

**File Code:** 1920; 1950**Date:** October 28, 2025**Route To:****Subject:** Guidance for Consistent Application of Survey and Manage Pre-Disturbance Survey Requirements while Applying the Emergency Action Determination Authority**To:** Line Officers Responsible for Implementing Northwest Forest Plan Direction, Regional Directors

This guidance addresses application of Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP) Survey and Manage pre-disturbance survey requirements for authorized emergency actions authorized pursuant to the April 3, 2025, Emergency Situation Determination (ESD) (Secretarial Memorandum 1078-006). Specifically, this guidance describes the rationale for application of the unusual circumstances provision so that pre-disturbance surveys are not required for emergency actions in projects authorized under the Emergency Action Determination (EAD) authority and sets forth criteria for applying this guidance.

The 2001 Record of Decision (ROD) for NWFP Survey and Manage Standards and Guidelines requires units to conduct pre-disturbance surveys for Category A and C species prior to authorizing habitat disturbing activities in areas that may provide habitat for those species. Attachment A of this guidance lists exceptions and exemptions from pre-disturbance survey requirements, including the “unusual circumstances” provision identified in the Standards and Guidelines: *“pre-disturbance surveys are not required in the unusual circumstance such that a delay in implementation of the activity (to permit pre-disturbance surveys) would result in greatly increased and unacceptable environmental risk.”* (January 2001 ROD, Attachment 1 at 22).

We recognize that the emergency situation that exists within the geographic boundary of the ESD likely constitutes an unusual circumstance such that fulfilling pre-disturbance survey requirements will delay implementation of authorized emergency actions, thereby greatly increasing unacceptable risk resulting from declining forest health conditions and increased wildfire risk. This emergency situation threatens public health and safety, adversely affects local economies and infrastructure, and endangers the very habitat upon which the Survey and Manage species depend. To meet the intent and objectives of the Secretary’s Memorandum 1078-006, Responsible Officials will evaluate the Survey and Manage pre-disturbance survey unusual circumstances exception for authorized emergency actions within the lands designated by the April 3, 2025 ESD or any subsequent additions.

This guidance is consistent with the requirements and intent of the NWFP Survey and Manage Standards and Guidelines (see Attachment B). Other land and resource management plan requirements remain applicable, including the requirement to manage known occurrences of Survey and Manage species. This guidance does not extend to proposed activities located outside the geographic boundary of the ESD; it only applies to authorized emergency actions activities within the ESD geographic boundary.



SM 1078-006 is attached for your convenience. When applying this guidance to authorized emergency actions, please include this guidance, attachments, and SM 1078-006 in your project record. Provided time allows, I highly encourage you to engage a Regional Ecosystem Office (REO) representative early in project development to help ensure appropriate application of this guidance. Please contact an REO representative or your Regional Planner if you have any questions about this guidance or implementation of the Survey and Manage Standards and Guidelines.

JACQUELINE BUCHANAN

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JACQUELINE A. BUCHANAN
Regional Forester

JASON KUIKEN

Digitally signed by JASON
KUIKEN
Date: 2025.10.28 12:57:09
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JASON KUIKEN
Acting Regional Forester

Enclosure: Unusual Circumstances Ltr ATT A & B; SM 1078-006; SM-1078-006 Map

Attachment A—Northwest Forest Plan Survey and Manage Pre-Disturbance Survey Exemptions and Exceptions

Standard exemptions and exceptions to the Survey and Manage pre-disturbance survey requirements were established in the *2001 Record of Decision and Standards and Guidelines for Amendments to the Survey and Manage, Protection Buffer, and other Mitigation Measures Standards and Guidelines* as well as through a 2006 Court Order (known as the Pechman Exemptions). These are summarized below. Please refer to the source documentation for more information or reach out to your Regional Ecosystem Office (REO) representatives if you have additional questions.

2001 Record of Decision and Standards and Guidelines

Pre-disturbance surveys are not required:

- a) for activities that are not defined as “habitat-disturbing,” including routine maintenance;
- b) in unusual circumstances such that a delay in implementation of the activity (to permit pre-disturbance surveys) would result in greatly increased and unacceptable environmental risk (such circumstances are subject to review by the REO to ensure the urgency of the activity justifies the risk to species); or
- c) for wildland fires (prescribed) for resource benefits in designated Wilderness.

Exceptions to pre-disturbance surveys (subject to REO review) may be sought for:

- a) other wildland fires for resource benefits in the backcountry, Wilderness Study Areas, roaded natural, and similar areas where the objective of such fires is similar to those in Wilderness; or
- b) wildland fire for resource benefits in Late-Successional Reserves if the Late-Successional Reserve Assessment addresses the potential presence and likely effect on Survey and Manage species.

Pechman Exemptions (2006 Court Order)

Pre-disturbance surveys are not required for:

- a) thinning projects in stands younger than 80 years old;
- b) replacing culverts on roads that are in use and part of the road system, and removing culverts if the road is temporary or to be decommissioned;
- c) riparian and stream improvement projects where the riparian work is riparian planting, obtaining material for placing in-stream, and road or trail decommissioning; and where the stream improvement work is the placement of large wood, channel and floodplain reconstruction, or removal of channel diversions; or
- d) the portions of projects involving hazardous fuel treatments where prescribed fire is applied (note: any portions of a hazardous fuel treatment project involving commercial logging will remain subject to the survey and manage requirements except for thinning of stands younger than 80 years old).

Attachment B—Rationale for Exempting Emergency Actions from Survey and Manage Pre-Disturbance Survey Requirements

Secretarial Memorandum (SM) 1078-006 includes an Emergency Situation Determination (ESD) and highlights the urgent need to address the forest health crisis facing National Forests. The SM describes the importance of taking immediate action to mitigate risk, protect public health and safety and critical infrastructure, support local and rural economies, and mitigate threats to natural resources on National Forest System lands. The Secretary determined that an emergency situation exists in areas where wildfire risk is high or very high and where forests are experiencing declining forest health and are at risk of experiencing substantially increased tree mortality over the next 15 years. To expedite implementation of emergency actions, projects carried out within the ESD geographic area may take advantage of efficiencies afforded by the Emergency Action Determination (EAD) authority. These efficiencies include limiting alternatives considered during National Environmental Policy Act analysis to the “no action” and “proposed action” alternatives and exempting analyses from pre-decisional administrative review procedures. Additionally, for authorized emergency actions, Forest Service personnel are directed to deploy other emergency or administrative authorities to accelerate emergency response.

Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP) Survey and Manage pre-disturbance survey protocols can sometimes add up to two years to project timelines. When confronted with funding or staffing challenges in fulfilling these requirements, land managers may be inclined to forego consideration of treatment in stands that require the surveys. Doing so is counter to the objective of fostering stand resiliency and reducing wildfire risk and is especially problematic where emergency conditions exist. Delays and practices such as these can substantially increase environmental risk.

Forests within the ESD portion of the NWFP area have been experiencing larger and more intense and destructive wildfires as well as increasing amounts of insect-related tree mortality in recent years. Monitoring data collected to evaluate the effectiveness of the Northwest Forest Plan in maintaining sufficient levels of late successional and old-growth forests to support species that depend on older forests shows that within the fire-prone physiographic provinces wildfires and insects accounted for 91.9 percent of older forest loss (1993-2017), whereas timber harvesting accounted for 8.1 percent. Losses from wildfire and insects are significantly higher than losses from active management aimed at reducing those losses, and wildfire losses have increased substantially since 2017. Given the presence of emergency conditions and the increasing risk of loss of older forests to wildfire and insects, it is imprudent to accept delays at any stage of project development, planning, or implementation or to defer pursuing resiliency and risk reduction treatments where land and resource management direction allows them.

Within the NWFP area, approximately 9.5 million acres of National Forest System (NFS) lands (or 48 percent) fall within the geographic boundary of the Secretary’s ESD. This means that nearly half of the NFS land base is characterized as being at high or very high risk of wildfire or experiencing declining forest health likely to lead to increased tree mortality over next 15 years. This data indicates that there is a substantial need to enhance stand resiliency and reduce wildfire

risk in the NWFP area. NWFP effectiveness monitoring data indicates approximately 9.4 million acres of NFS land within the NWFP area is characterized as being within forested stands that are over the age of 80—the threshold at which Survey and Manage pre-disturbance survey requirements generally apply. The majority of these acres (77 percent) are outside of the ESD area or in land allocations such as Wilderness and Late Successional Reserves where land management direction either prohibits active management or favors actions intended to develop or maintain late successional and old growth characteristics. In other words, the majority of late successional and old-growth forest would not be eligible for emergency treatment under SM 1078-006 or exempted from pre-disturbance survey requirements.

The determination to exempt emergency actions planned in accordance with SM 1078-006 from Survey and Manage pre-disturbance survey requirements is consistent with the species persistence objectives included in the Northwest Forest Plan for the following reasons:

- a. Northwest Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines are still applicable and will serve to ensure the persistence and development of late successional and old-growth stands within the plan area.
- b. Most late-successional and old-growth forest within the geographic boundary of the ESD will not likely be proposed for emergency actions.
- c. Management of known sites for Survey and Manage species would still be required as specified in the Standards and Guidelines.