



GPNF LITTLE WHITE SALMON PLANNING AREA

Synthesis of Collaborative Areas of Agreement & Disagreement



Last updated: 9/18/24

DOCUMENT PURPOSE

This draft document serves to synthesize collaborative feedback from the past 2+ years related to the USFS' Little White Salmon planning area and anticipated proposed action. This 'living document' will be used to assess current areas of collaborative agreement for the purposes of planning targeted future discussions/work and providing formal comments when the EA is released by the USFS this summer/fall.

METHODS

This document was written based on multiple collaborative full-group and subcommittee meetings, field trips into the LWS watershed, and targeted surveys. The USFS (e.g., IDT team, MARD Ranger) were generally present at meetings and field trips and often provided presentations about valued resources and associated management considerations on the watershed. This document is a best approximation of where the group currently stands based on: (a) an in-depth analysis of previous meeting Notes and recorded discussions, and (b) existing approved Zones of Agreement (ZOA) documents on topics related to the LWS planning area. These included ZOA's on *Forest Restoration*, *Plantation Thinning* (i.e., *Thinning*, *Riparian Reserve Mgmt.*, *Road Access*), *Early Seral Habitat Creation*, and *Post-Fire Salvage Logging*.

NOTE: This document has not been voted upon by the full group and is an approximation of where the group currently stands on the topics addressed herein. This document will be shared with the ZOA Subcommittee and full group for feedback prior to incorporating into a formal SGPC EA comment letter and will first be voted upon prior to submission.

CURRENT AREAS OF AGREEMENT

Active management

- We encourage the USFS to apply an adaptive management approach on the LWS that continuously monitors, evaluates, and adjusts efforts to accelerate natural recovery.
- We support active management on the LWS planning that provides ecological, economic, and social benefits.
- We recommend that critical structures, dynamics, and components of ecological recovery on the LWS be protected.
- We support efforts on the LWS that improve stand resiliency (e.g., disease, insect, fire) and species heterogeneity.
- We support the use of variable density thinning on the LWS to put plantation stands on a trajectory to more closely resemble the natural stands of a healthy and resilient forest.
- We continue to support the increased use of Designation by Prescription (DxP) because this method provides a varied prescription that allows the healthiest, tallest, and most vigorous trees to be left on the cutting unit.
- The Collaborative supports a comprehensive, landscape-scale approach to restoration across the South Zone Planning Area, including the LWS.

Meeting multiple objectives

- We support management efforts on the LWS that contribute to meeting multiple restoration objectives including fire risk reduction, protecting communities and neighboring landowners, climate change mitigation/adaptation, treating diseased stands (e.g., root rot), and improving stand vigor.
- We support efforts on the LWS that yield timber production, implement silvicultural prescriptions that produce sustainable forest recovery, and facilitate growth and yield over the long term.
- We support specific efforts that leverage PCLs and PODs to improve points of ingress/egress for managing (and escaping) future wildfires.

Fire / post-fire management

- We support fuels reduction efforts on the LWS to reduce wildfire risk to the communities of Willard and Mill A and other high-value resources by increasing opportunities for safe and effective fire management and by improving ingress and egress.
- We support efforts to introduce sufficient fuel breaks on the LWS that protect sensitive areas and other valued resources.
- We support cross-boundary / 'all-lands' management efforts and the associated tools/analyses that have been developed by WA DNR and the USFS to assess conditions and vulnerabilities on the LWS.
- When conditions are appropriate, we support prescribed fire on the LWS to reduce wildfire risk, especially near sensitive resources (e.g., Mill A, Willard).
- We support management activities on the LWS that create new, and improve upon existing, PCLs and PODs for managing wildfires.

Economics & local communities

- We encourage the USFS to continue to provide opportunities on the LWS for locals to connect with their land and for visitors to contribute to the local economy.
- We support efforts to reduce wildfire risk to, and protect valued resources in, Mill A, Willard, and other nearby potentially-affected land-use ownerships (i.e., private, state).
- We support efforts to improve local ingress/egress for managing wildfires and keeping locals safe.
- We support efforts to provide high-quality drinking water for local communities adjacent to the LWS planning area.
- When safe (i.e., outside of active operations), we support continued access to the LWS watershed for local communities for recreation and spiritual purposes.
- Timber sales on the LWS should provide economic opportunities for local communities through ecologically and economically viable timber sales.
- We support timber sales on the LWS that prioritize local timber companies and mills.

- The Forest Service should maximize firewood and biomass utilization practices for Mill A and Willard. We recommend leaving firewood on landings or adjacent to open roads for easy access by locals.

Monitoring

- The USFS should develop and implement measurable management goals and actions on the LWS that are informed by the historic range of variability for forest types in the region and the best available science, including tools and assessments by partners (e.g., WA DNR).
- We encourage the development of a detailed long-term monitoring plan for the LWS in conjunction with the Collaborative and other stakeholders.
- We encourage that monitoring data be used to guide adaptive management activities on the LWS.
- We support monitoring efforts by SGPC partner organizations and agencies (e.g., WA DNR, CFC) in conjunction with the USFS in sensitive areas on the LWS such as older stands and riparian areas.
- We encourage the USFS to develop clear metrics for assessing success on the LWS, including pre-harvest metrics/information, control areas, and a strong study design focusing on a few key variables.

Aquatics / riparian zones

- We support efforts on the LWS to restore or enhance priority terrestrial and aquatic systems to improve function, connectivity, and resilience to future disturbances.
- We support efforts on the LWS that enhance watershed health to provide clean water for human and non-human systems in alignment with the Northwest Forest Plan's Aquatic Conservation Strategy.
- We support biological surveys for sensitive aquatic species (e.g., fish, mollusks, amphibians, reptiles) on the LWS watershed.
- Proposed actions on the LWS should aim to enhance riparian health, including improving biodiversity, structure, functionality, and heterogeneity.
- We recommend that the USFS consider beaver reintroduction/beaver dam analogues, meadow restoration, floodplain reconnection, and active riparian forest management on the LWS where applicable and appropriate.

- We acknowledge that it may be necessary and beneficial to treat riparian areas within plantation stands in the LWS in the short term to restore forest ecosystem health over the long term.
- Treatments in the LWS should be guided by the need to maintain and restore forest permeability, heterogeneity, complexity, and functionality.
- Vary inner no-cut Riparian Reserve buffer widths on the LWS to capture unique landscape features such as snags, downed wood, hardwood pockets, stream-adjacent seeps, and unstable slopes.
- Utilize a variety of management options (e.g., skips, gaps, and variable density thinning) to support landscape connectivity in the LWS. For example, consider the use of leave patches adjacent to inner no-cut Riparian Reserve buffers.
- Consider fuel treatments in outer riparian reserves on the LWS that include practices such as adding wood to streams to increase water retention/capacity and reduce fire risk.
- Manage for threatened, endangered, proposed, and listed (TEPL) species on the LWS with specific habitat management activities where appropriate. For example, provide for amphibian connectivity across thinned stands and ridgelines or protect microclimate for shade dependent plant species such as *Corydalis*.
- Provide both the science-based rationale and forest management objective for increasing or decreasing buffers from the default minimums (i.e., ACS). When custom buffers are used, provide the percent of proposed treatment area affected.
- Consider management options to create heterogeneity within the inner no-cut Riparian Reserve buffer (e.g. drop and leave trees) in plantation stands under 80 years old.
- To promote heterogeneity and reduce edge effects in heavily thinned units on the LWS, use a feathered thinning approach (e.g. transition from thinned unit to inner no-cut Riparian Reserve with standard to light thinning of the outer Riparian Reserve).

Climate change

- We recognize the transitional nature of the LWS watershed, which contains stands with dryer (i.e., eastside) and moister (e.g., westside) characteristics.

- We recognize the transitional characteristics of the LWS make it particularly vulnerable to climate change. This vulnerability necessitates a unique management strategy that might *not* apply to other watersheds.
- We support active management on the LWS to improve forest health and build resilience to climate change-related stressors, including fire, drought, insects, and disease.
- The USFS should clearly communicate how management actions in the LWS will address the anticipated effects from climate change.
- The USFS should use the best available science (e.g., drought projections, climate vulnerability assessments) and consider all available options (e.g., planting trees from different seed zones, assisted migration) to mitigate climate change on the LWS.
- The USFS should consider the relative economic value of different species when introducing any new species for climate change mitigation on the LWS.

Age of stands

- We recognize that the USFS and partners (e.g., WA DNR) have identified a need to treat mature stands in the LWS watershed to enhance forest health and mitigate wildfire risk.
- The SGPC fully supports thinning projects in plantation stands (i.e., matrix) 35-80 years old, but also supports *some* treatments in more mature stands when needed to enhance forest health and meet project objectives.
- We suggest the USFS prioritizes management activities in LWS mature stands when multiple management objectives can be met (e.g., treat stands adjacent to landowners, treat disease, increase vigor, improve PCLs/PODs, protect sensitive species).
- We preferentially support treating mature stands that are less complex (i.e., more homogenous) and not adjacent sensitive resources, unless management activities in more complex stands are an identified high-priority need.
- When harvesting in mature stands in the LWS, we support leaving the largest and most structurally complex trees on the landscape to serve as future LSR/OG.
- Where age/size and stand complexity considerations are ambiguous, the SGPC will make determinations on a case-by-case basis.

Forest succession

- All forest successional stages (i.e., early, mid, late seral) on the LWS are essential and should be promoted and actively managed to support current and evolving structural diversity.
- In particular, we support efforts to manage for conditions that promote healthy mature and old growth stands on the LWS given their associated ecosystem services (e.g., dependent species, higher resilience to fire, carbon sequestration).
- We recommend that early seral habitat (ESH) creation on the LWS occur only in matrix stands younger than 80 years old and closely mimics natural ESH created by large-scale disturbances (e.g., snags, downed wood, variable patch sizes).

Land use allocation

- We generally support thinning projects on matrix lands/plantation stands under 80 years old on the LWS.
- We support efforts on the LWS that bring conifer plantations (under 80 years old) more closely into alignment with natural stand composition, functionality, and dynamics.
- We support management practices that increase growth and yield in plantations on LWS matrix stands under 80 years old.
- Although we support efforts that increase growth and resiliency in plantations (under 80 years old) on Late Successional Reserve (LSR) designated land, we request the USFS clearly communicate the need for managing LSR stands on the LWS and consult the Collaborative as-needed.

Wildlife

- We support a holistic ecological approach supported by the best available science for managing wildlife on the LWS that considers different forest strata (e.g., soil, canopy, water) and recognizes the interdependence of species at different scales.
- Managing agencies should survey for and protect any listed or vulnerable plant, aquatic, and terrestrial species present on the LWS.
- We suggest management efforts that protect and promote the presence of any species of recreational or cultural significance.

- In lieu of heavy slash covering, the USFS should consider wildlife forage seeding and planting when possible to support ungulate mobility and benefits to other early seral wildlife species.
- We encourage that closed roads, and in some cases created openings or exposed soil areas, be managed to support biodiversity and reduce edge effects on existing and potential wildlife habitat.

Access / Roads

- We recognize challenges related to access on the northeast portion of the LWS watershed and generally support an efficient access strategy that minimizes environmental impacts (e.g., avoids sensitive areas/species, uses existing infrastructure when suitable).
- We request the USFS clearly communicate the costs and benefits of any proposed helicopter logging relative to alternative access methods.
- We support efforts to improve existing infrastructure on the LWS watershed (e.g., culvert replacements, fish passage enhancement, road/trail improvements) when warranted.
- We support the overall goal of not increasing net system road mileage but recognize that there may be circumstances when modifying an existing road is appropriate to reduce ecological impacts, and that this will result in a net increase in system road mileage.
- The USFS should prioritize use of open system roads above other access options for plantation thinning projects.
- Maximize use of closed system roads before building temporary roads unless a temporary road provides better ecosystem protection.
- When temporary roads offer the least ecologically impactful access to a plantation, the USFS should both maximize the plantation area accessed by the *least possible* new temporary roads and minimize stream crossings to protect forest and aquatic ecosystem health.
- Locate temporary roads on previously disturbed areas (e.g. old temp roads, skid trails).
- Use decommissioned roadbeds as a temporary road when determined to be the most ecologically appropriate way to access a plantation.
- The Collaborative would like to be informed on a case-by-case basis of any proposed temporary roads on previously decommissioned roadbeds in a given planning area and consulted for feedback and concerns.

- The Collaborative recommends that the USFS consider a host of criteria (see ZOA document) when considering using a decommissioned road as a temporary road for a project.
- As a last option, we understand it may be necessary to build a new temporary road. In such cases, we suggest that any temporary roads maximize the plantation area accessed (i.e., to minimize number of temp roads built), while minimizing ecological disturbance and aquatic impacts.
- We recommend that the USFS identify user-created roads and trails in plantations on the LWS and prioritize for closure those that are causing demonstrable harm to forest resources.

Operating season

- We suggest the USFS use a condition-based threshold, rather than hard dates, for plantation thinning projects on the LWS.
- Consider fall and winter logging on the LWS when conditions are appropriate to provide environmental benefits (e.g., reduced soil compaction and lessened vegetation impacts when ground is frozen or snow-covered) and economic benefits (e.g., longer operating season could expand employment opportunities for local operators and eliminate the time and extra work involved with obtaining waivers that are currently required to work before or after the July 15 through September 30 time period).

Invasives

- We encourage the incorporation of invasive species monitoring and mitigation measures in timber sale administration plans on the LWS to reduce the spread of invasive plants during and following harvests.
- We encourage leveraging local resources and knowledge (e.g., Skamania County Noxious Weeds Control Program) to assess and mitigate invasive species on the LWS watershed.
- We encourage the treatment of identified invasive weeds on roads and in/adjacent to units prior to sales.
- We support the use of certified weed-free gravel/material for any road/landing building or improvement as well as the requirement of clean equipment.

- We support the use of appropriately-sourced native seed along freshly disturbed roads and landings and recommend monitoring and treatment of invasive weeds following these disturbances.

Recreation

- We support efforts to identify and protect valued recreation resources (e.g., trails, access points) on the LWS watershed for locals and other visitors.
- We support efforts to improve existing recreation infrastructure on the LWS as part of broader management activities.
- We support efforts to protect recreation and cultural use areas such as Goose Lake, wilderness areas on the LWS, the Sawtooth berry fields, Monte Cristo, and the peeled cedars, among others.

CURRENT AREAS OF DISAGREEMENT

- Given the diversity of species present on the LWS and associated differences in growth rates across the watershed, we do *not* support the use of hardline metrics (e.g., age, height, DBH) for determining the acceptability of proposed harvests.
- The intensity of treatments in more complex stands or stands that neighbor sensitive resources on the LWS.
- Managing / not managing the full proposed acreage of mature stands on the LWS watershed.
 - Harvest and going into older stands to harvest understory (not only older trees).
 - The current definition of mature/OG stands based on EO/NOGA and other measures.
- NSO management in the LWS
 - Current owl circles and associated management restrictions.
 - The degree of support for barred owl management.
 - Owl take.
 - Prioritizing individual species.
- Helicopter access/logging on the LWS.