are depicted in associated maps within the landscape assessment document for each western Washington HCP planning unit.

DNR has designated forest stand acreage within regeneration harvest deferred areas in each HCP planning unit to meet or exceed the policy's 10% older-forest target. This identified acreage is designated in DNR's GIS database as the Westside Forest Cover (Conservation Areas) and Older-Forest in Conservation Areas layers.

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The Dabblers Timber Sale is not identified as one of those stands designated to meet older-forest targets over time. Following the timber sale, the variable retention harvest units will be replanted with native, conifer tree species that will be supplemented by natural regeneration expected to occur as a result of the conservation areas in and around the harvest units.

In the same email, you ask “Can you point me in the direction of either policy or precedent that states 0.30 acres of exclusion zone is adequate for mitigating a moderate level of unstable slope risk?”

I would like to refer you to WAC 222-16-050(1)(d) and Forest Practices Board manual Section 16 – Guidelines for Evaluating Potentially Unstable Slopes for definitions and descriptions of potentially unstable slopes or landforms. The Forest Practices Application/Notification Notice of Decision was approved on July 1, 2024 as a Class III forest practice.

In the same email, you ask “Can you please expand on this answer? What are the associated risks with the expected erosion levels. What is the location in respect to the unstable slopes, etc.?”

In response, there are no forest practices activities in or over potentially unstable slopes or landforms. Proposal measures to reduce or control erosion are discussed and available in the SEPA Checklist.

In the same email you reference the Complete Proposal Description table provided in the SEPA Environmental Checklist and you ask, “You mentioned in our phone conversation that this harvest would leave 8 trees per acre, Is this the section in the checklist that is referring to that detail? If not, can you direct me to where in the report I would find that? Can you give me some more information on how 8 trees per acre was reached as a leave tree amount? What is the range of leave tree possibilities available to planners according to policy, and what are the contributing factors of identifying this variable? For example, are fewer leave trees per acre allowed? or is 8 per acre the minimum? Is there a maximum? Is there any way at this stage to increase the amount of leave trees?”

The table provided that you reference in your comment displays the acreage associated with the Leave Tree Clump Acres, not the amount of leave trees provided for the timber sale. The SEPA Environmental Checklist describes specific mitigation measures proposed, in addition to the mitigation provided by plans and programs listed in A-13-b (i.e. above and beyond expectations) in A-13-c. This proposal included specific mitigation measures beyond the HCP and Forest Practices requirements. While this proposal required 1,120 leave trees to be retained, this proposal includes 1,404 leave trees. The Dabblers timber sale achieved the 8 trees per acre documented as there were 892 Clumped and Scattered Leave Trees associated with Unit 1, 122 Clumped and Scattered Leave Trees associated with Unit 2, and 390 Clumped and Scattered Leave Trees associated with Unit 3. These Leave Tree Areas were added around most Type 5 streams and stream headwalls to provide additional protection, extra leave trees were preserved around potentially unstable areas in Unit 1, and extra leave trees were included around legacy trees in Unit 3. For more information on leave trees, please visit our website and read our HCP and PSF.

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In your letter you make the statement “The way this sale is proposed and justified by this SEPA, is apparent that maximization of timber revenue is the sole concern, and all other responsibilities to the trust beneficiaries suffer including but not limited to environmental health... Prioritizing management in this proposal for timber revenue first is putting Clark County and trust beneficiaries at a loss of all other objectives... There would be accurate GHG emissions data, and a climate impact study for this site as proposed, and not as lumped into the entire Westside forest region. The current SEPA does not have any of that for this site.”

To address your statement, The Department’s analyses of impacts of the timber sales program on global climate change, GHG emissions, and analyses of alternatives have been adequately addressed in the final environmental impact statement (FEIS) for the 2015-2024 Sustainable Harvest Calculation and the FEIS for the 2019 HCP Long-Term Conservation Strategy for the Marbled Murrelet. This is because these analyses considered impacts, including the Dabbler timber sale area as included in being available for the full management suite of harvest activities, including variable retention harvest. Sustainable forestry remains consistent with the legislature’s express policies for limiting greenhouse gas emissions in Washington. RCW 70A.45.005 and .090.

This sale, Dabbler, was also included in the western Washington analyses for the development of the FEIS for the 2015-2024 Sustainable Harvest Calculation and the FEIS for the 2019 HCP Long-Term Conservation Strategy for the Marbled Murrelet, and, therefore, has already been included in the aforementioned analyses.

As for alternatives to the proposal, the purpose of the proposal is to generate revenue for the institutional beneficiaries of the lands included in this proposal. Making the trusts productive is one of DNR’s responsibilities as a trust manager, and DNR’s statutes include directives to harvest timber in accordance with its sustainable harvest level. RCW 79.10.340. This timber sale implements in part this statutory directive, and alternatives such as thinning or partial cutting, or not cutting at all what is currently proposed for harvest inherently produces less revenue than DNR’s current proposal. The Department has proposed and implemented substantial mitigation measures as part of its development of this site, including providing protections to riparian and wetland areas that exceed Forest Practices minimums, as well as green retention trees within the extent of the harvest boundaries which together with the riparian and wetland protections amount to 16 acres. Mitigating measures are properly considered as alternatives in SEPA, and properly considered as part of the threshold determination process. WAC 197-11-792(2)(b); -786; 330(1)(c); and 197-11-350(1).

Less than 18% of the Dabbler timber sale proposal is designated as common school trust land. The remaining is designated as State Forest Purchase and State Forest Transfer trust lands, producing a significant amount of revenue for junior taxing districts including Clark County, Clark County Roads, Fort Vancouver Library, Battleground School District Enrichment, North Country EMS General, State School Property Tax 1 & 2 while concurrently affording the public opportunity to use these lands for recreational opportunities such as hiking, horseback riding, mushroom gathering, fishing, and hunting. Although there have been proposals to redirect revenue generated from common school trust lands to

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other potential trust beneficiaries, no laws, policies, or procedures have been changed or created to change the current funding process.

In your letter you state “The sale as proposed of The Dabblers site would deprive Clark County citizens from providing informed feedback for the county’s upcoming Comprehensive Plan climate change portion – as mandated by state law HB1181...The proposed sale of The Dabblers before this comprehensive plan is finished prevents Clark County leadership from performing good-faith efforts to adhere to HB 1181 and plan for mitigating adverse climate change outcomes for the residents of Clark County.... This comprehensive plan is meant to create actionable targets for reducing COUNTY level emissions – and so accurate GHG emissions levels from forest loss, in this case, from the Dabblers sale, are crucial to performing an accurate and publicly informed planning process. Frankly, going ahead with this sale as is and not providing this information feels like a breach of my personal liberty in being able to participate fully in my local government without obstruction.”

The Department’s forest management activities in no way limit Clark County citizens’ ability to participate in and provide informed feedback for the county’s upcoming Comprehensive Plan climate change portion. All details regarding this project (and every DNR timber sale in Clark County) are available to the public, and the public is provided the opportunity to participate through this public commenting period.

We support Clark County’s efforts to create actionable targets for reducing their county-level emissions. The “Engrossed Second Substitute House Bill 1181” as amended by the senate includes the adoption of several goals. The section of the law that speaks to goals for natural resource industries reads as follows: “Maintain and enhance natural-resource based industries, including productive timber, agricultural, and fisheries industries. Encourage the conservation of productive forestlands and productive agricultural lands, and discourage incompatible uses.”

The Dabblers Timber Sale has been carefully designed to ensure that the project area will continue to remain productive as a working forest. Active management of working forest is not the same as “forest loss.” The project area will continue to be sustainably managed to produce timber, provide wildlife habitat, and deliver a range of ecosystem services. As stated in the SEPA Environmental Checklist for the Dabblers Timber Sale, the Department will replant the project area with native tree species following harvest. Silviculture staff will conduct post-planting survival surveys to ensure a healthy, vigorous cohort. In any areas that exhibit low or no seedling survival, our staff may interplant and monitor to be sure a healthy forest regrows following harvest. For these reasons among many others, the Dabblers Timber Sale project is compliant with 1181 and the important planning work that Clark County and its citizens are embarking upon.

Your letter, emails, and phone conversations do not raise new concerns, or substantive concerns specific to the Dabblers Timber Sale that have not been previously raised and responded to by DNR or documented in the SEPA Environmental Checklist. In its responses to similar correspondences, DNR explained its policy to protect old growth, its procedure to identify and manage structurally complex forest, its obligations under the 1997 HCP, and the 2006 Policy for Sustainable Forests. Some of your

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questions were not directly answered because the information is provided in the SEPA Environmental Checklist for Dabbler timber sale, will be provided through the Notice of Final Determination for Dabbler timber sale, in supporting documentation referenced in the SEPA Environmental Checklist, or provided to you through phone conversations with DNR staff.

The Dabbler timber sale was designed to be consistent with DNR's framework (WAC 332-41-665 (1)(f)). The harvest was designed in accordance with DNR's Habitat Conservation Plan and Policy for Sustainable Forests. While your comment letter expresses disagreement with that framework, it does not identify a probable, significant, adverse environmental impact which was not analyzed in the environmental impact statements for the programmatic decisions or an inadequacy in the SEPA checklist prepared for the Dabbler timber sale. The Dabbler timber sale is located in lands available for harvest.

Thank you for your comments.

Comments Received during SEPA Review Period not specified above - Concerns with stand age, carbon sequestration and carbon emissions, forest revenues, Northern Spotted Owl Management, wildlife habitat, forest management, and older forest thresholds.

Response: See attached Appendix A.



**DEPARTMENT OF
NATURAL RESOURCES**

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**Appendix A: Response to multiple SEPA comments received for
Dabbler timber sale, SEPA File No. 24-100101**

November 13, 2024

Subject: Dabbler Timber Sale
Contract No. 30-106156, FPA #2942570
Response to SEPA Comments (SEPA File No. 24-100101)

To Whom It May Concern,

Thank you for providing comments to our staff regarding the DABBLER timber sale, SEPA File No. 24-100101. This letter is in response to your comments and provides information outlining how this proposal is consistent with all the applicable laws, rules, policies and procedures, including the Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) and Policy for Sustainable Forests (PSF).

This proposal is in the Columbia Planning Unit within the Siouxon Spotted Owl Management Unit (SOMU) in designated habitat. The DNR HCP's northern spotted owl conservation strategy is the foundation for the proposed harvest activities and this proposal is consistent with the HCP for conservation of northern spotted owl (NSO).

In the Dabbler Timber Sale 140 net acres are being harvested, while 16 acres (10.3% of the proposal area) are being conserved from the overall proposal area that was evaluated for harvest. These conservation areas may include potentially unstable slopes, riparian and wetland management zones and other conservation areas. Many of these conservation areas are regeneration harvest deferred and will contribute to older-forests over time. The stage of stand development for the harvest areas within this proposal on the stand level scoring using the Van Pelt guide (Van Pelt 2007) includes Maturation 2.

The Department of Natural Resources has a multi-species Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service concerning threatened and endangered species and their habitats, which requires the Department to manage landscapes to provide and sustain long-term habitat in exchange for an Incidental Take Permit. This agreement substantially helps the Department to mitigate for cumulative effects related to management activities. The Department follows Forest Practices Rules as applicable to roads and potentially unstable slopes. The Department follows Forest Protections related to fire hazard mitigation.

As for alternatives to the proposal, the purpose of the proposal is to generate revenue for the institutional beneficiaries of the lands included in this proposal. Making the trusts productive is one of DNR's responsibilities as a trust manager, and DNR's statutes include directives to harvest timber in accordance with its sustainable harvest level. RCW 79.10.340. This timber sale implements in part this

statutory directive, and alternatives such as thinning or partial cutting, or not cutting at all what is currently proposed for harvest inherently produces less revenue than DNR's current proposal. The Department has proposed and implemented substantial mitigation measures as part of its development of this site, including providing protections to riparian and wetland areas that exceed Forest Practices minimums, as well as green retention trees within the extent of the harvest boundaries which together with the riparian and wetland protections amount to 16 acres. Mitigating measures are properly considered as alternatives in SEPA, and properly considered as part of the threshold determination process. WAC 197-11-792(2)(b); -786; 330(1)(c); and 197-11-350(1).

Less than 18% of the Dabbler timber sale proposal is designated as common school trust land. The remaining is designated as State Forest Purchase and State Forest Transfer trust lands, producing a significant amount of revenue for junior taxing districts including Clark County, Clark County Roads, Fort Vancouver Library, Battleground School District Enrichment, North Country EMS General, State School Property Tax 1 & 2 while concurrently affording the public opportunity to use these lands for recreational opportunities such as hiking, horseback riding, mushroom gathering, fishing, and hunting. Although there have been proposals to redirect revenue generated from common school trust lands to other potential trust beneficiaries, no laws, policies, or procedures have been changed or created to change the current funding process.

Your comments do not raise new concerns, or substantive concerns specific to the Dabbler Timber Sale that have not been previously raised and responded to by DNR or documented in the SEPA Environmental Checklist. In its responses to similar correspondences, DNR explained its policy to protect old growth, its procedure to identify and manage structurally complex forest, its obligations under the 1997 HCP, and the 2006 Policy for Sustainable Forests. Some of your questions were not directly answered because the information is provided in the SEPA Environmental Checklist for Dabbler timber sale, will be provided through the Notice of Final Determination for Dabbler timber sale, in supporting documentation referenced in the SEPA Environmental Checklist, or provided to you through phone conversations with DNR staff.

The Dabbler timber sale was designed to be consistent with DNR's framework (WAC 332-41-665 (1)(f)). The harvest was designed in accordance with DNR's Habitat Conservation Plan and Policy for Sustainable Forests. While your comment letter expresses disagreement with that framework, it does not identify a probable, significant, adverse environmental impact which was not analyzed in the environmental impact statements for the programmatic decisions or an inadequacy in the SEPA checklist prepared for the Dabbler timber sale. The Dabbler timber sale is located in lands available for harvest.

Thank you for your comments.