

SEPA

The State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) is intended to inform agencies, applicants, and the public to encourage the development of environmentally sound proposals. Public agencies are required, under SEPA, to evaluate the potential negative environmental consequences of a proposal prior to decision making. SEPA applies to actions made at all levels of government within Washington State. (Ecology SEPA Handbook 2003)

The environmental review process involves the identification and evaluation of potential adverse environmental impacts within the reasonable alternatives that can address the agency's specified purpose and need for the proposal. Along with other considerations, this information is used by agency decision makers when determining whether to move forward or change a proposal.

DNR wants to involve participants in the Forest Land Planning process early, and as frequently as possible. The SEPA process is designed to help facilitate this public involvement.

Types of SEPA projects and additional public input

- "Project" review under SEPA is when DNR proposes an activity to actually modify a specific site, such as constructing a building or a road, or designing a timber harvest.
- "Non-project" review involves "... actions which are different or broader than a single site-specific project (such as plans, policies, or rule revisions, etc.), ...and contain standards that control modification of the environment, or govern a series of connected actions."

General steps in the OESF Forest Land Plan SEPA process

- A Scoping Notice was published to invite public participation. DNR used the public input to help decide what to include in alternative proposals for managing these lands, including potential adverse environmental impacts that will need examination.
- A Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was prepared. In the EIS DNR examined the potential environmental impacts of the alternatives.
- The public will review the Draft EIS and offer comments.
- The comments and responses to those comments are then incorporated in a Final EIS. This Final EIS will help inform decisions involving adoption of a final Forest Land Plan for the OESF planning unit.
- Eventually, following guidance of the OESF Forest Land Plan, when a project such as a timber harvest is proposed, additional SEPA — a "Project" review — will be carried out with public input at that time.

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Vision for the Olympic Experimental State Forest

... to "optimize" the integration of ecological and commodity values by ... applying non-traditional silvicultural practices, testing new concepts, measuring outputs, and revising forest practices.

www.dnr.wa.gov

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Olympic Experimental State Forest Forest Land Planning



Productive Forested State Lands

About 2.1 million acres of state-owned trust lands are forested – working forests that earn income to build public schools, universities and other state institutions, and help fund local services in many counties. They also provide habitat, clean water, and recreation opportunities. Since 1970, about 85- to 90 percent of the \$6 billion earned on trust lands has come from the forests. The revenue reduces the need for taxes to pay for public projects and services.

DNR also manages the state's Natural Resources Conservation Areas and Natural Area Preserves to protect native plant and animal species and unique features. Forested natural areas contribute to the habitat commitments of the 1997 Habitat Conservation Plan.

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In order for Washington's Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to reach the policies expressed and adopted by the Board of Natural Resources in 2006, the department began a Forest Land Planning process to help implement the sustainable forest management approach, including existing policies, the trust land Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) and other Board of Natural Resources direction.

The Forest Land Planning process helps DNR identify local issues and develop strategies to link adopted policy goals and direction to on-the-ground forest management activities. Planning will determine the direction needed to reach specific goals.

During the past three years, DNR has captured ideas and information about the OESF from interested parties. This information has helped DNR to shape the management alternatives being considered.

Offered here is an overview of DNR's Forest Land Planning process and how it relates to other plans and guidance. The Olympic Experimental State Forest (OESF) HCP planning unit has a particularly unique history which will influence the development of the OESF Forest Land Plan.



Photo: Hoh River Valley.

Map: DNR uses the 1997 trust land Habitat Conservation Plan planning units as forest land planning areas.

Context for Forest Land Planning

Forest land planning is designed to help implement DNR's strategic plans and policies. ▶ These include the 1997 Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP), 2007 Sustainable Forest Management direction and a sustainable harvest level and the 2006 Policy for Sustainable Forests. ▶ A Forest Land Plan for a specific area will link the broad concepts and direction in these plans and policies by providing guidance to direct on-the-ground decisions.

A Bit of History and Vision

In 1989 the Commission on Old Growth Alternatives — a broad-based citizen advisory group—recommended the creation of an experimental forest on state lands on the west side of the Olympic Peninsula. They saw the experimental forest as a place where DNR could develop solutions to meet the compatible goals of a 'working forest' that generates revenue and provides for the conservation of diverse species by scientifically applying different management concepts, and harvesting and planting techniques.

The vision is to create a working forest where innovation is real; where scientific knowledge is sought and applied; where creative ideas flourish and long-standing problems are solved.

DNR plans to test and monitor innovative methods of forest management designed to produce a sustained timber harvest, while improving trust assets for future generations, and contributing to the protection and restoration of the forest ecosystems and the species that depend upon them.

Habitat Conservation Plan

In January 1997, DNR made a far-reaching commitment to protect habitat for native species, particularly those threatened with extinction. DNR signed a 70-year multi-species HCP agreement with federal agencies. The HCP covers about 1.8 million acres of DNR-managed forested trust lands — mostly in Western Washington — affected by the federal listing of the northern spotted owl. As long as DNR abides by the objectives defined in the plan, the federal government agrees not to add restrictions or disrupt long-term timber harvest activities due to the Endangered Species Act.

This 1997 trust lands HCP is an agreement between DNR and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and NOAA-Fisheries (collectively known as the Federal Services) to guarantee that habitat commitments are met, while not penalizing the incidental "take" of a federally listed animal or its habitat. This allows DNR some flexibility to

accomplish various income production and habitat goals.

Sustainable Forest Management and Harvest Level

In September 2004, the Board of Natural Resources approved a new direction for DNR's Sustainable Forest Management and the associated harvest level for Westside forested state trust lands.

The Board's direction for an active stewardship approach is expected to accelerate the creation of complex forest structure (varied ages and species of trees, understory plants, and openings in the tree canopy, etc.), while earning more trust revenue. The approach will help create a working landscape that provides a mosaic of diverse, complex forests — desired habitat under DNR's HCP. The Federal Services and Washington's Department of Fish and Wildlife have worked closely with DNR to ensure that the new approach helps accomplish those habitat goals.

Forest Land Planning is helping to implement the new approach to Sustainable Forest Management, and meet the requirements of the HCP through adopted agency policies and procedures. Foresters designing timber sales or other activities will use information collected through forest land planning — information about conditions that DNR may not have been aware of.

Policy for Sustainable Forests

Adopted in 2006, the Policy for Sustainable Forests replaces the 1992 Forest Resource Plan to guide long-term sustainable management of 2.1 million acres of forested state trust lands statewide. As a result, the people of Washington can expect a continual flow of economic, ecological and social benefits into the foreseeable future, including revenue to support our public schools and institutions, creation of wildlife habitat, clean air and water, and outdoor recreation.

Forest Land Planning is a policy from the 2006 Policy for Sustainable Forests designed to help implement the Board directives on the ground. The planning process offers DNR ways to communicate with the public about the forest management



DNR Photos

that will occur based on local issues and guided by Department policy. In addition, DNR will be able to more accurately assess whether desired forest conditions and outcomes are being achieved, and if not, adjustments can be made through adaptive management.

Forest Land Planning helps implement sustainable forest management

Forest Land Planning helps develop a tool — a plan that guides forest management activities that will effectively and efficiently meet DNR's desired outcomes.

The process began with documenting current issues that foresters and the public identified within this HCP planning unit.

DNR's regional foresters will gain a pragmatic working tool that outlines strategies for a given area, and the resulting Forest Land Plan likely will include:

- A description of the economic, social and ecological environment
- A description of the strategic goals and targets to be met
- A description of the strategies to be used to achieve DNR's goals and targets

In implementing a Forest Land Plan individual activities (such as timber sales and road abandonment) are undertaken.

DNR believes in a dynamic, fluid planning process to better accommodate agency needs, changing regulations and public concerns — a process that is responsive as conditions

change. DNR's planning framework has important feedback components. These feedback mechanisms include: management reports to the Board of Natural Resources on specific activities (such as timber sales, and stakeholder and public participation in the various planning and environmental review steps. All these elements provide important information for modifying, adapting and managing the plan to meet DNR's strategic goals.

Environmental analysis helps develop the OESF Forest Land Plan

DNR's management activities have the potential to result in environmental impacts on specific elements of the environment. In this Draft EIS, DNR identified nine environmental topics that are evaluated for probable, significant, adverse, environmental impacts resulting from implementing either management alternative, including: forest conditions, riparian (including impacts to water quantity), stream channel conditions, water quality, fish, soils, wildlife, northern spotted owls, and marbled murrelets.

This analysis includes examining possible negative impacts on wildlife habitat, such as loss of foraging or nesting habitat for the northern spotted owl or marbled murrelet.

