



VIA Email: objections-chief@fs.fed.us

November 6, 2018

Chris French
Objection Reviewing Officer
1400 Independence Avenue SW
EMC-LEAP, Mailstop 1104
Washington, DC 20250.

Re: Objection regarding the Revised Colville Forest Plan

Pursuant to 36 C.F.R. Part 218, the American Forest Resource Council (AFRC) files this objection to the proposed decision for Revised Colville Forest Plan and Record of Decision. The responsible official is the Region 6 Regional Forester. The project occurs on the Colville National Forest.

Objector

American Forest Resource Council
5100 SW Macadam, Suite 350
Portland, Oregon 97239
(503) 222-9505

AFRC is an Oregon nonprofit corporation that represents the forest products industry throughout Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, and California. AFRC represents over 50 forest product businesses and forest landowners. AFRC's mission is to advocate for sustained yield timber harvests on public timberlands throughout the West to enhance forest health and resistance to fire, insects, and disease. We do this by promoting active management to attain productive public forests, protect adjoining private forests, and assure community stability. We work to improve federal and state laws, regulations, policies and decisions regarding access to and management of public forest lands and protection of all forest lands. The Revised Colville National Forest Plan (Final Plan) will, if properly implemented, benefit AFRC's members and help ensure a reliable supply of public timber in an area where the commodity is greatly needed. The Colville must continue to be a working forest as it has been for many years in the past.

Objector's Designated Representative

Tom Partin
P.O. Box 1934
Lake Oswego, Oregon 97035
503-704-4644
tpartin@amforest.org

5100 S.W. Macadam Avenue, Suite 350
Portland, Oregon 97239
Tel. (503) 222-9505 • Fax (503) 222-3255

Reasons for the Objection

The content of this objection is based upon prior specific written comments regarding the proposed revised Land and Resource Management Plan for the Colville National Forest submitted by AFRC on July 5, 2016. Many of the recommendations and requests for change in our comments were not incorporated into the Final Plan, thus prompting this objection. This new Plan will govern management on approximately 1.1 million acres in Northeast Washington. Getting the best from this Final Plan for the AFRC membership (National Forest timber purchasers and manufacturers) is paramount for their long-term economic survival. AFRC and our members have been participating in the Colville plan revision process dating back to 2003. AFRC's objections will focus on several major areas where we believe the Final Plan is deficient.

- 1. The Forest has self-imposed a maximum diameter at breast height (dbh) limit for harvest of trees exceeding 20.”** The Final Plan guideline FW-GDL-VEG-03 states that *“Large Tree Management activities should retain and generally emphasize recruitment of individual large trees (larger than 20 inches diameter at breast height) across the landscape.” Exceptions where individual large trees may be removed or destroyed include the following:*

- *Trees need to be removed for public health or safety (such as, but not limited to, danger/hazard trees along roads or in developed or administrative sites).*
- *Trees need to be removed to facilitate management of emergency situations such as wildfire response.*

The following exemptions apply only to situations where removal of smaller trees alone cannot achieve the stated desired conditions:

- *Trees need to be removed to meet, promote, or maintain desired conditions for structural stages (see FW-DC-VEG-03. Forest Structure).*
- *Trees need to be removed to control or limit the spread of insect infestation or disease.*
- *Trees need to be removed where strategically critical to reinforce, facilitate, or improve effectiveness of fuel reduction in wildland-urban interfaces.*
- *Trees need to be removed to promote special plant habitats (such as, but not limited to, aspen, cottonwood, whitebark pine).*

AFRC believes that setting the 20” diameter limit is an arbitrary decision made by the Forest with little or no scientific backing. This diameter limit—which is lower and more restrictive than the Eastside Screens—will decrease management opportunities, further reduce volume outputs, decrease forest health, and increase the likelihood of litigation.

AFRC strongly believes the Forest could leave out any reference to diameter limits and effectively manage using the third exception which states: *“Trees need to be removed to meet, promote, or maintain desired conditions for structural stages.”* This would help drive the Forest more quickly toward the Historic Range of Variability (HRV).

At minimum, the Final Plan should make any retention standards or guidelines more flexible. The current language could require extensive tree-by-tree analysis to go above 20 inches when needed for important silvicultural goals. More flexibility can be achieved by (1) deleting any reference to a specific diameter limit and (2) changing the detailed “exception” list to a statement that larger/older trees may be removed when appropriate to land management goals at the discretion of the responsible official.

2. Recommended road densities are arbitrary and not achievable.

There are approximately 4,000 miles of road on the Colville National Forest as stated in the Final Plan. The Forest includes 1.1 million acres, or approximately 1718 sections of land. Using these numbers, the miles of road per section of land is 2.32 miles.

MA-DC-GR-05: Travel ways, states that Road densities vary across the management area; however, there are no more **than 2 miles** of National Forest System road per square mile within the General Restoration Management Area within each subwatershed. Total road density is calculated as miles of National Forest System road per square mile of National Forest System lands. This road density calculation does not include roads under another jurisdiction, or roads that have been hydrologically stabilized and impassable to all vehicular traffic, or decommissioned. Furthermore, no more **than 1 mile** of road per section for Focused Restoration management areas is allowed.

These road density numbers are totally arbitrary and not attainable. The Forest hasn’t shown a need for these specific levels tied to any of the goals of the Plan. Restricting road density undercuts the ability of the Forest to provide for many of the multiple uses inherent in a working Forest, including timber production, motorized recreation, grazing, and others. The proposed numbers could place restrictions on the construction of new roads for needed access and could force the Forest into closing needed roads for fire access, recreation, and forest product removal. AFRC further believes that this arbitrary standard will also leave the Forest open to litigation.

3. The Final Plan does not sufficiently address the needs of the Forest for immediate restoration.

Only six years after the current Colville Plan was implemented in 1988, Region 6 adopted the Eastside Screens which greatly impacted land management options on the Colville and across the Region. Most significantly, a 21-inch maximum diameter size for harvest was implemented. Further, wildlife connective corridors were identified and wider INFISH stream buffers were applied. When combined, these factors greatly reduced forest management options on the Forest and reduced harvests. The 1988 Plan called for a sustainable harvest of 123.4 million board feet (MMBF) annually. However, from 1996-2015 the average volume of timber sold was only 39.1 MMBF, or 32% of the target. The impacts of this harvest reduction were devastating on many fronts including the local sawmilling infrastructure, the communities that depended on those jobs, and the health and sustainability of the Forest.

AFRC believes the significant deviation and restrictions in forest management policy that took place from 1994 until the present has resulted in the current volatile forest conditions and these conditions have not been thoroughly addressed. Moreover, there has

been significant growth in the Forest since 1994 and a static 21-inch rule has been made obsolete.

Alternative P indicates there are 656,600 acres suitable for timber production and an additional 202,150 acres that allow harvest to improve other resource objectives. This is a total of 858,750 acres available for harvest (see Table 31). Under Alternative P the average annual number of acres planned for timber harvest will be 5,000 acres (see Table 27) or one-half of one percent (.0058) of the available acres. At this pace, there is no way the forest health and wildfire conditions can be addressed effectively. Even by combining both 5,000 acres for timber harvest and 5,000 acres for mechanical fuel treatment, it would take 86 years to get all acres treated. If management focused only in the suitable acres it would take 65 years to treat every acre.

Compounding the problem, the Plan considers the current fiscal budget that the Colville receives as the management level for the life of the Plan. This self-imposed restriction severely handicaps management opportunities and will fail to bring resource needs into balance. This is also not consistent with the 1982 Planning Rule.

The 1982 Planning Rule contains no language providing for any determination of “fiscal capability” or “reasonably foreseeable budgets” for resulting forest plans. “The 1982 Rule requires the calculation of long-term sustained yield capacity (LTSY) based on *productivity* and the calculation of allowable sale quantity (ASQ) that is tied to *lands* that are suitable for timber production.” DEIS at 85 (emphasis added). And NFMA in turn allows a forest’s ASQ to deviate from LTSY only to the extent consistent with a Forest Plan’s “multiple-use management objectives.” 16 U.S.C. § 1611(a). NFMA does not permit a deviation for non-management reasons such as budget. The planned sale quantities (PWSQ and PTSQ) established by the Forest, both constrained by budget, are not consistent with the 1982 Planning Rule.

The 1982 Rule requires that the resulting plans shall provide for multiple uses and sustained yield of goods and services in a way that maximizes long-term net public benefits in an environmentally sound manner. 1982 Rule, Sec. 219.1(a). Net public benefits is an expression used to signify the overall long-term value to the nation of all outputs and positive effects (benefits) less all associated inputs and negative effects (costs). 1982 Rule, Sec. 219.3. The maximization of net public benefits to be derived from management of units of the National Forest System is consistent with the principles of multiple use and sustained yield. *Id.*

It appears the Plan may be incorporating budget guidance from the 2012 Planning Rule. The new Rule requires the responsible official to ensure that plan content is within the “fiscal capability” of the unit. 36 C.F.R. § 219.1(g). “Fiscal capability” is not defined in the Rule or elsewhere. The 2012 Rule also states that “objectives should be based on reasonably foreseeable budgets.” 36 C.F.R. § 219.7(e) (1) (ii). But the Forest has elected to proceed under the 1982 rule, so these provisions are not relevant.

4. The Forest should analyze the unconstrained harvest calculation and departure from even-flow to more quickly get to LTSY.

The Long-Term Sustained Yield (LTSY) for the Colville is 97.4 MMBF. This volume can only be achieved when all the manageable timber acres have reached their HVR. As previously mentioned, this could take as many as 65-86 years to achieve.

AFRC pointed out in our Draft EIS comments that the original model runs produced in November 2014 included unconstrained model runs. These model runs allowed for higher levels of treatment to determine what an unlimited management budget could achieve under the management prescriptions for each alternative. However, these model runs were not consistent with the concept of non-declining flow for timber volume and did not meet the LTSY objectives. Therefore, they are not currently included in the modeling package. Instead the LTSY and Allowable Sale Quantity runs now approximate the maximum harvest levels of an unlimited budget and associated resource impacts.

AFRC requested a departure from non-declining flow for timber volume, and we believe that these model runs should have been part of the final Alternative P that would have more quickly returned the Forest to the HRV.

There was support in the community for a departure of this magnitude. The Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition (Coalition) has been working with the Forest since 2002. Their website states their work is: “to find common ground and move our region forward with new solutions to forest management problems. Today, the fighting in our forests is behind us, and work is getting done in the woods once again, proving that we can protect special places and protect timber jobs at the same time.” Since 2002 the Coalition has lobbied for a long-term sustainable harvest of 80 MMBF on the 400,000 acres of forest land that the Coalition classifies as manageable. Additional timber volume should be added from the acres the Coalition has classified as restoration.

5. The Final Plan does not provide an adequate timber volume to support the local timber industry infrastructure and ensure community stability.

Table 32 lists the various volumes by alternatives. The volume designations include LTSY, Allowable Sale Quantity (ASQ), Probable Wood Sale Quantity (PWSQ), and Probable Timber Sale Quantity (PTSQ).

Table 32. Average annual volumes (million board feet (MMBF)) by alternative

	No action	Proposed Action	Alternative R	Alternative P	Alternative B	Alternative O
LTSY	18.3	97.5	7.5	97.4	13.9	12.2
ASQ	18.3	67.6	7.5	67.0	13.9	12.2
PWSQ	40.6	62.1	14.3	61.8	37.4	37.5
PTSQ	26.9	48.4	9.3	48.1	23.7	23.8

Unfortunately, these volumes appear to be artificially limited by only considering the current budget the Forest is receiving. No consideration was given to the fact that the Forest is **currently producing more timber** than listed above. For example, the actual Colville timber target PTSQ for Fiscal Year 2019 (FY19) is 82.6 MMBF rather than the 48.1 MMBF listed in Table 32. Volumes from other sources such as Good Neighbor Authority projects and the A-Z project will yield another 60 MMBF making the total volume target for this year 142.7 MMBF. The target for FY20 is 142 MMBF and 155 MMBF for FY21.

AFRC has grave concern that if a new Forest Supervisor and management team were placed on the Forest and they were not inclined to rapidly move the Forest toward the HRV, harvests could drop off significantly. There is no solid direction to maintain the volumes the Colville is currently producing.

AFRC members who buy and depend on timber sales from the Colville to sustain their infrastructure employ more than 1,200 people. This number has been rising as the Colville has been steadily increasing its harvest numbers in recent years. According to a 2012 report published by the Oregon Forest Resources Institute, every one million board feet of timber harvested supports 11 direct and indirect jobs. A more recent report published by the Idaho Department of Lands in 2016 shows that every one million board feet of timber harvested supports 18 direct and indirect jobs.

Increasing timber harvests on the Colville would not only help maintain the existing infrastructure but also generate hundreds of additional private sector jobs in three economically depressed Washington state counties and beyond. These numbers are consistent with communications AFRC has had with its members, who confirmed that an additional 200 or more jobs would be added at existing facilities if the raw material was available. In order to support the local timber infrastructure and ensure local community stability that depends on the Colville, the Final Plan should attempt to maximize its sustained yield timber output. The current timber sale level of 142 MMBF, supports approximately 2,256 jobs. Conversely, using the PTSQ number of 48.1 MMBF from Table 32, the Colville's timber sale program would only support 866 jobs. This is a significant economic variance and, if implemented, would create a serious deficit for the local, largely rural economy and communities found in and around the Colville National Forest.

6. The Proposed Plan improperly limits management due to budget considerations.

The Forest's treatment of budgets in the Final Plan is inconsistent with the 1982 Planning Rule and results in artificial restrictions on timber production. As a result, the Plan's own direction is compromised from inception. The objectives are limited by budget, leading to artificial and unlawful constraints on standards, guidelines, and desired condition. The Forest should have produced a set of desired conditions reflecting both how much the land can produce and what the landscape needs. Rather the Forest rejected that idea as AFRC had proposed using the argument that *"It would be disingenuous to continue to portray unrealistic objectives based on unconstrained or much higher budget levels. The Forest Service has learned it is important to analyze the effects of plan alternatives*

within the fiscal capability of the unit, because financial constraints are often the primary limiting factor in achieving desired conditions.” (Pg. 77 volume 1).

As AFRC pointed out above there are a total of 858,750 acres available for harvest. Under Alternative P with the constrained budget, the average annual number of acres planned for timber harvest will be 5,000 acres and 10,000 acres for mechanical fuel treatments. At this pace it would take 65-86 years to treat all acres to get back to the HRV.

The Forest Service has recently been very proactive and creative in identifying new revenue sources to increase their management footprint. This includes shared stewardship, Good Neighbor Authority, and other partner contributions that could supplement the agency’s appropriated funds on any given year in the future. AFRC has serious concerns that future land managers tasked with implementing this plan may view the budget-constrained values described in it for acres treated, timber volume harvested, and any other restrained measurable component to be a *limit*, rather than simply an estimation based on current budgetary constraints. Doing so would undermine the efforts we outlined above that could increase the Forest’s capacity and ability to exceed the budget-constrained values described. This applies to other objectives than just timber. The ability to achieve higher outcomes on any budget-constrained objective could be compromised as the plan is currently written.

Resolution Requested

The Colville Final Plan will provide management direction to the Colville National Forest for the next 15 plus years. The Final Plan attempts to provide public benefits including making available recreation access, facilities, and services; supplying renewable and non-renewable forest products; and providing roads, services, and accommodations to support local economies. AFRC believes this Final Plan fails to provide the certainty needed for our membership that a consistent, and predictable volume of timber will be produced in a timely manner that will more quickly move the Forest toward the desired HRV.

To resolve the issues that AFRC has raised above, the following actions will need to occur.

1. The Forest needs to drop the maximum 20” dbh limit for harvest. AFRC believes that setting the 20” diameter limit is an arbitrary and capricious decision made by the Forest with little or no scientific backing. This diameter limit, which is lower and more restrictive than that found in the Eastside Screens, will decrease management opportunities, further reduce volume outputs, decrease forest health, and increase the likelihood of litigation.

AFRC strongly believes that the Forest could leave out any reference to diameter limits and manage using the broad exception which states that larger/older trees may be removed when appropriate to land management goals in the discretion of the responsible official.

2. The Forest must drop the arbitrary and unachievable goal of no more than two miles of National Forest System road per square mile within the General Restoration Management area and no more than one mile of road per section for Focused Restoration management areas. As stated above these numbers could place restrictions on the construction of new roads for needed access and could force the Forest into closing needed roads for fire access, recreation and forest product removal. AFRC further believes that this standard will also leave the Forest open to litigation.
3. The Final Plan does not sufficiently address the needs of the Forest for immediate restoration. Under Alternative P the average annual number of acres planned for timber harvest will be 5,000 acres or one-half of one percent (.0058) of the available acres. At this pace, there is no way the forest health and wildfire conditions can be addressed with any effectiveness. It would take 86 years to get all acres treated and 65 years to just treat the suitable timber acres.
4. The Forest should analyze the unconstrained harvest calculation and departure from even-flow to more quickly get to LTSY. The Long-Term Sustained Yield for the Colville National Forest is 97.4 MMBF. This volume can only be achieved when all the manageable timber acres have reached their HVR. AFRC requests a departure from non-declining flow for timber volume, and we believe that these model runs should have been part of the Final Plan.
5. The Proposed Plan must reflect an adequate timber volume to support the local timber industry infrastructure and ensure community stability. The Forest Service planned FY19 timber sale program (PTSQ) is 82.6 MMBF. The PTSQ outlined in the Final Plan is 48.1 MMBF. The numbers in the Final Plan must reflect what the Forest is proposing to sell now if the Plan is based on using the current and static budget.
6. The Final Plan should not limit management options based on current or other budget considerations. The Forest's treatment of budgets in the Final Plan is inconsistent with the 1982 Planning Rule and results in artificial restrictions on timber production. As a result, the Plan's own direction is compromised from inception. At the least, the Forest should modify the Plan to clarify that the values described are based on current budget conditions and those values **can and should be exceeded** if the Forest is able to increase their capacity through increased budget allocations or shared stewardship.

Request for Resolution Meeting

Pursuant to 36 C.F.R. § 218.11, the objectors request a meeting with the reviewing officer to discuss the issues raised in this objection and potential resolution. In the event multiple objections are filed on this decision, AFRC respectfully requests that the resolution meeting be held as soon as possible with all objectors present. AFRC believes that having all objectors together at one time, though perhaps making for a longer meeting, will be a more expeditious process to either resolve appeal issues or move the process along in the long run. As you know, 36 C.F.R. § 218.11 gives the Reviewing Officer considerable discretion as to the form of resolution meetings. With that in mind, AFRC requests to participate to the maximum extent

practicable, and specifically requests to be able to comment on points made by other objectors in the course of the objection resolution meeting.

Thank you for your efforts on the Revised Colville Forest Plan and your consideration of this objection. AFRC looks forward to the initial resolution meeting. Please contact our representative, Tom Partin, at the address and phone number shown above, to arrange a date for the resolution meeting.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Travis Joseph". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Travis Joseph
President