

# **Small Forest Landowner Assistance after the December 2007 Storm**



**Small Forest Landowner Office**

**September 2008**



WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF  
**Natural Resources**

### **Severe December Storm**

From Sunday, December 2 through Tuesday, December 4, 2007 an extraordinary amount of rain fell (as much as 20 inches reported in some rain gauges) on top of snow received just the week prior in highly localized areas of Lewis, Grays Harbor, and Pacific Counties and other surrounding areas. This resulted in catastrophic flooding throughout the region. In addition, unusually high winds in excess of 80 miles per hour, gusting up to an excess of 145 miles per hour, were sustained over this period of time.

### **Damage Estimates**

The early December rain and wind storms resulted in widespread destruction of farms, residences, livestock, timber, and infrastructure such as roads and bridges.

When the floodwaters receded, deposits of woody debris were revealed within streams and on area farmlands. The windstorm significantly damaged forest lands along the Washington coast from Naselle to north of Hoquiam in a band reaching approximately 20 miles inland from the coast. Small forest landowners were hit especially hard. For some, a lifetime's work was flattened by these winds. Industrial forestlands, state trust lands, and county forestlands were also damaged by those severe, sustained winds.

Immediately after the storm, DNR began assessing damage from the flooding and wind storm on state trust lands, farms, and private forestlands. On March 6-7, 2008 the Forest Health Program staff conducted aerial surveys along the coast to better estimate the wind damage. Of the 1.5 million acres surveyed, 29,000 acres were mapped as having wind damaged timber of varying severity. The damage consisted of about 27,000 acres of conifers, with Douglas-fir being the dominant species, and 2,000 acres of hardwoods, with red alder being the dominant species. Roughly 20,000 acres of the damage occurred on private forest land. Further information can be found in the "Tree Blowdown Aerial Survey" report on the DNR website at:

[http://www.dnr.wa.gov/Publications/rp\\_fh\\_2008\\_blowdownreport.pdf](http://www.dnr.wa.gov/Publications/rp_fh_2008_blowdownreport.pdf)

### **Initial DNR Reaction**

Immediately after the storm, DNR began to determine how to best serve the public in anticipation of a high service need in the southwest portion of the state. Informational Timber, Fish, and Wildlife (TFW) meetings were held in three locations in the region. At these meetings, hundreds of landowners attended and were able to ask questions and learn about how DNR planned to handle the response to the storm. DNR also listened to ideas and feedback from the public at these meetings to better formulate their response. A meeting was also held at the U.S. Forest Service office in Olympia to get ideas from the affected landowners. It was decided that all Forest Practices Rules would still be enforced and the procedures would stay the same, except that Forest Practices Applications (FPAs) submitted for properties with storm damage would move to the top of the priority list for review, and Forest Practices Foresters would try to review applications quickly.

Staff from the Small Forest Landowner Office and the Stewardship programs realized that many small forest landowners needed some background information about how to manage timber land under these circumstances. On February 23 and March 1, 2008 in

Raymond and Aberdeen, workshops were held for landowners with damaged timber. About 70 landowners attended these workshops and learned from DNR staff and other experts about harvesting damaged wood, safety issues, the economic outlook of a salvage harvest, replanting these sites, Forest Practices Rules, and other topics. Landowners left these workshops with the tools to get started and the information on who to contact for help. Outreach for this event involved press releases in local papers and mailings to over 500 landowners. WSU Extension, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Department of Revenue, and local conservation districts played key roles in delivering these workshops.

DNR led several efforts after the storm including helping farmers remove wood debris from their land, assessing damage on state lands, and assisting forest owners. The bulk of the assistance requested of the DNR Small Forest Landowner Office revolved around the wind damage in Pacific, Grays Harbor, and western Wahkiakum Counties.

### **Landowner Assistance**

Pacific, Grays Harbor, and Wahkiakum Counties are located in the Olympic and Pacific Cascades regions of DNR. In those regions, Forest Practices office and field staff have processed over 170 forest practices applications (FPAs) related to storm damage. In those regions, Small Forest Landowner Office Foresters and Stewardship Foresters (collectively referred to as Landowner Assistance Foresters in this report) include Rick Kuykendall, Mike Nystrom, Tony Sachet, and Ritch Wood. Landowner Assistance Foresters went to work immediately after the storm by answering phone calls from concerned landowners. Foresters have helped roughly 150 people by phone consultation, and have made over 90 site visits to properties. Assistance delivered through the Small Forest Landowner Office and Stewardship programs, along with other partners, is detailed below and organized by specific program.

### **Environmental Quality Incentive Program**

In April 2007 the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) awarded a specific allocation of funds to help small forest landowners with storm damage through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), a program offering incentive payments to landowners to implement conservation practices on their property. With this special storm allocation, landowners were able to receive payments to improve forest health after the storm. NRCS and DNR partnered to administer this program which included:

- Deciding and prioritizing which activities to fund, including:
  - Removal of blowdown
  - Slash treatment
  - Site preparation
  - Tree planting
  - Vegetation/competition control
  - Wildlife habitat
  - Critical area seeding and mulching
- Advertising the program
- Conducting site visits for technical advice and planning

- Developing plans and contracts to receive the funding

Press releases were sent to local media to advertise the Storm Damage EQIP opportunity. Additionally, the Small Forest Landowner Office advertised the opportunity to about 500 people through an E-mail newsletter, and another 500 people through a direct mailing. Landowners and other agency staff were notified at TFW Meetings. By the July 15<sup>th</sup> deadline, 47 people applied for assistance through EQIP. A few landowners were found to be ineligible and some decided not to pursue the opportunity to the contract stage. Thirty-seven contracts were completed with 19 in Pacific County and 18 in Grays Harbor County. Stewardship Foresters from DNR completed 13 plans that resulted in contracts. Tony Sachet planned 8 EQIP projects and 7 became contracts. Mike Nystrom planned 6 projects that became EQIP contracts and consulted with landowners who planned and finalized contracts with NRCS staff. Data for all contracts completed through the partnership is detailed in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) assistance delivered to small forest landowners in Pacific and Grays Harbor Counties, WA.

	<b>Pacific County</b>	<b>Grays Harbor County</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Contracts completed by DNR	7	6	13
Contracts completed by NRCS	12	12	24
Total contracts completed	19	18	37
Acres treated	316.1	328.4	644.5
Acres of parcels treated	1225	1041	2266
Range of acres treated per parcel	1.5 to 67.0	1.6 to 73.1	1.5 to 73.1
\$ Contracted through EQIP	\$238,128	\$305,352	\$543,480
\$/contract (average)	\$12,533	\$16,964	\$14,689

Since the December storm, many have pondered how severely small forest landowners were affected. Some estimates were made about what percentage of landowners' properties suffered blowdown in the "Tree Blowdown Aerial Survey" report from the Forest Health Program. While the figures from the storm damage EQIP program do not represent a scientific sample of all small forest landowners affected by the storm, they do provide some insight. The figures from EQIP participants show that, on average, about 28.4% of each parcel will be treated with contracted practices. However, a subsample taken from Grays Harbor County reveals a great range from parcels only slightly affected by the storm to parcels almost entirely blown down from the storm (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Percentage of parcel damaged by December 2007 storm for a sample of 6 landowners in Grays Harbor County, WA

	Acres Treated	Acres in parcel	Percentage of acres treated
Example 1	4	113	3.5%
Example 2	3.5	18.5	18.9%
Example 3	70.5	160	44.1%
Example 4	52	103	50.5%
Example 5	16	19	84.2%
Example 6	37	40	92.5%
TOTAL	183	453.5	40.4%

**Alternate Plans**

A great deal of the blowdown from the storm occurred in riparian areas. Many landowners throughout southwest Washington realized that standard Forest Practices rules only allow very limited management in riparian areas of fish bearing streams. Landowners contacted Landowner Assistance Foresters to determine if there was an acceptable method to remove the downed trees. Small forest landowners are able to work with Landowner Assistance Foresters to craft an Alternate Plan to harvest in riparian areas under some circumstances as long as public resources are still well protected. Many alternate plans were developed and approved by DNR. Most of the Alternate Plans included removal of downed trees and replanting in the riparian area. Several more Alternate Plans are still in process of being developed or currently being reviewed. The current status of alternate plans is shown in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Alternate plans completed and discussed with small forest landowners.

	Completed in PC Region	Completed in Olympic Region	Discussed (not yet complete)
Alternate Plans	10	6	15

**Forestry Riparian Easement Program (FREP, Long-Term Forest Practices Application (LTA), and Family Forest Fish Passage Program (FFFPP)**

As Landowner Assistance Foresters have worked with landowners affected by the windstorm, there's been an opportunity to discuss other SFLO programs. Discussions surrounding the SFLO programs are tracked in Table 4. Several of these landowners are now in the process of implementing a Forestry Riparian Easement along streams on their property with some having already completed the process. Foresters discussed the Long-Term Forest Practices Application with many landowners. Landowners with a LTA will be able to react quickly to storm events that happen in the future. The windstorm and flooding events associated with the heavy rainfall, severely affected forest road crossings over streams throughout the impact area. With this in mind, many landowners contacted Scott Potter at the SFLO with questions about the Family Forest Fish Passage Program. Following the storm, Scott made several site visits with landowners interested in the program as well as landowners who have already applied. Local sponsors who support FFFPP projects joined FFFPP staff to visit completed projects in Pacific, Grays Harbor,

Lewis, and Thurston Counties. In total, 38 sites were visited, and all of them remained intact. In one case, fill had been washed out around a new culvert, and the FFFPP paid to repair the damage.

These photos were taken on Pants Creek in Thurston County. The bridge on the left was installed with the Family Forest Fish Passage Program in the Fall of 2007. On the right, a stream crossing over an undersized culvert upstream from the bridge was completely washed out. Both photos were taken shortly after the December 2007 storm, and the bridge passed a large amount of water and large woody debris without any damage.



**Table 4.** Outreach and implementation of other SFLO programs as a result of the assistance provided to small forest landowners after the December 2007 storm.

<b>PROGRAM</b>	<b>Completed application</b>	<b>Pending application</b>	<b>Program discussed</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Forestry Riparian Easement Program	2	4	4	10
Long-Term Forest Practices Application	0	0	7	7
Family Forest Fish Passage Program	0	0	7	7

**Forest Practices Applications and Amendments**

As of early September 2008, DNR has processed 173 Forest Practices Applications for management of storm damaged timber on small forest landowner parcels. DNR has also processed at least 10 amendments to FPAs previously approved. The Olympic Region has processed 63 FPAs with 6 including alternate plans. The Pacific Cascade Region has processed 110 FPAs with 10 including alternate plans.

**Continued work**

At the time of completing this report the Pacific Cascade and Olympic Region Offices are continuing to receive FPAs for storm damage related management activities. Much of the management planned in the EQIP contracts has yet to take place. Throughout implementation of those plans, Landowner Assistance Foresters and NRCS staff will be answering questions and making site visits to help landowners obtain their objectives. Staff will also make site visits to complete status reviews after the work is finished on these contracts. Foresters are continuing to work with landowners on Alternate Plans related to the storm and are also working on FREP and FFFPP projects that were sparked

by the storm activity. Many landowners are now more engaged in active management on their property and have shown interest in acquiring a Forest Stewardship Plan and some are choosing to write their own by attending a Coached Planning Course offered through DNR and WSU Extension. Several of those interested in Forest Stewardship plans, as well as those enrolled in EQIP, have a great opportunity to leave some snags and downed wood for wildlife. These landowners will be following up with Jim Bottorff in the coming months to get a wildlife management component into their plans.

**Thanks to the following staff who made site visits with the affected landowners**

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