DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER OF PUBLIC LANDS
1111 WASHINGTON ST SE
MS 47001
OLYMPIA, WA 98504-7001

December 1, 2024

The Honorable Bernard Dean
Chief Clerk of the House
338B Legislative Building
Olympia, WA 98504

The Honorable Sarah Bannister
Secretary of the Senate
312 Legislative Building
Olympia, WA 98504

Dear Chief Clerk Dean and Secretary Bannister:

Please accept the enclosed 2024 legislative report on Long-Term Forest Health & Reduction of Wildland Fire Danger, submitted on behalf of Department of Natural Resources (DNR), as required in RCW 76.04.516. The statute directs DNR to provide biennial progress reports on expenditures made from the wildfire response, forest restoration, and community resilience account and recommendations on funding dispensation. As well as progress on the implementation of the wildland fire protection 10-year strategic plan and the 20-year forest health strategic plan, and progress on developing markets for biomass generated from forest health treatments.

The statute and the ongoing report requirements were established in 2SHB 1168 during the 2021 session. This is our second report under this statute, which is due to the Legislature and Governor by December 1st of each even-numbered year.

Should you have any questions, please contact me at 360-486-3469 or Brian.Considine@dnr.wa.gov.

Sincerely,

Brian Considine
Legislative Director
Office of the Commissioner of Public Lands

Enclosure: 2024 Legislative Report – Long-Term Forest Health & Reduction of Wildland Fire Danger

cc: Members of the Senate Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources, and Parks Committee
Members of the House Agriculture & Natural Resources Committee
Members of the Senate Ways and Means Committee
Members of the House Appropriations Committee
Ruth Musgrave – Senior Policy Advisor, Natural Resources, Office of the Governor
Jim Cahill – Senior Budget Advisor, Natural Resources, Office of Financial Management
Lisa Borkowski – Budget Advisor, Natural Resources, Office of Financial Management

Report on Long-Term Forest Health & Reduction of Wildland Fire Danger (2SHB 1168)

RCW 76.04.516

Prepared by
Washington State Department
of Natural Resources

Office of the Commissioner of Public Lands, Hilary Franz
Prepared by Loren Torgersen, Wildland Fire Policy Advisor
December 1, 2024

WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF
NATURAL RESOURCES

Table of Contents

Contents

Table of Contents 2

Executive Summary 3

Wildland Fire Response 6

Forest Restoration 15

Community Resilience 27

Appendices 34

Deliverables by Program 34

Acknowledgments 37

Executive Summary

This report presents the progress and strategic initiatives of the Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) under the authority of Second Substitute House Bill 1168 (2SHB 1168) concerning long-term forest health and the reduction of wildland fire danger. As mandated, this report covers the biennial period following the initial report delivered in December 2022, documenting advancements and continued efforts in fiscal years (FY) 2023 and 2024.

Since the previous report, DNR has significantly advanced implementation of the Wildland Fire Response, Forest Restoration, and Community Resilience Account (Account). Established by 2SHB 1168 in 2021, the Account has enabled DNR to increase its efforts in managing forest health and mitigating wildland fire risks. Notably, DNR has effectively utilized funding from the Account to enhance various activities within these core areas, supporting our overarching goal of safeguarding communities from wildland fire, as well as protecting water quality and cultural and natural resources throughout Washington State.

The efforts outlined in this report demonstrate DNR's commitment to the principles set forth in 2021 by 2SHB 1168. In the legislation establishing the Account, the legislature expressed its intent to take immediate action to fully fund the directives outlined in 2SHB 1168. As we move forward, DNR remains dedicated to enhancing the effectiveness of wildland fire response, the sustainability of forest restoration efforts, and the resilience of communities throughout Washington State. This holistic approach reduces the impacts and costs of wildland fires while also preserving the quality and vitality of Washington's natural and cultural resources.

Looking ahead, DNR will continue to maintain its focus on these critical areas, continuously seeking innovative solutions to evolve and adapt to the challenges posed by climate change and evolving wildland fire risks. DNR is committed to making lasting improvements that will safeguard our forests and communities for future generations. This ongoing mission reflects our dedication to excellence in stewardship and our responsibility to the citizens of Washington State.

Key Achievements (2023-2024):

DNR, along with other state agencies and community partners, has achieved remarkable successes toward accomplishing the goals of the 10-Year Wildland Fire Protection Strategic Plan, increasing the pace and scale of forest management across different land ownerships, and fully funding implementation of the 20-Year Forest Health Strategic Plan in eastern Washington, as well as activities developed to facilitate the Forest Action Plan. Progress made since the establishment of the Account three years ago has resulted in meaningful strides to improve our state by focusing efforts on wildland fire response, community resilience and forest restoration.

Wildland fire Response: DNR has strategically committed $14.9 million from the Account to bolster wildland fire response capabilities by increasing its wildland fire fighting workforce; expanding wildland fire training, including training tribal members; increasing air operations capacity; and improving operational facilities.

Forest Restoration: In FY 2023 and FY 2024, DNR invested $16.7 million from the Account to increase forest resilience to insects, disease, climate, and wildland fire. Direct investments in state, tribal, federal, and private lands to reduce forest density, reduce fuels and encourage appropriate species have occurred statewide. These investments will pay off in the short term by addressing immediate threats, and in the long term by improving growth and yield of forests as well as landscape health.

Community Resilience: DNR has invested $6.4 million to date from the Account to increase regional and community preparedness and response to wildland fires, as well as increasing the resiliency of our forests and communities statewide to wildland fire and other disturbances. Account funds increased capacity for outreach and to provide grant funding to communities conducting community wildland fire preparedness, participating in Firewise USA, Wildfire Ready Neighbors, or Fire Adapted Communities activities.

Other Key Achievements

Development of Data Dashboards: In response to the need for transparent and accountable tracking of progress, DNR has launched a comprehensive Wildfire Response, Forest Restoration, and Community Resilience Account Dashboard. This tool monitors the effectiveness and outcomes of the initiatives and activities funded under 2SHB 1168, ensuring goals are met efficiently.

Enhanced Organizational Structure: DNR has refined its internal structures to better organize programs and personnel, optimizing resource allocation and response times during critical wildland fire incidents.

Strengthened Partnerships: Through the implementation of the various programs supported by the Account, and building on the foundation of collaboration, DNR has deepened partnerships with local communities, federal agencies, and other stakeholders. These partnerships are vital for integrated and cohesive wildland fire management and forest health strategies.

Community Engagement and Resilience Building: Through continuous engagement and support, DNR has empowered communities to actively participate in resilience building, making substantial strides in changing the trajectory of wildland fire suppression and loss mitigation.

When resources became available to DNR in July of 2021, the agency was prepared to begin immediately implementing key components of the Legislature's goals in establishing and funding the Account. This included reducing human-caused wildland fires; lowering the size,

scale, and geography of catastrophic wildland fires; reducing the numbers of communities, landscapes, and populations at risk from wildland fire; and creating resilient landscapes and communities.

Accountability

Consistent with the direction provided by the legislature, funds were fully obligated and allotted to programs at DNR to meet legislative direction and intent. This report straddles two biennia of work funded by the Account: 2021-2023 and 2023-2025, but only includes detailed information on FY 2023 and FY 2024. FY 2022 is covered in the prior report. This report provides detailed information for FY 2023, as well as the final deliverables for the 2021-2023 Biennium. It also provides an overview of how funds were allocated by the agency for this current biennium, (2023-2025) and a progress report on deliverables through FY 2024. These investments by the legislature are critical to the success of DNR continuing the work to achieve the goals established in the legislation. The full report discusses what DNR is doing currently to ensure that robust and meaningful collaboration occurs with all partners.

The legislature directed that DNR meet certain thresholds for investments in three key areas: wildland fire response, forest restoration and community resilience. Table 1 highlights those expenditures and provides those expenditures through the end of FY 2024.

Fiscal Year	Total Allotments	Total Expenditures
2023	$87,097,500	$80,290,947.16
2024	$56,961,976	$43,054,157.58

Fiscal Year	Wildfire Response Allotment	Wildfire Response Expenditures	Forest Restoration Allotment	Forest Restoration Expenditures	Community Resilience Allotment	Community Resilience Expenditures
2023		$32,897,009.36		$33,735,059.70		$13,658,878.10
2024	$23,293,393.44	$17,732,613.22	$19,554,624.84	$15,469,830.29	$14,113,957.72	$9,851,714.07

Table 1. 2023-2024 Total allotments and expenditures. For the 2021-2023 Biennium, the Wildland Fire Response, Forest Restoration, and Community Resilience investment areas lack allotment information as such allocations were not broken out programmatically at that level of detail.

Wildland Fire Response

Outcome and Impact Analysis

Financial Utilization and Efficiency

In general, utilization of account funds fluctuates with the onset of fire season and attendant operational tempo. A thorough discussion of account financials, including allotments, expenditures, and variances by biennium and fiscal year is available at DNR's Wildfire Response, Forest Restoration, and Community Resilience Account Dashboard.

Fiscal Year	Total Allotments	Total Expenditures	Wildfire Response Allotment	Wildfire Response Expenditures
2023	$87,097,500	$80,290,947.16		$32,897,009.36
2024	$56,961,976	$43,054,157.58	$23,293,393.44	$17,732,613.22

Table 2. FY 2023 and FY 2024 Wildland Fire Response allotments, expenses, and variance[1]

How investments are reducing human caused wildland fires

Increasing community preparedness also increases awareness, leading to fewer wildland fires. DNR staff and local fire protection district staff interact regularly with landowners and the public, and provide advice on managing, clearing, and disposing of flammable vegetation to reduce the risk of wildland fire ignitions.

DNR is coordinating with interagency wildland fire partners to implement the National Fire Danger Rating System (NFDRS) Operating Plan. With partners, DNR staff evaluated criteria that establish fire danger ratings and industrial fire precaution levels and burning restrictions. Changes are documented online, through social media and earned media.

DNR chairs the Utility Wildland Fire Protection Advisory Committee and works directly with utilities, landowners, and the other stakeholders to provide recommendations on reducing the risk of wildland fires from utility infrastructure. The committee is an example of implementing the priority to establish the leadership structures, organizational framework, and working groups as the foundation for plan implementation. In 2023, DNR staff secured a contractor to develop a Utility Wildland Fire Mitigation Template, as required by the legislature. The template is complete and is available to all utilities in the state.

Establishing causality between these activities and reduction in human-caused wildland fire is difficult. Many variables contribute to numbers of human-caused fires. One can assume these

[1] *For the 2021-2023 Biennium, the Wildland Fire Response, Forest Restoration, and Community Resilience investment areas lack allotment information as such allocations were not broken out programmatically at that level of detail.*

activities will have some effect, but DNR continues to refine metrics to demonstrate this more definitively.

Lowering the size/scale and geography of catastrophic wildland fires

It is difficult to measure a direct cause and effect relationship between investments designed to lower the size/scale and location of catastrophic wildland fires, and an actual reduction in those fires. Many variables exist, including the influence of weather, topography, and available resources to definitively make that determination. That is not to say that investment in activities does not have a positive effect. In the last three years, DNR has increased performance in suppression. Prior to new investments, DNR's suppression efforts kept 80 percent of fires below 10 acres. That number has jumped to 95.6 percent since 2021. Scaling up investments that have a positive impact locally will result in fewer large, intense fires.

To achieve reduction of catastrophic fire outcomes at landscape scales, DNR is investing in activities and resources consistent with the 10-Year Wildland Fire Protection Strategy implementation priorities. DNR continues to invest in infrastructure, facilities, and support to improve wildland fire response including:

- Increasing our wildland fire fighting workforce,
- Expanding wildland fire training, including training tribal members,
- Increasing air operations capacity, and
- Improving operational facilities.

One example of this approach includes providing local fire protection districts with surplus DNR engines. Local fire protection districts play a crucial role in lowering the intensity of catastrophic wildland fires. DNR is accelerating the replacement cycle of its wildland fire engine fleet to provide additional engines to fire protection districts. Other investments include increasing grant funding to fire protection districts to enhance their ability to equip and train volunteers for wildland fire suppression statewide.

Heavy equipment newly available for wildland fire response includes 16 dozers and four excavators. Fifteen of the dozers and all four excavators are staffed with permanent operators, utilizing the remaining dozer as a spare. Equipment purchases and transport fabrication were completed, and everything was operational by spring of 2023.

DNR's current aviation fleet includes 10 medium and 1 light helicopter available for response. The medium ships are used for water delivery and crew transport, and the light helicopter is used for observation and command and control. Three of the medium ships have night vision capability. Additionally, to improve efficiency, DNR has four heavy helicopters under contract. These Type 1 ships carry and haul heavier loads.

DNR has significantly increased "peak" wildland fire season available aviation assets utilizing contracted aircraft with "reacting to fire potential" suppression funding. These additional

aviation resources have played a key role in reducing the size and duration of wildland fires, thereby reducing overall suppression costs.

Funds from the Account were utilized to manufacture one mobile retardant base, and another is slated to be built prior to the 2025 wildland fire season to improve tanker reloading times. DNR continues to utilize airtankers reloaded at the federally managed facility at Moses Lake that can also accommodate Very Large Airtankers (VLATs).

DNR continues to explore long-term strategies for a next-generation rotor wing platform replacement. Such a platform will require a significant commitment to funding and will take time to develop well-supported budget requests. In the interim, DNR will continue to utilize the Account to upgrade the existing fleet when possible.

In 2023, under contract with DNR, Pano AI deployed 21 remote artificial intelligence (AI) based wildland fire detection cameras across DNR jurisdictions. These cameras were sited between June and December and resulted in several early detections leading to better suppression outcomes. Among the fires that the cameras caught early were Jackson Road, Beitey, and Big Canyon. In June 2024, Pano AI was the sole alert source of the Warden Fire, triangulating the location to within a few hundred feet. Because the fire was caught quickly, responders were able to keep the fire to 15.6 acres.

Reducing communities, landscapes, and populations at risk

DNR is investing in increased operational capacity and engaging with others to create resilient landscapes and fire-adapted communities.

DNR has hired staff to assist in the administration of the $8 million in wildland fire and community resilience grants that DNR received as part of 2SHB 1168. These positions oversee grant agreements, assist in tracking and reporting on the grants, produce grant guidance, and ensure that grants are equitably distributed.

DNR is utilizing funding through the Account to hire positions to increase regional community wildland fire preparedness capacity for outreach and support to communities conducting community wildland fire preparedness, participating in Firewise USA, or Fire Adapted Communities activities. These staff each focus on a set of counties where their efforts will pay off. These county divisions are as follows:

- Grays Harbor, Kitsap, Mason, Pierce, and Thurston;
- Klickitat, Benton, Franklin, Walla Walla, Columbia, Garfield, Asotin, and Skamania;
- Yakima, Clark, Cowlitz, Wahkiakum, Lewis, and Pacific;
- Kittitas and King;
- Chelan, Douglas, Grant, and Adams;
- Okanogan and Ferry;
- Stevens, Pend Oreille, Lincoln, Spokane, and Whitman.

DNR is the lead for Washington State in working with partners to apply for Community Wildfire Defense Grants (CWDG). CWDG is a new grant program under the federal Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, which presents an exciting opportunity to leverage state funding. The purpose of this program is to increase actions taken by homeowners and landowners on their property to be prepared for the next wildland fire. CWDG applications opened August 2022 and closed on October 2022. In FY 2023 and FY 2024, Washington State received 22 awards for a total of $50,091,624. Awards went to local fire agencies, homeowner associations, conservation districts, public utility districts, tribes, and nonprofit organizations.

Improvements to infrastructure

DNR has made use of a portion of the funds from the Account to support logistical requirements, specifically facilities, resulting from the agency growth associated with an increase in staffing. All spending to date has focused exclusively on the requirements of the wildland fire program, for both regional administration and support of the wildland fire aviation sub-program.

Based on initial planning results, 2SHB 1168 represented an approximate growth of 13 percent against total DNR positions. DNR's capacity to absorb that growth into existing space was, and remains, negligible without expansion given the growth in personnel, equipment and parking requirements associated with the growth. The aviation sub-program in particular required substantial expansion of facilities to accommodate growth in terms of personnel and to support maintenance and security with the addition of more aircraft. The dispersed nature of ground support systems and personnel included in the growth required expansion in many locations across the state.

Leases

DNR has executed 13 new leases through the Department of Enterprise Services (DES) or under delegated authority from DES in support of growth. One of these actions was the expansion of an existing lease in Wenatchee where DNR has no owned infrastructure. Three of the leases supported the aviation sub-program by expanding their presence in both Olympia and Yakima. One new lease site supports the Arcadia 20 Person Crew in Spokane in cooperation with living support provided by the Department of Corrections. Additional locations include Lacey, Chewelah Peak, Omak, North Bend, Issaquah, Twisp, and Toledo. During FY 2023, there was an additional lease in Republic that is no longer necessary or in use.

DNR has two remaining leases still in the project phase that are due to come to fruition in FY 2025. One is in Snohomish County to accommodate a new 10-person fire crew and the second is in Camas to support a similar requirement. Both projects involve leasing space from county fire districts in existing fire stations.

Acquisitions

In support of 2SHB 1168 growth, DNR purchased a fire station outside of Kalama. The $355,000 acquisition will provide important support for operations for wildland fire suppression and prevention for DNR – including office space for administrative purposes, long-term storage for five fire engines in the winter, and increased access to other DNR-managed properties and roads. The acquisition replaces a Larch Mountain facility.

Renovations

DNR made minor renovations at several sites to improve infrastructure to accommodate growth associated with requirements of 2SHB 1168 and two significant renovations.

1) The first major renovation was to DNR's Dallesport facility. The Dallesport facility required renovations in two phases, the first to achieve occupancy by completing work already under permit by the previous occupant and the second phase, occurring this biennium, to install additional shower and latrine facilities to support billeting of a 20-person fire crew.

2) The second major renovation was at DNR's Chehalis location to fully enclose a 5600-square-foot structure that was open on three sides except for 1600 square feet of garage space. The renovation, performed through the DES Energy Support Contracting program, transitioned the building from use of gas heating to electrical systems, fully enclosed the building and created a training room and a temperature-controlled storage loft for firefighting equipment. The agency anticipates an additional project next year in support of the aviation sub-program in Wenatchee.

DNR was unable to secure a lease at the Moses Lake Airport and is conducting a test using some mobile structures at Wenatchee this year to determine if the site meets requirements tied to flight demand. This project will not proceed to a full lease project until the summer of 2025 at the earliest.

Expenses for existing leases will continue as an annual cost and account for $2.9 million in this biennium. Once the current work is complete, DNR projects an annualized cost of roughly $2.5 million to maintain operation and leases of the new infrastructure secured through 2SHB 1168.

Funding through 2SHB 1168 is not the only method of meeting the demands of growth. DNR prioritized meeting immediate spatial needs to support the hiring of personnel. However, the increased numbers of wildland firefighting equipment, particularly items such as dozers and crew vehicles, require expansion of facilities necessary to maintain the equipment. Secondly, billeting facilities for fire personnel have become increasingly important in order to fill positions in rural communities that lack available local housing. DNR is pursuing solutions to these issues through the capital budget, both in the current biennium and in future biennia.

How are these activities and expenditures achieving the goals of the Strategic Plan?

The initiatives and investments detailed above have advanced the goals of DNR's 10-Year Wildfire Strategic Plan by:

- Increasing capacity of the state's wildland fire prevention, preparedness, and recovery workforce,
- Providing effective training for the wildland fire management workforce,
- Increasing capacity of the state's wildland landscape treatment and response workforce,
- Investing in robust infrastructure.

Challenges and Opportunities

With the resources provided by the Account, DNR and its partners have made significant progress toward achieving the outcomes of the 10-Year Wildland Fire Protection Strategy, but certain challenges remain. Recruitment and retention of people continues to present significant challenges. A tight job market continues to limit the pool of candidates necessary to fill firefighting and other program positions to carry out the work.

Inflationary pressures that erode the value of static funding levels also present challenges. Rising wages and benefits and increased costs of goods and services contribute to reduced capacity to achieve outcomes.

Prescribed fire is a key tactic for increasing landscape resilience and decreasing the frequency and intensity of wildland fire over time. There are well-documented barriers associated with implementing prescribed fire including regulatory process, personnel training, landscape-level planning, burn operations, and public support for prescribed fire. In 2023, DNR convened state, federal, tribal, local government, and nonprofit partners to evaluate these barriers and develop goals and strategies to address these challenges. The plan identified more than 60 near-term actions that are in the process of being implemented.

In terms of facilities, the nature of where DNR needs to be geographically to support fire suppression and the nature of the types of infrastructure DNR needs to meet that mission, create distinct challenges regarding rapidly fulfilling logistical needs. Most of the places DNR needs to be to support fire suppression are small markets with low inventories of property available for lease, particularly in eastern Washington. In western Washington, DNR is in competition to find rarely available light industrial commercial properties in a growth economy. In several cases, DNR has had to abandon plans for growth in an area because the combined efforts of both DES and DNR were unable, over a period of several years, to identify a suitable lease site.

To date, some of the best opportunities DNR has been able to take advantage of were acquisitions. In these cases, funding on hand coincided with market availability at the right time and configuration to meet DNR requirements. This is not possible when attempting to budget through the capital appropriations cycle, due to real estate market conditions, combined with the length of time required to appropriate capital funds for a specific purchase. The Kalama and Dallesport facilities are examples of successfully combining market opportunities with availability of 1168 resources. DNR has been judicious with 1168 resources to allow opportunistic purchases that meet department requirements.

Forecast: Where the program is headed

DNR's focus will remain on implementation of the Wildland Fire Protection 10-Year Strategic Plan (Plan) and achieving the vision, outcomes, and goals established in the Plan as the primary mechanism to reduce the losses and costs from wildland fires in Washington.

In Spring 2023, the Washington State Forester requested the "assistance of the Wildland Fire Advisory Committee (WFAC) to employ the expertise, knowledge, and the constituent connections of the WFAC to help determine the extent of progress in achieving the goals and outcomes of the Plan, identify any recommendations for amendments to the Plan, and to provide the basis for development of future DNR program budgets and deliverable priorities." This review was seen as a critical step to ensure the relevance and effective implementation of the Plan. The resulting Addendum[2] to the Plan presents the results of the WFAC's review and recommendations to achieve the Plan's successful implementation over the next five years and beyond.

Summary of WFAC findings and recommendations

The WFAC found that the four goals of the Plan remain valid, and that they chart the right course toward achieving the vision of the Plan: "All Washington – safely managing and living with wildland fire."

The WFAC believes substantial progress has been made in implementation of the strategies associated with the four goals of the Plan but recognize that the Plan cannot be fully implemented in the following five years. As such, the WFAC recommends that consideration should be given to developing a future plan update that continues to chart a course for implementation over the next decade.

[2] The addendum has been approved by the WFAC and is in the process of being published. It will be available to the public in December.

The WFAC believes all goals and strategies continue to be relevant and deserve continued attention and funding resources but identified three key areas that if emphasized over the next five years may produce the greatest gains in achieving the vision of the Plan.
The three key areas are:

1. Preparedness, response, and recovery systems
2. Landscapes resiliency
3. Community protection

In addition to key areas for emphasis, the WFAC also identified several related strategies that support implementation of these areas of emphasis:

1. Provide leadership and coordination
2. Enhance and sustain a highly capable workforce
3. Advance sustainable funding
4. Expand programs and practices to manage fuels and vegetation
5. Establish and sustain fire adapted communities

Applying a more holistic view of the wildland fire crisis was seen as a critical approach for achieving the success of the Plan. This includes closely connecting all elements of the wildland fire cycle, from prevention to recovery, and accounting for all ecosystem risks related to wildland fire — not just the risks to the high-value, built environment. These elements are deeply interrelated and represent the framework for individual and community engagement in achieving the Plan outcomes. Finally, successfully addressing the wildland fire crisis requires a management approach with clear leadership intent, planning, resources, and execution. The Plan provides the framework but requires bold action by all those impacted by wildland fires to achieve the vision of all Washington — working collaboratively across jurisdictional boundaries and with engaged communities, safeguarding values, adapted and prepared for wildland fires, and with healthy and resilient landscapes.

2025-2027 Projected Long-Term Needs and Recommendations

Increased funding through Wildland Fire Response, Forest Restoration, and Community Resilience Account has made wildland fire preparedness response and recovery systems more capable and integrated through ongoing support of people who provide the capacity to implement programs, carry out activities and manage the increased goods, services, equipment, and aircraft necessary to meet these goals. Communities are better prepared for and adapted to impacts from wildland fire because of the increased capacity for people to work directly with communities to increase wildland fire awareness and provide technical support in planning and implementing community protection activities.

Response is considered safer and more effective because of increased funding for wildland fire suppression training, equipment and aircraft for people who respond to and suppress wildland fire. Injuries have decreased by 5 percent in the Southeast Region and by 4 percent in Northeast, despite an increase in person-hours of exposure, a trend which holds statewide.

To fully achieve the outcomes envisioned in the Plan, stakeholders will have to broaden accountability for achieving the outcomes beyond a few agencies. They will be required to gain better alignment of priorities and create strong incentives for all stakeholders to participate in implementation. This includes developing priorities and budgets cohesively to ensure alignment. It also includes taking the time to develop shared metrics to measure progress toward improving the capabilities, integration, and sustainability of preparedness, response, and recovery systems.

A shift in focus is needed to emphasize "ecosystem health" and restoring "fire adapted landscapes" when developing landscape-oriented wildland fire mitigation strategies. Ecosystem health better describes the breadth of abiotic and biotic factors that should be considered when mitigating impacts from wildland fire. Landscapes should provide clean water, habitat, forest products and other functions. Ecosystem health is directly related to resilience and better describes the outcomes envisioned under the Plan.

Wildland fire preparedness of tribal communities must be a priority. A gap in preparedness exists between tribal and non-tribal communities. By providing additional resources, tribal communities can be better supported in adapting to their specific circumstances.

Broader accountability for the Plan's implementation is a critical need. Clearly establishing which entities are responsible for achieving the elements of the Plan, including coordinating with landowners to implement treatments and monitoring those treatments. Increased emphasis must be placed on coordinating post-fire and long-term recovery among various organizations.

Forest Restoration

Outcome and Impact Analysis

Financial Utilization and Efficiency

The Account has been used efficiently to leverage other state, federal, and private resources to magnify on-the-ground impact for the benefit of Washington's forests, all those who call them home, and those who rely on them for recreation, ecosystem services, or livelihood. The agency dedicated $22.2 million to forest restoration activities in FY 2023 and FY 2024. For detailed financial information, including expenditures, allotments and variances, and use of account funds by type and activity, visit DNR's Wildfire Response, Forest Restoration, and Community Resilience Account Dashboard.

Fiscal Year	Total Allotments	Total Expenditures	Forest Restoration Allotment	Forest Restoration Expenditures
2023	$87,097,500	$80,290,947.16		$33,735,059.70
2024	$56,961,976	$43,054,157.58	$19,554,624.84	$15,469,830.29

Figure 1. FY 2023 and 2024 Forest Restoration allotments, expenditures, and variance[3]

Progress on 20-Year Forest Health Strategic Plan: Eastern Washington and Washington's Forest Action Plan

Following our strategic plan for all-lands forest restoration work as directed in RCW 76.06.200, DNR strategically made forest health investments via assessments, treatments, and by monitoring impacts. For this reporting period:

- Forest health assessments to inform forest management were completed and made publicly available for 861,115 acres in eastern Washington. DNR led a collaborative effort to pilot forest health assessments in two priority landscapes in western Washington.
- The resources made available for forest restoration led to historic levels of implementation statewide in FY 2023 and FY 2024. We completed 66,373 acres of forest health treatments in FY 2023 with funding from the Account. These treatments occurred on state, private, tribal, local, and federal lands, with an emphasis on investments in strategic wildland fire risk reduction.
- Monitoring was conducted at multiple scales in order to track progress toward our goals.

[3] *For the 2021-2023 Biennium, the Wildland Fire Response, Forest Restoration, and Community Resilience investment areas lack allotment information as such allocations were not broken out programmatically at that level of detail.*

Forest Health Assessments: How are forest conditions and associated forest health indicators changing over time?

Eastern Washington

Since 2017, DNR scientists have completed landscape evaluations for 46 priority landscapes encompassing 5,274,663 acres in eastern Washington. Landscape assessments for the first 46 priority planning areas have identified a restoration need between 1,120,270 and 1,616,770 acres. The assessments vastly exceed the requirement established by RCW 76.06.200 to assess 200,000 acres each biennium. These assessments also prioritize treatments for the dual benefits of forest health and wildland fire operations. By working in partnership with fire districts and wildland fire fighters, DNR has identified potential control lines and potential operational delineations to aid in fire suppression and response across all 46 priority planning areas. The landscape evaluation summaries for each priority planning area can be found at DNR's Forest Resilience Data and Mapping System.

Scientists at DNR are using new methods to evaluate the condition of forests in eastern Washington. They utilized satellite and aerial imagery datasets to develop methods to map disturbances such as treatments, insects, and wildland fire, and to assess forest structural changes. These datasets are used in combination with treatment tracking data to quantify changes in priority landscapes.

The remote change detection is based on satellite information and captures forest change that resulted in substantial canopy loss. The forest health treatment tracking data consists of forest health treatments reported to DNR by partners and captures lower-intensity treatments missed by remote change detection (i.e. ground fuels removal). The combined result provides a powerful understanding of the changes happening to eastern Washington forests on an annual basis. For more information about change detection monitoring read the 20-Year Forest Health Strategic Plan: Eastern Washington Monitoring Report published in 2024 that summarizes the impact of change between 2017-2022.

Western Washington: Landscape Assessment Pilot Projects

In western Washington, DNR scientists are piloting a landscape evaluation methodology in the Middle Snohomish Priority Landscape and Packwood, Washington. This approach provides a common base of information for landowners to increase forest health and resilience. The landscape assessment evaluates resilience to disturbances and climate change, the ability of forests to provide an array of ecosystem services, and risks posed by wildland fire to human communities. The Washington Conservation Science Institute was contracted in 2023 to help develop the pilot methodology and assessments in coordination with DNR based on feedback from a technical advisory group made up of scientists across multiple disciplines at federal, state, and nonprofit agencies.

Washington's Forest Action Plan identified landscape objectives to guide assessments in western Washington. Those objectives drove key components and indicators for the pilot landscape evaluations.

Testing the assessments in-place provided insights to inform future forest health and resilience investments. For example, the greater Packwood area encompasses an approximately 150,000-acre analysis area, the majority of which is within the Gifford Pinchot National Forest. Potential recommendations in this area suggest that treating mid-seral, dense forests to accelerate late-seral conditions and create high-quality, early seral habitats will contribute to forest resilience goals. Defensible space treatments adjacent to homes, structures, and along key potential control lines near communities will also be important to prepare for future wildland fires.

For more information, read the full report on the pilot landscape assessments.

Statewide Forest Health Highlights Annual Report

Since 1947, DNR and USDA Forest Service (USFS) have worked together to conduct statewide aerial detection surveys to observe recently killed and currently damaged forests. The 2023 aerial survey assessed the condition of approximately 22 million acres of forestland in the state. Tree mortality, defoliation, or foliar diseases were recorded on 517,000 acres. Bark beetles accounted for the majority of observed tree damage at 348,000 acres. Drought conditions and warm, dry spring weather tend to increase tree stress and insect success, increasing the number of acres with damage in both the current and subsequent year. According to the U.S. Drought Monitor, all of Washington experienced some level of drought condition by fall of 2023. All western Washington forests ranged from moderate to extreme drought conditions by late September, while all forested areas of eastern Washington were in abnormally dry to severe drought conditions. For more information, read the full 2023 Forest Health Highlights Report.

Assessments on DNR State Uplands

State Uplands and University of Washington scientists completed an analysis of drivers of post-wildland fire natural regeneration using field data collected during the previous biennium on wildland fires that burned between 2012-2017. This work filled a knowledge gap, as studies of post-fire natural regeneration in eastern Washington have been few and localized. The deliverable, chosen for its importance to reforestation practices, underscores the value of science-based approaches in ecological restoration. One of the major findings of this analysis was that contrary to much of the western United States, natural regeneration following recent wildland fires has generally been robust in eastern Washington. However, the three-year, post-fire growing conditions tended to foster greater drought stress on plants than the preceding 30-year averages. Areas with lower regeneration tended to be located in drier forests with higher burn severities. A scientific report was delivered to the DNR in 2023, and publication of results in scientific journals is expected in 2024 or 2025. This important research has added crucial information to the body of knowledge on this topic. Forest land managers will be able to more

rapidly identify areas that may need reforestation post wildland fire, allowing for efficient prioritization of funding and resources.

State Uplands is continuing work highlighted in the legislation related to forest inventory and sustainable harvest modeling on trust lands. Within this current biennium, our informatics team will utilize 2SHB 1168 funding to contract for third-party validation of the growth and yield model, as well as the forest estate model for the eastern Washington sustainable harvest calculation (SHC). This work is critical for DNR to ensure models developed are defensible and accurate for use in landscape planning, financial planning, and ensuring stable timber markets into the future. Some of the funding is used to further knowledge of forest conditions across space and time assisting in treatment prioritization processes. Resilience improvement activities are aligned with DNR's 2020 Forest Action Plan, 20-Year Forest Health Strategic Plan, Wildland Fire Protection 10-Year Strategic Plan as well as State Uplands management policy and direction.

Forest Health Treatments: Increasing forest health and resilience statewide

Vegetation treatments completed during this reporting period included commercial harvest, non-commercial thinning, invasive species removal, post-fire tree planting, prescribed burning, and in some locations, managed wildland fire. These treatments create diverse landscape patterns and forest structures that better resemble historic conditions and create resilience to disturbances associated with a changing climate. Vegetation treatments are complemented by treatments to improve watershed function such as road restoration, installation of aquatic organism passages, and beaver dam analog installation. Additional forest health treatments to mitigate drought and improve watershed resilience also included aquatic organism passage, road restoration, and beaver dam analog installation complemented in some cases by beaver re-location.

With resources provided from the Account, DNR and our partners planned, implemented, and monitored forest health treatments on tens of thousands of acres statewide, including providing assistance to thousands of individual landowners. A comprehensive accounting of completed deliverables for the 2021-2023 biennium and 2024 state fiscal year are available at DNR's Wildfire Response, Forest Restoration, and Community Resilience Account Dashboard.

Specifically, on state uplands, DNR has implemented 6,017 acres of non-commercial treatments through the first half of this biennium (FY 2024) and has budgeted through FY 2025 for an additional 7,293 acres using 2SHB 1168 funding. The treatments include prescribed fire, young stand density reduction, and control of invasive species and vegetation inhibiting forest seedling growth (budgeted $3,633,600 for implementation of treatments). State Uplands also successfully completed over 550 acres of broadcast prescribed fire and over 500 acres of pile burn prescribed fire in FY 2024. State Uplands has budgeted for an additional 450 acres of broadcast and 700 acres of pile burning for the FY 2025 period. One prescribed fire operation was

conducted as a cooperative cross boundary burn with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) and the U.S. Bureau of Land Management; another was a cooperative cross boundary burn with the USDA Forest Service (USFS).

Detailed results of forest health treatments across all land ownerships and those specially completed on DNR State Uplands in fiscal year 2023 and 2024 are summarized in DNR's RCW 76.06.200 and 79.10.530 legislative reports. These reports include progress updates on DNR's forest health strategic plans, State Uplands forest health treatment prioritization, and results made possible through funding from the Account as well as all leveraged resources.

Information on forest health treatments is also available on DNR's Forest Health Tracker, an online tool to collect and display statewide forest health project information.

Assessing the Work of Wildland Fire

Wildland fire plays a major role in influencing forest conditions. In 2021, DNR scientists developed an approach to monitor and assess the influence of wildland fire on forest structure, including how wildland fire interacts with completed forest health treatment and how changed conditions following a wildland fire may inform the need for future treatments. Low- and mixed-severity fire generally plays a positive role in reducing hazardous fuels and restoring forest health and resilience in eastern Washington. Large patches of high-severity wildland fire have become more common in eastern Washington. These large, high-severity patches in dry forest make it difficult for trees to regenerate, can have detrimental effects on soils, hydrologic conditions, and wildlife habitat, and can lead to increased risk of landslides and debris flows. Following each fire season, DNR scientists publish a report describing the outcomes of wildland fire as it relates to forest health and resilience. Learn more at the Work of Wildfire publication series.

Forest Resilience and Wildland Fire Suppression

DNR is working with wildland fire fighters to prioritize forest treatments that benefit future wildland fire operations. This helps land managers and fire personnel focus treatments in areas that have the highest probability of reducing exposure to values at risk, such as homes and private property, drinking water source areas, timber, and critical habitat, among other values. These treatments provide fire managers with additional operational flexibility during future wildland fires and support fire suppression effectiveness and firefighter safety. Fuel breaks alone are not sufficient to address the forest health and wildland fire crisis facing eastern Washington. They are one tool land managers should consider within landscapes while developing management plans that implement treatment tools which will increase the resilience of the landscape as a whole. For example, fuel breaks should be strategically placed to tie commercial and non-commercial treatments across the landscape where they most effectively can be used by firefighters. For more information, read DNR's assessment of the role of shaded fuels breaks.

Economic and Workforce Development Integrated into Approach to Meet Forest Restoration Goals

Developing markets for forest residuals and biomass

Creating markets for small-diameter logs and restoration byproducts has the potential to improve the economic viability of forest health treatments and create jobs in timber-dependent rural communities.

Through investments from the Account, DNR is increasing the use of Good Neighbor Authority agreements with USFS. To date, Good Neighbor Authority projects in Washington State have sold 109 MMBF of commercial timber, conducted 23,500 acres of pre-commercial thinning and hazardous fuels reduction, completed 345 miles of road repair and maintenance, and accomplished 68 aquatic organism passage projects.

Biomass, or the non-merchantable part of the tree, is of low economic value and often costs more to transport than the value of the material. Numerous studies and pilot efforts have attempted to utilize slash to create sustainable aviation fuel, biochar, and pellets to replace coal; however, the use of these technologies remains relatively uncommon.

Washington is fortunate to have robust forest products infrastructure in much of the state, including numerous global and regional leaders in forest management and restoration. Significant public and private investments will be required to maintain and upgrade Washington's wood products infrastructure over time, and to establish wood products infrastructure in North Central Washington, where the lack of utilization capacity is making it difficult to restore landscape health and reduce wildland fire risk to communities.

In North Central Washington, there is a high concentration of forested watersheds and communities at risk of catastrophic wildland fire. The area has no mills and very little wood products infrastructure, meaning that small logs and biomass from thinning projects are piled and burned in the forest. DNR staff, in partnership with Chelan County, Washington State Department of Commerce (COM), and USFS are working together to establish forest products campus near Wenatchee.

Grant funding provided by USFS's Wood Innovations Program and matched with Chelan County resources resulted in a wood supply assessment produced by consultancy Mason, Bruce, & Girard and a site feasibility study led by infrastructure consulting firm Perteet, Inc. to evaluate potential locations. The assessment results show there is a long-term, sustainable supply of forest products associated with restoration needs. The studies also found that local zoning rules would allow for the siting of a wood products facility. Numerous potential industrial sites are available to accommodate the forest products campus. Project partners have attracted an entrepreneur that specializes in low-value wood utilization with operations in Oregon and California to evaluate the potential of establishing a new facility in Chelan County. The facility

would serve as the anchor tenant of the campus and produce a suite of potential products such as posts and poles, bundled firewood, wood straw, and biochar.

DNR is investing funds, matched with federal, county, and private investments, to conduct a market assessment that will inform the potential product lines associated with the campus and to develop a business plan that will inform capital requirements, as well as funding and financing needs. COM has submitted a request to the legislature to change the intent of funding previously dedicated to C6 Forest to Farm, a failed biochar operation that would have been built in Chelan County. The redirected funding will support the acquisition and development of an industrial site for the Forest Products Campus.

Workforce Development

Direct and leveraged funding through the Account have allowed DNR to create new positions while investing in efforts to train, sustain, and retain a viable workforce to implement our work at an increased pace and scale today and into the future. State Uplands has funded 5.2 FTE with 2SHB 1168 funds and anticipates that over 20 contracts will be awarded to predominantly small or minority owned companies consistent with objectives outlined by the fund.

In particular, DNR has invested resources in increasing our skilled and trained prescribed fire workforce both within and outside of DNR. Funding has supported Washington hosting four Prescribed Fire Training Exchanges (TREX) and Certified Prescribed Burn Manager workshops. Funding from the Account has leveraged federal funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law focused on providing resources for increased NWCG prescribed fire training of state employees.

Equitable Access to Jobs

As RCW 76.04.521 states, (enshrining 2SHB 1168 into law), in partnership with COM, DNR shall develop and implement – including through grant awards – initiatives to grow a "forest health workforce." This legislation reflects an acute need to address the shortage of skilled labor capable of effectively managing Washington's vast forestlands which encompass half of the state's land area.

The forest sector and broader natural resources management face a critical workforce shortage exacerbated by an aging workforce nearing retirement and a need for diversifying to include people of color, Indigenous Peoples, and other underrepresented communities. As outlined by the Washington State Workforce Training and Education Coordinator Board and a 2018 study by Washington State University, this "silver tsunami" of retiring workers is set to dramatically impact the sector's capacity to address environmental challenges intensified by climate change, such as wildland fires, droughts, and flooding.

To address this gap, there is an urgent need to not only replenish, but also expand and enhance the skills of the workforce dedicated to forest health and natural resources management. The Career Pathway Program and the Adult Education and Outreach Program are designed to tackle these issues head-on. The former will create structured career advancement and upskilling

opportunities for current DNR employees, while the latter will focus on expanding and diversifying the workforce through community outreach and partnerships with the communities that DNR serves – with an emphasis on our underserved communities, veterans, and rehabilitated individual – to provide career pathways into the natural resources sector. These programs are vital for preparing a new generation of workers who are equipped with the necessary skills to manage and mitigate the impacts of climate change on our natural environment.

The Career Pathway Program aims to:

- Create comprehensive career pathway mapping to better inform DNR employees of steps they may take to advance from current roles toward future career goals.
- Provide targeted training and mentorship to employees to develop a workforce capable of managing Washington's diverse natural landscapes effectively.
- Combat the aging workforce issues and increase the ability to retain highly skilled talent.
- Enhance the resilience of Washington's natural landscapes by ensuring a continuous influx of well-trained individuals equipped with innovative and effective natural resources management strategies.
- Work closely with the Agency Workforce Development Core Group designed to create cohesive internal work in partnership with DNR's Office of Equity and Environmental Justice, Human Resources Office, Youth Education and Outreach Program, Policy Office, and Office of Workplace Culture and Development.

The Adult Education and Outreach Program will complement these efforts by:

- Actively recruiting and retaining individuals from diverse and underserved backgrounds into the natural resources sector, focusing on creating inclusive opportunities that reflect the demographics of the state of Washington.
- Developing and implementing outreach initiatives that engage communities in environmental stewardship, raising awareness and fostering a deeper connection to local natural resources.
- Investing in partnerships with corps programs and other entities to implement introductory on-the-job training experiences in wildland firefighting, natural resources and forestry for communities of color, Indigenous Peoples, LGBTQ+ communities, women, and other communities historically underserved in the outdoor space.
- Developing a workforce development workgroup to foster collaboration with educational institutions, state agencies, community organizations, and industry groups to broaden the reach and impact of DNR's workforce development initiatives, ensuring programs are accessible and aligned with forest health workforce and community needs.

- Support a Civic Spark Fellow pilot program in DNR to offer opportunities to emerging leaders who are interested in gaining professional experience in the community resilience field and developing technical skills, all while creating a meaningful and lasting impact.

Together, these programs will not only directly address the critical workforce shortage by equipping new and existing workers with necessary skills but will also create a model that can be adapted to future needs as environmental conditions evolve.

How are these activities and expenditures achieving the goals of the Strategic Plan?

The Washington State Forest Action Plan includes more than 100 priority actions to restore forest health and resilience across the state. The 20-Year Forest Health Strategic Plan: Eastern Washington has five overarching goals:

1. Conduct 1.25 million acres of scientifically sound, landscape-scale, cross-boundary management and restoration treatments in priority watersheds to increase forest and watershed resilience by 2037.

2. Reduce risk of uncharacteristic wildland fire and other disturbances to help protect lives, communities, property, ecosystems, assets, and working forests.

3. Enhance economic development through implementation of forest restoration and management strategies that maintain and attract private sector investments and employment in rural communities.

4. Plan and implement coordinated, landscape-scale forest restoration and management treatments in a manner that integrates landowner objectives and responsibilities.

5. Develop and implement a forest health and resilience monitoring sub-program that establishes the criteria, tools, and processes to monitor forest and watershed conditions, assess progress, and reassess strategies over time.

Highlights of statewide implementation towards our state's Forest Action Plan from this reporting period are included in our 2022 and 2023 Forest Action Plan Annual Reports, and the RCW 76.06.200 legislative report.

Investments made through the Account are essential to fully implementing the Forest Action Plan and 20-Year Forest Health Strategic Plan. Sustaining the positive impacts of implementation will require ongoing financial support and coordinated strategic delivery of work ongoing.

Challenges and Opportunities

Restoring forest health and resilience following more than a century of fire exclusion, and in the face of a changing climate, is a herculean task. Significant progress is being made, but continued investment will be required to maintain momentum.

Workforce Housing

Housing shortages are impacting nearly all industries in the state, including natural resources, which are especially impacted by the lack of quality and affordable housing in rural communities. Creative approaches to support affordable housing, including leases and partnership on DNR-managed lands, represent an important, but small fraction of the overall housing need. In 2024, DNR was successful in creating the first ever tax incentive to build affordable housing on public lands, thanks to broad bipartisan support. HB 2003 amended the Leasehold Excise Tax code (Chapter 82.29A) to create an exemption for leases on public land when used for the placement of affordable housing.

As the state contemplates opportunities to address the housing affordability crisis and the forest health crisis, it would be wise to consider opportunities to build with wood, especially multi-family units where mass timber may be competitive with traditional building techniques and materials. Incentives and direction from the legislature to support use of mass timber in public buildings may also further support the maturation of the industry and establish Washington State's place as a leader in the mass timber movement.

Investments in Forest Products Infrastructure

Maintaining and expanding the existing forest products infrastructure in the state is essential for addressing forest health and wildland fire risks in Washington. In locations of the state with forest products infrastructure, DNR and partner agencies and landowners should seek to advance forest restoration and management goals that provide a reliable supply of raw logs.

In North Central Washington, where the state lacks infrastructure to process restoration by-products, efforts to establish a Forest Products Campus will be important to ensure forest health treatments are economically viable, reduce human health impacts such as smoke, and support local economic activity. Legislative support for the Washington Department of Commerce budget request for wood innovations and workforce development will aid DNR's efforts in line with RCW76.06.200 and 2SHB 1168.

Scaling up the use of prescribed fire

Prescribed fire managed by trained practitioners is a necessary tool to improve the health of Washington's forest lands and natural habitats for plants and animals, and to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildland fires and improve community resilience. There are well-documented barriers associated with implementing prescribed fire, including regulatory process, personnel

training, landscape planning, burn operations, and public support for prescribed fire. In 2023, DNR convened state, federal, tribal, local government, and nonprofit partners to evaluate these barriers and develop goals and strategies to address these challenges. The plan identified more than 60 near-term actions that are in the process of being implemented. For more information, read the 2023 Washington Prescribed Fire Barriers Assessment Report and Strategic Action Plan.

State Uplands

State Uplands has been able to capitalize on 2SHB 1168 funding to accomplish needed non-commercial projects. Much of the work has been additive or has enhanced regular program treatments. Without this fund source, many forest stands would be underperforming, at risk of insects and pathogens, and less resistant to wildland fire.

Prescribed fire training, certification, and implementation have accelerated since the last report. While it will take years to overcome limitations in workforce skill and training, the staff in DNR are moving at an appropriate pace considering the high bar set for qualified practitioners to utilize this tool in a safe, effective manner.

Challenges include achieving a workforce to workload ratio at an appropriate equilibrium; retention and recruitment continues to present challenges for full planning and capitalization of opportunities in the complex realm of forest management.

Continued funding allows sustained management that benefits the citizens of the state and trust beneficiaries. State Uplands relies on 2SHB 1168 funding to ensure lands managed by DNR are realizing their full potential – without this fund source, many forests will underperform and be more susceptible to insects, disease and wildland fire.

Forecast: where the program is headed

In 2025, DNR will update the Forest Action Plan, which is federally required to be updated every five years. DNR will work across the agency, with our Forest Health Advisory Committee and with partners, to evaluate progress against the more than 100 priority actions identified in the 2020 Forest Action Plan and to reassess our strategic priorities related to forest health and resilience. The strategic planning process will also include updated mapping and prioritization of western Washington priority planning areas. The 2025 State Forest Action Plan will serve as an overarching strategy and roadmap to ensure DNR continues to advance the legislative direction provided through 2SHB 1168 and RCW 76.06.200.

In the next biennium (2025-2027) and with the legislature's continued funding of the Account, DNR will continue to lay the scientific foundation of assessments and work with partners to implement actions that increase our forests and communities' health and resilience.

2025-2027 Projected Long-Term Needs and Recommendations

While DNR has made important strides in detection, monitoring, and management of Washington's forestlands, we must continually assess and address on-the-ground conditions. DNR will choose and implement the correct management strategy at the right time. Maintaining that treatment over time is nearly impossible without sustained funding, as fuels grow back and must be managed.

To reach the stage at which a combination of forest treatments, prescribed burning and carefully managed natural fire is sufficient to disrupt the frequency and intensity of catastrophic wildland fire, DNR and partners must continue managing fuels such that wildland fire season does not entail the loss of human life, critical ecosystem services, or property. These efforts require consistency, and a sustained, year-over-year effort.

Community Resilience

Outcome and Impact Analysis

Financial utilization and efficiency

The Community Resilience sub-program engages at the community level, including with city and county governments, to ensure that communities are prepared for wildland fire, and are resistant to the impacts from wildland fire. This is accomplished through distribution of grants or fielding DNR staff to help organize community activities that attempt to reduce impacts from wildland fires. This approach has led to a high degree of efficiency in use of funds from the Account. For a detailed depiction of financials associated with DNR's deployment of account funds, visit DNR's Wildfire Response, Forest Restoration, and Community Resilience Account Dashboard.

Fiscal Year	Total Allotments	Total Expenditures	Community Resilience Allotment	Community Resilience Expenditures
2023	$87,097,500	$80,290,947.16		$13,658,878.10
2024	$56,961,976	$43,054,157.58	$14,113,957.72	$9,851,714.07

Figure 2. FY 2023 and 2024 Community Resilience allotments, expenditures, and variance[4]

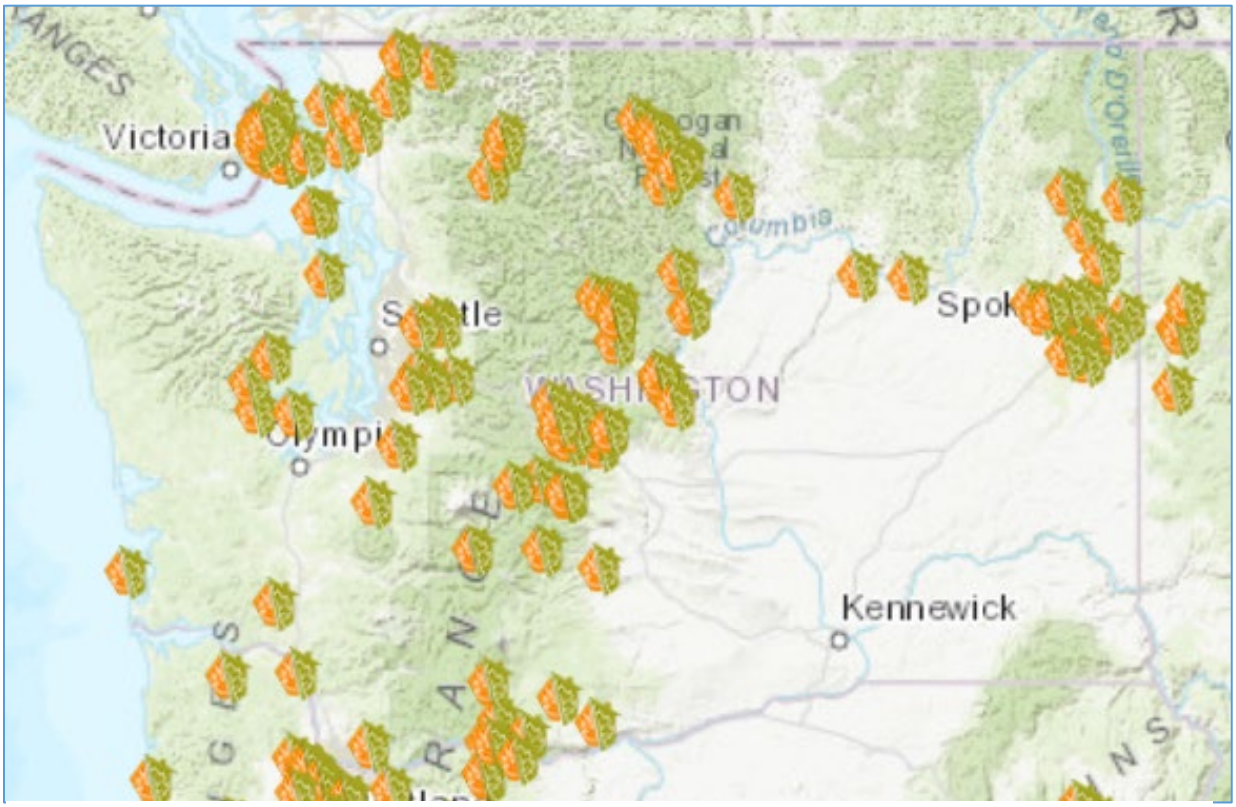
Progress on grants

Firewise USA sites and Community Micro grants

Funds from the Account were used to award 155 micro grants for a total of $629,382.60 to support Firewise USA™ site action plans and community events. Broadly, the micro grant program helps communities to engage or reengage in wildland fire preparedness.

The specific purpose of the micro grant program is to encourage Firewise USA™ sites and communities to celebrate Wildfire Awareness Month in May of each year. Funds provided under 2SHB 1168 are used to implement Firewise USA™ site action plans and to encourage communities to host events with the goal of becoming a Firewise USA™ site.

[4] *For the 2021-2023 Biennium, the Wildfire Response, Forest Restoration, and Community Resilience investment areas lack allotment information as such allocations were not broken out programmatically at that level of detail.*



Map 1. Statewide Firewise USA Sites

Firewise USA™ sites is a program designed to help communities work, learn, and grow together while completing wildland fire preparedness activities. There are currently 132 Firewise USA™ sites across the state. Firewise USA™ sites have been up and running in Washington for more than 20 years, yet communities can struggle to keep this program afloat without the right community "spark plugs" and momentum. Additional support staff from the program helped sites to retain their status with the Firewise USA™ sites program and helped new areas across the state access the program.

	Fiscal Year 2023	Fiscal Year 2024	Total
Microgrants awarded	83	72	155
Microgrant funds allocated	$305,417.00	$323,965.60	$629,382.60

Chart 1. Microgrants awarded and funds allocated

This program also fosters community engagement. Making micro grants available to a community provides a pathway to engage that community in discussions about the most effective ways to use those funds. Community leaders get together with community volunteers to discuss their priorities and the best way to use their to prepare the community for the next wildland fire. These discussions have lasting benefits to the community as they update the Firewise USA™ site action plan for the current and future years.

Micro grants can be used for various activities depending on community need. The money is most typically used for a community clean up event. Other activities using those funds included creating a second emergency egress, installation of a dry fire hydrant, and educational events.

Figure 3. Timblerline Firewise USA site in Okanogan County. Community Clean up event.

Equity and Inclusion Grants for Wildland Fire Preparedness.

This program focuses on communities and individuals that have little to no experience with wildland fire preparedness, with a recent emphasis on Latino communities. Partnerships have been established with two organizations: Latino Community Fund (LCF) and Community for the Advancement of Family Education (CAFÉ). LCF and CAFÉ have been focusing efforts on a "Train the Trainer" program, in which they engage with Latino community leaders and train them as a "cohort" on community wildland fire preparedness. These leaders then work with local people to engage them in wildland fire preparedness. Fourteen cohorts have been completed with 280 graduates. These cohorts have completed 10 community clean up events, eight wildland fire preparedness presentations, and 34 outreach events.

Equity and Inclusion Grants	Fiscal year 2023	Fiscal year 2024	Total
E & I - Awards	2	2	**4**
E & I - Funds Allocated	$553,519.33	$535,200.00	**$1,088,719**

Chart 2. Equity and inclusion grants awarded, and funds allocated

Figure 4: Latino Cohort in training

Community Wildfire Protection Plans

A Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) focuses on mitigating the impact of wildland fire on a community. CWPPs are making a resurgence at a national and state level because having one is often a requirement for new funding opportunities, such as the national Community Wildfire Defense Grant (CWDG) program. Most CWPPs in Washington are developed at the county level. Three CWPPs were completed this year in Lewis, Jefferson, and Richland counties. There is potential for as many 20 additional CWPPs to be updated or completed in the next two years.

Conservation District Community Response

In FY 2022, $250,000 in funding from the Account was provided to the Washington State Conservation Commission (SCC) to coordinate homeowner wildland fire preparedness activities through local conservation districts. The purpose is to increase actions taken by homeowners and landowners on their property so they are prepared for the next wildland fire event. Specific activities included developing and working with Firewise USA™ sites and partnering with the Wildfire Ready Neighbors program to conduct wildland fire home risk assessments.

In FY 2023, funding for this program was appropriated directly to SCC by the legislature and not as a passthrough from DNR.

Wildfire Ready Neighbors

Wildfire Ready Neighbors (WRN) was established in 2021 with a focus on increasing community resilience in the face of ever-increasing wildland fire danger. WRN uses an innovative outreach approach that employs the power of social marketing to drive community awareness and interest in making their homes better prepared for wildland fire. This initiative builds on partnerships with existing community organizations such as local fire districts, conservation districts, and non-profit organizations to increase capacity to conduct a home visit where a wildland fire expert provides a homeowner with simple preparedness actions to increase the chance of their home surviving the next wildland fire. This partnership selects targeted communities in a county for a marketing surge to increase participation.

Since 2021, WRN has generated more than 81,800,000 campaign impressions across social and digital ads, direct mail, cable TV, radio, and earned media.

How are these activities and expenditures achieving the goals of the Strategic Plan?

Firewise USA Sites and Community Micro Grants.

By working at the community scale to target specific needs such as fire suppression water supply, community vegetation cleanups, and wildland fire emergency egress, Firewise USA™ and community micro grants are instrumental in supporting both landscape resiliency and community preparedness, as well as adaptation in the face of increased intensity and frequency of wildland fire. These efforts are a key element of investing in fuels and vegetation management. Firewise USA™ resources are especially effective at supporting the development and implementation of wildland fire mitigation and fuels treatment plans for non-forested landscapes and building broader awareness through social marketing and community engagement.

Equity and Inclusion Grants for Wildfire Preparedness.

Our partners are directly engaging with limited English proficiency communities and providing programming in Spanish. They are also engaging with fire districts and other local agencies that work in wildland fire. Taken together, outreach and funding to underserved communities facilitated by the Equity and Inclusion Grant Program increases the prevalence of social marketing to foster behavioral change and enhances DNR's engagement with communities that have limited English proficiency.

Community Wildfire Protection Plans

By increasing the capacity of community assistance programs to coordinate and network, CWPP supports the development of land use plans, regulations, and codes to reduce wildland fire risk in the wildland urban interface (WUI). By investing in planning, communities are better able to stage and fund fuels and vegetation management activities that increase resilience in the face of increasingly severe and frequent wildland fire. This process also helps communities better align education programs, messaging, and regulation efforts.

Conservation District Community Response

Funding from this program was instrumental in providing training on assessing structure ignition potential. DNR was able to increase community effectiveness and resilience against wildland fire by supporting local efforts to complete WRN home visits, increasing local coordination of wildland fire preparedness and sharing other programs that help landowners. These strategies help reduce the toll that fires take on human life and property.

Wildfire Ready Neighbors

WRN provides "Assessing Structure Ignition Potential" training to organizations. Training materials have been developed in Spanish to target limited English proficiency communities.

Challenges and Opportunities

Forecast: Where the Program is Headed

Firewise USA

The DNR Firewise USA™ site program continues to focus on engaging with communities. A training program is being developed to train Firewise USA™ site leadership and other community leaders on how to improve their efficiency when building community resiliency. This program is modeled on a Colorado program; we have named ours the Wildfire Ambassador Program. Funds will continue to be used to engage existing sites and to incentivize new sites and community events.

Equity and Inclusion Grants for Wildfire Preparedness

We will continue to engage the partners and expand geographic areas that these programs are working in. An additional focus will be to have trainers engage with residents on the topic of community resilience, leveraging these community leaders to bring back information to their communities.

Community Wildfire Protection Plans

We will update and complete new plans in more than 20 counties across the state. The challenge will be to keep these CWPP planning groups engaged and to help them evolve into CWPP implementation groups.

Conservation District Community Response

Most funding for this will go directly to SCC, which will distribute funds to the local conservation districts. DNR may still fund individual conservation district on a limited basis. We will continue to work with both SCC and local conservation districts to keep program alignment and to engage landowners in wildland fire preparedness.

Wildfire Ready Neighbors

WRN will continue to focus on at-risk communities to reduce property loss due to wildland fire. The program will continue to focus on increasing the number of people who are engaged in the program and will expand into new areas as partnerships are developed.

2025-2027 Projected Long-Term Needs and Recommendations

As people continue to move further out into the wildland-urban interface and as the population of Washington's fire-prone landscapes change both in numbers and demographics, DNR will need to:

- Reaffirm, expand, and diversify its approach to community education, landowner support, and direct citizen engagement
- Build upon outreach to minority English-speaking communities
- Increase efforts to educate landowners in both the WUI and within urban growth area boundaries.

Building upon these programs will require increases in hiring, training, capacity, and retention. DNR will need to keep abreast of new and emerging social media and outreach strategies and step up face-to-face engagement while refining our focus to make the most strategic use of existing resources.

Appendices

Deliverables by Program

DNR program staff engaged in a deliberative process to choose deliverables that are targeted, strategic, and measurable. Those, as well as a full accounting of progress are available on DNR's Wildfire Response, Forest Restoration, and Community Resilience Account Dashboard.

FY 2024 Expenditures by Activity:

1. Wildfire Response % and $

Activity	Expenditure	Allotment	Percent
Not Specified	$2,384,597.14	$3,709,935.44	64.28%
150-Admin Program Adjustments	*$1,227,930.48*	*$1,534,820.00*	80.00%
127-Atg Legal Services	*$337,547.16*	*$259,790.80*	129.93%
125-Interagency Payments	*$644,993.83*	*$594,237.16*	108.54%
555-NRB Rent	*$174,125.67*	*$168,129.48*	103.57%
202-Resource Protection Unallotted	*$0.00*	*$1,152,958.00*	0.00%
1168 Infrastructure	$2,381,283.72	$3,402,000.00	70.00%
Firefighter Property and Assistance	$1,279,789.26	$3,066,700.00	41.73%
Forest Resiliency Contracting	$73,624.28	$76,532.00	96.20%
Infrastructure Maintenance	$38,390.55	$47,196.00	81.34%
Post Release Crew Program	$953,875.37	$1,168,275.00	81.65%
Predictive Services, GIS and Data Manage	$40,200.11	$0.00	
Preparedness	$9,229,241.38	$11,168,045.00	82.64%
Region Administrtion Adjustments	$501,528.56	$528,922.00	94.82%
WF Policy and Coordination	$121,810.15	$125,788.00	96.84%
Wfm Fire Business Fiscal Staff	$728,272.71	$0.00	
Totals	**$17,732,613.22**	**$23,293,393.44**	**76.13%**

2. Forest Restoration % and $

Activity	Expenditure	Allotment	Percent
Not Specified	$2,698,359.93	$4,198,084.84	64.28%
150-Admin Program Adjustments	*$1,389,500.28*	*$1,736,770.00*	80.00%
127-Atg Legal Services	*$381,961.26*	*$293,973.80*	129.93%
125-Interagency Payments	*$729,861.44*	*$672,426.26*	108.54%
555-NRB Rent	*$197,036.95*	*$190,251.78*	103.57%
202-Resource Protection Unallotted	*$0.00*	*$1,304,663.00*	0.00%
1168 Infrastructure	$132,293.54	$189,000.00	70.00%
Forest Health Strategic Science and Plan	$1,925,543.91	$2,204,000.00	87.37%
Forest Resiliency Administration	$54,996.58	$0.00	
Forest Resiliency Contracting	$83,311.68	$86,602.00	96.20%
Forest Resiliency IT and Data Management	$138,589.59	$217,600.00	63.69%
Gna Ops and Admin	$1,537,700.72	$2,160,400.00	71.18%
Informatics	$314,395.80	$288,900.00	108.83%
Infrastructure Maintenance	$43,441.94	$53,406.00	81.34%
Post Fire Recovery	$117,092.09	$117,100.00	99.99%
Post Release Crew Program	$190,775.07	$233,655.00	81.65%
Preparedness	$1,049,096.39	$1,153,380.00	90.96%
Prescribed Fire	$843,026.56	$1,330,180.00	63.38%
Region Administrtion Adjustments	$567,519.16	$598,517.00	94.82%
Region and Division Rule Implementation	$306,181.78	$357,600.00	85.62%
Service Forestry State	$3,508,407.11	$3,795,000.00	92.45%
Silviculture	$1,509,984.27	$2,049,100.00	73.69%
Small Forest Landowner Office	$433,561.42	$470,300.00	92.19%
Timber Sales	$15,552.75	$51,800.00	30.02%
Totals	**$15,469,830.29**	**$19,554,624.84**	**79.11%**

3. Community Resilience % and $

Activity	Expenditure	Allotment	Percent
Not Specified	$1,192,298.57	$1,854,967.72	64.28%
150-Admin Program Adjustments	*$613,965.24*	*$767,410.00*	80.00%
127-Atg Legal Services	*$168,773.58*	*$129,895.40*	129.93%
125-Interagency Payments	*$322,496.91*	*$297,118.58*	108.54%
555-NRB Rent	*$87,062.84*	*$84,064.74*	103.57%
202-Resource Protection Unallotted	*$0.00*	*$576,479.00*	0.00%
1168 Infrastructure	$132,293.54	$189,000.00	70.00%
Community Resilience	$2,523,547.73	$4,178,300.00	60.40%
Community Resiliency Policy Office	$234,486.71	$263,500.00	88.99%
Firefighter Property and Assistance	$1,275,462.74	$2,657,200.00	48.00%
Forest Resiliency Administration	$36,664.39	$0.00	
Forest Resiliency Contracting	$36,812.14	$38,266.00	96.20%
Infrastructure Maintenance	$19,195.28	$23,598.00	81.34%
Post Fire Recovery	$351,276.26	$351,300.00	99.99%
Post Release Crew Program	$127,183.38	$155,770.00	81.65%
Preparedness	$1,235,918.08	$1,501,475.00	82.31%
Prescribed Fire	$96,872.89	$106,120.00	91.29%
Region Administrtion Adjustments	$250,764.28	$264,461.00	94.82%
Service Forestry State	$2,338,938.07	$2,530,000.00	92.45%
Totals	**$9,851,714.07**	**$14,113,957.72**	**69.80%**

Acknowledgments

DNR wishes to acknowledge the significant contributions of the following people to completion of this report:

- Kylie Browning
- Brule Burkhart
- Guy Gifford
- Jamie Golding
- Marissa Grimsley
- Jonathan Guzzo
- Russ Lane
- Candace Montoya
- Calvin Ohlson-Kiehn
- Yvonne Pitrof
- Dave Ritchie
- Wayne Skill
- Andrew Spaeth
- Sam Steinshouer
- Jennifer Watkins
- David Way