Draft Western Washington Forest Health Strategic Plan
Core Content for Work Group Review
Version 3
October 15, 2025

DNR staff have drafted the revised content below based on outreach associated with this strategic planning process including Forest Health Advisory Committee recommendations, Washington Forest Health Strategic Plan Work Group feedback and survey results, one-on-one and small group conversations, three hosted field trips, and input from DNR scientists and other science advisors. This second version of the draft core content below was developed following extensive written and verbal comments from Western Washington Forest Health Strategic Plan Work Group members via email and at the October 8th Work Group meeting in Olympia.

This content is available for review and discussion through October 22, 2025. Your feedback will inform the final content of the Western Washington Forest Health Strategic Plan. We ask that you are succinct in your comments and highlight the most relevant items you want to provide feedback on. Please share your feedback on this document by by completing this Western WA Forest Health Strategic Plan Feedback Survey no later than October 22,2025.

Definitions

Forest Health: Forest health is the condition of a forest ecosystem reflecting its ability to sustain characteristic structure, function, and processes; resilience to fire, insects and other disturbance mechanisms; adaptability to changing climate and increased drought stress; and capacity to provide ecosystem services to meet landowner objectives and human needs.

Forest Resilience: Resilience is the capacity of forests to persist through and recover from disturbance while maintaining its structure and function and the ecosystem services they provide. This includes the ability to change and adapt to changing climate and disturbance regimes without shifting to a qualitative different state (e.g. Shift from forest to grassland).

Forest Stewardship: Forest stewardship is the active, long-term management of a forest's resources to ensure its health and productivity for the present and future, balancing economic, ecological, cultural, and social benefits.

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Vision

Western Washington's forested landscapes are ecologically healthy and meet the socioeconomic and cultural needs of current and future generations.

Mission

Foster coordinated, voluntary actions and investments across western Washington that promote forest and watershed health and climate resilience; respect landowner objectives; enhance the cultural, social, and economic vitality of historically forest-dependent rural communities; and strengthen collaborative stewardship across Tribes, agencies, landowners, and communities.

Goal 1: Enhance forest and watershed health and resilience in western Washington.

The following priority strategies and actions support Goal 1 and promote forest and watershed health and resilience:

1.1 Forest Stewardship and Active Management

Increase the pace and scale of proactive stewardship on forests across land ownerships, with a focus on practices that enhance forest and watershed resilience to drought, flooding, wildfire, insects, and disease while meeting landowner objectives.

1.2 National Forest Road Strategy

Create and implement a western Washington National Forest Road Strategy where the US Forest Service, State Agencies, Tribes and partners make meaningful, ongoing investments towards a sustainable National Forest road program that provides an operationally resilient road network while minimizing impacts to natural and cultural resources.

1.3 Integration of Indigenous Knowledge (IK)

Engage with Tribes to incorporate indigenous knowledge into forest planning and management so cultural values and Indigenous stewardship practices inform strategies for resilience where consistent with landowner objectives. Identify and pilot pathways to prioritize historic sites, traditional places, and traditional materials in restoration projects, timber harvests, and other forest health work.

1.4 Climate Vulnerability and Landscape Evaluations

Conduct climate vulnerability assessments and landscape evaluations. Utilize best available science and analytical tools to produce landscape-level forest and watershed health data and prescriptions for forest landowners, managers, and partners to inform the prioritization and design of treatments.

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1.5 Increase Diversity of Forest Structures and Species Composition
Through active management, enhance climate and drought resilience and structural complexity of forests and promote a diversity of forest structures and species composition.

1.6 Invasive Species and Emerging Pathogens and Insects
Increase partnerships and investments to address invasive species including plants, pathogens, and insects emphasizing early detection, rapid response, monitoring, and adaptive management.

1.7 Support Small Forest Landowners
Expand education, incentives, financial cost-share programs, and technical assistance for small forest landowners to encourage the adoption of voluntary forest health treatments.

1.8 Reforestation
Invest in climate-smart reforestation including: research, infrastructure and re-planting capacity with a focus on ecologically appropriate post-fire recovery, post-harvest planting needs, and drought-tolerant seedlings. Support forest landowners' conducting regeneration harvests on the landscape by providing increased opportunities to reforest with native seed that is adapted to future climatic conditions, through assisted population migration, assisted range expansion, and potentially assisted species migration.

1.9 Public Engagement and Communication
Increase public understanding of climate impacts to forests and watersheds and engage communities in supporting proactive stewardship actions that promote drought resilience and forest and watershed health in western Washington. Increase our shared literacy of forest and watershed health issues in western Washington and connect communities to the work happening in forests.

1.10 Riparian Forest Health
Reduce barriers to plan, implement, and monitor riparian forest health thinning and restoration work. Expand incentive programs and identify funding and capacity needs to assist public and private landowners interested in conducting projects that restore riparian forest health, restore floodplain and forest wetland connectivity, and increase water storage and snowpack retention.

1.11 Recreation
Secure funding sources to support maintenance and enforcement on recreational lands to mitigate detrimental impacts from unsanctioned activities including dumping, shooting, burning, trail development and other resource-damaging activities.

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Goal 2: Maintain working forests in western Washington by reducing the risk of forest conversion to non-forest uses.

The following priority strategies and actions address the threat of forest conversion in western Washington:

2.1 Prioritize High-Risk Areas

In partnership with conservation groups, land trusts, Tribes, state agencies, counties, and communities, utilize the statewide assessment of forestland conversion risk to prioritize areas of high ecological, cultural, economic, and community value.

2.2 Strengthen Incentives and Funding

Increase funding for conservation easements, acquisitions, and financial incentives that help landowners in western Washington keep forests as forests. Better coordinate and align existing federal, state, local, and nonprofit programs to maximize the impact of investments.

2.3 Prioritize Tribal Values

Prioritize the values and needs of Tribes for lands with high potential for land conversion.

2.4 Support Small Forest Landowners

Expand technical assistance, financial cost-share programs, and other tools to support small forest landowners in managing and maintaining their forests in a healthy and resilient state. Provide resources and planning support to keep forestlands intact through generational transitions.

2.5 Expand Community Forests

Support the establishment and growth of community forests that provide local stewardship, economic opportunities, and tribal and public access for communities in Western Washington.

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Goal 3: Support and expand natural resource economies in western Washington by increasing sustainable timber supply and investing in workforce, housing, infrastructure and innovation that advances forest health and resilience.

The following priority strategies and actions advance rural economic development in western Washington:

3.1 Sustainable Forest Products Supply

Encourage a diverse, stable, sustainable, and robust supply of locally sourced and processed forest products from public, private, and Tribal forestlands to support existing and new infrastructure and associated socio-economic benefits. On public, lands, work collaboratively to increase the consistency, availability, and predictability of forest resources including timber.

3.2 Workforce Training and Development

Maintain and expand education, training programs and apprenticeship programs for forestry, watershed restoration, and wood innovation. Partner with local organizations, Tribes, community colleges, universities, and local schools to build rural skills training programs with a focus on rural and underserved forest-dependent communities.

3.3 Invest in Forest Workers

Support the expansion and continuation of natural resource education programs aimed at youth, young adults, and historically underrepresented communities and Tribes to develop the next generation of forest workers. Create a pilot grant program to fund forest worker training and education programs.

3.4 Workforce Housing

Increase natural resource workforce housing availability and affordability in rural and Tribal communities to attract and retain forestry, wildfire, and restoration workers. Develop two natural resource workforce housing projects in western Washington.

3.5 Wood Innovations and Mass Timber

Support entrepreneurship and wood innovation campuses and cooperatives that link restoration projects to rural economic development. Grow markets for low-value materials (e.g., small-diameter logs, biomass, historically uneconomical tree species, restoration

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byproducts) to increase the economic viability of forest health treatments. Encourage investment in new and emerging technologies including mass timber. Facilitate forward looking market and supply planning for larger diameter logs to ensure capacity to utilize the potential increase of larger diameter logs over time with extended rotations and as our forests mature.

3.6 Agency Hiring Policies and Practices

Emphasize agency community connections including promoting hiring and placement in rural, forest-dependent communities to the extent practicable to strengthen local economies and foster stronger connections between agency staff and the communities they serve.

3.7 Promote the Benefits of Local Forest Products

Through communication channels and utilizing examples grounded in western Washington forests, promote the benefits of local forest products that advance our state's ecological, economic, social, and cultural goals.

3.8 Interagency Collaboration and Partnerships

Foster collaborative efforts among agencies, Tribes, local governments, nonprofits, and industry to increase understanding and knowledge exchange of rural economic challenges and opportunities and align investments in forestry-related rural economic development.

Goal 4: Increase understanding of wildfire and appropriate actions to mitigate wildfire risk in western Washington forests, communicate the risks and actions effectively and acknowledge that wildfire risk and mitigation actions are inherently different than eastern Washington.

The following priority strategies and actions support wildfire resilience in western Washington:

4.1 Wildfire Science Investments

Invest in scientific research to increase understanding of current landscape-scale wildfire risks, projected changes, and potential mitigation measures. Implement and monitor new approaches to vegetation and fuels management focused on wildfire risk reduction in Western Washington where appropriate.

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4.2 Wildfire Science Communication

Communicate best wildfire science and recommendations for addressing landscape-scale wildfire risk in Western WA forests.

4.3 Wildfire Hazard and Risk Maps

Create wildfire hazard and risk maps that effectively communicate the level of wildfire hazard and risk in western Washington relative to the whole state. Map local variability in wildfire hazard and risk as appropriate based on data limitations and ensure alignment between state and local wildfire risk science, communication strategies, priorities and actions. Utilize best available science and methods to appropriately identify western Washington communities at significant risk of wildfire.

4.4 Post-Fire Restoration

Invest in post-fire outreach and education and restoration actions. Utilize post-fire vegetation management where necessary to achieve more resilient post-fire vegetation and landscape conditions, as well as supporting forest management, public safety and wildfire risk reduction objectives.

4.5 Pilot Incorporating Wildfire Risk Reduction Objectives into Forest Management

Pilot incorporating wildfire risk reduction objectives into western Washington forest management actions with an emphasis on Puget Sound lowlands and forests within the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) of communities at risk of wildfire in Western Washington. Implement and monitor new approaches to vegetation and fuels management focused on wildfire risk reduction in appropriate locations in Western Washington.

4.6 Fire Suppression and Management

Ensure adequate fire management capacity in western Washington and minimize risks to values including communities, natural resources and cultural resources even during periods of high demand statewide, regionally, and nationally. Develop coordinated strategies for known high-risk east wind events to reduce risk.

4.7 Fire Prevention

Reduce human-caused fires in western Washington through prevention education, outreach, and enforcement. Invest in educational signage and restrictions of ignition-starting activities (such as fireworks or campfires) in and around forested areas with high human use. Develop plans to temporarily close public access to high-fire danger areas during high-risk weather events, such as east wind events.

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4.8 Washington State Wildland Fire Protection 10-Year Strategic Plan

Implement the Washington State Wildland Fire Protection 10-Year Strategic Plan in western Washington, including relevant community wildfire preparedness and resilience goals, strategies and actions that are a necessary complement to work in the forest for wildfire resilience.

4.9 Western WA Wildfire Guidance Document

Develop a document that provides guidance on science and recommendations for wildfire mitigation strategies, prevention, preparedness and pre-planning for post-fire recovery specifically for western Washington.

Goal 5: Support Western Washington forest health assessments, monitoring, research, and adaptive management

The following priority strategies and actions support on-going monitoring and facilitate opportunities for adaptive management in western Washington:

5.1 Emerging Forest Health Threats

Increase state and federal investments in forest health monitoring including aerial surveys, monitoring, technical assistance, and landowner outreach and education. Invest in aerial imagery that provides wall-to-wall mapping of critical forest health threats.

5.2 Indigenous Knowledge

Integrate indigenous knowledge alongside western science in adaptive decision-making. Explore and pilot pathways for more system-wide incorporations of IK into forest health management and trainings. Identify potential pathways for cultural burning and Indigenous-led burning in western Washington.

5.3 Retain and Adapt Genetic and Species Pathways for Native Trees and Plants

Retain unique native genotypes that are vulnerable to climate-related ecosystem changes through collaborative identification, planning and retention efforts (such as coordinated seed archiving or adaptations at seed orchards). Prioritize projects that help restore or

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create climate-resilient habitat for potential assisted migration pathways and opportunities.

5.4 Western Washington Wildfire Science

Invest in scientific research to increase understanding of current landscape-scale wildfire risks, projected changes, and potential mitigation measures. Implement and monitor new approaches to vegetation and fuels management focused on wildfire risk reduction in Western Washington where appropriate. Communicate best science and recommendations for addressing landscape-scale wildfire risk in Western WA forests.

5.5 Invest in Applied Science to Inform Management

Prioritize investments in research at the state and federal level to continue to expand our understanding of forest ecosystems and socio-economic well-being in forest dependent communities. In partnership with land managers, support evidence-based decision-making.

5.6 Forest Health Research and Assessments Summary

Create a summary of major forest health research and assessment projects in western Washington being led by state agencies, universities, federal agencies, tribes and others.

5.7 Adapt Restoration Work to meet Desired Conditions

Identify thresholds or trends (e.g. mortality rates, etc.) that trigger evaluation of strategies. Support pilot projects and experimental treatments to test new approaches to forest health and climate adaptation in Western Washington.

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