



**DEPARTMENT OF
NATURAL RESOURCES**

**OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER
OF PUBLIC LANDS**

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November 24, 2021

Carin Vadala, District Ranger
Newport Sullivan Lake Ranger District
315 North Warren
Newport, WA 99156
FS-comments-pacificnorthwest-colville-newport@usda.gov

Re: Sweet-Ione Integrated Resources Improvement Project

Dear Ranger Vadala,

On behalf of the Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) please accept this letter in response to the public comment period for Sweet Ione Integrated Resources Improvement Project. DNR has a long history of working with the Colville National Forest (CNF) in delivery of our core mission – to manage, sustain and protect the health and productivity of Washington’s lands and waters. The Sweet Ione project continues to advance this mission and is an exceptional example of our partnership through delivery of Washington’s 20-Year Forest Health Strategic Plan: Eastern Washington and Shared Stewardship Investment Strategy.

20-Year Forest Health Strategic Plan: Eastern Washington

In 2017, DNR worked with partners, including the CNF, to develop the 20-Year Forest Health Strategic Plan. The plan is an all-lands, all-hands approach to addressing forest health and wildfire risk in the state. Plan development included a stakeholder driven, scientifically rigorous mapping and prioritization process that identified 39 priority landscapes for accelerated restoration. The Sweet Ione Project is within one priority landscape identified by DNR. We appreciate the interest of CNF in aligning with our priorities and working together to achieve landscape scale restoration and management objectives. Forest health treatments within the Sweet Ione Project on the CNF represent a critical contribution to solving our state’s forest health and wildfire crisis.

Shared Stewardship Investment Strategy

In 2019, DNR, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, and USFS signed a memorandum of understanding to advance our Shared Stewardship Investment Strategy in Washington State.

The agreement focuses on three core elements:

- 1) establishing shared priorities,
- 2) conducting the right work in the right places, and
- 3) utilizing all available tools for active management and restoration.

The Sweet Ione Project is an important example of Shared Stewardship and we appreciate the leadership of CNF in advancing forest health and wildfire risk reduction treatments in this high priority landscape.

DNR Landscape Evaluation

In each priority landscape, DNR Forest Health Scientists conduct a landscape evaluation to establish forest health treatment needs and priorities. The landscape evaluation for the DNR Ione priority landscape was completed and a summary of results are included with this letter. The Ione priority landscape includes 41,784-forested acres, and our landscape evaluation found that 16,500 – 21,000 acres of forest health treatments are needed across all land ownerships to move this landscape into a resilient condition. This includes using both commercial and non-commercial treatments to shift dense to open forest and maintenance treatments in existing open forest, based on current condition data from 2015 and 2016 LiDAR. The landscape evaluation also identified the following key landscape highlights and treatment needs:

- The planning area is dominated by large, homogenous patches of dense, medium sized forest stands that make the entire landscape susceptible to large patches of high severity wildfire that affect all stand types.
- Projected warming over the next 20-40 years will likely shift climate conditions suitable for predominately moist and cold forest types and late seral species towards climate conditions suitable for more predominately dry forest types and early seral species. Moderate and low moisture stress levels are projected to remain on 40% of the area.
- Treating 39-50% of forested acres is recommended to increase resilience and reduce fire risk to communities using a combination of mechanical, prescribed fire, and managed fire treatments.

DNR Landscape Evaluation findings are aligned with USFS purpose, need and proposed action for the Sweet Ione Project, especially activities to conduct forest health treatments, reduce potential wildfire severity, and improve watershed condition. In addition to landscape evaluation findings, DNR supports CNF's leadership in contributing to local economic activity through forest health treatments, enhancement of forage and habitat for big game, and implementation of a sustainable road system to support public and administrative access. DNR Forest Health scientists, Northeast Region, and Federal Lands Section are available to provide additional input and information as part of project implementation and monitoring.

We would like to commend CNF for continued leadership in addressing forest health in Northeast Washington. The approach to project planning, extensive public outreach and

engagement, and science-based restoration assessment aligns with the state's 20-Year Forest Health Strategic Plan and Shared Stewardship Investment Strategy.

Thank you for making this project possible. We look forward to continuing to work closely with the Colville National Forest in the future.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:

George Geissler

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George Geissler

State Forester, Deputy Supervisor for Wildland Fire Management
Washington State Department of Natural Resources

c: Ken McNamee, Region Manager, Northeast Region
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