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Comments: March 17, 2025

USDA Forest Service

1220 SW 3rd Ave Ste. G015

Portland, OR, 97204

RE: Northwest Forest Plan Amendment #64745

Dear Forest Service staff,

The Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology) thanks the United States Forest Service (Forest Service) for the opportunity to provide comment on proposed amendments to the Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP) #64745. Ecology and Forest Service Region 6 have enjoyed a longstanding working relationship aimed at protecting water resources and quality in Washington. Ecology encourages strong consideration of the authorities and policies contained in existing water quality regulations and guidance when determining the outcome of proposed amendments to the NWFP. Please consider the following:

* The Federal Water Pollution Control Act (CWA) (33 U.S.C. [sect] 1251 et seq.) is the foundation for surface water quality protection in the United States.

* The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is authorized to delegate implementation of the CWA to the states and has done so in Washington State. In the state of Washington, Chapter 90.48 Revised Code of Washington (RCW) gives Ecology authority and responsibility to protect and manage water quality. Washington State has designated Ecology as the primary state water pollution control agency for CWA purposes, RCW 90.48.260.

* Section 313 of the CWA requires the Forest Service to adhere to the requirements set forth in the state surface water quality laws and regulations in the same manner and to the same extent as any nongovernmental entity.

* Best Management Practices (BMPs) for forest management on non-federal lands are codified in the state Forest Practices Rules (Washington Administrative Code 222) and are further clarified by guidance contained in the Forest Practices Board Manual. Rules marked with an asterisk are agreed to by Ecology because they pertain to water quality (see WAC 222-12-010 and RCW 90.48.420). Ecology recognizes Best Management Practices (BMPs) as the primary mechanism to control nonpoint source pollution on Forest Service lands. Activities on National Forests are obligated to meet or exceed the requirements that apply to non-federal lands. BMPs are also recognized as the primary mechanism to control nonpoint source pollution from land management activities such as recreation, mining, livestock grazing, fire suppression, and fish, wildlife and watershed restoration.

* Ecology strongly recommends any proposed expansion of forest practices operations be accompanied by a commensurate expansion of qualified Forest Service staff to oversee compliance and administration of timber sale contracts and required water quality protections.

* Improperly located or maintained forest roads present a high risk to water quality. Ecology strongly recommends any proposed expansion of forest practices operations be accompanied by a commensurate expansion of engineering resources and funding to upgrade federal forest road infrastructure to Washington State Forest Practices standards. Ecology advises that all water crossing structures be designed and sized adequately to facilitate aquatic organism passage and provide for 100-year flow passage, consistent with state-level protections.

* Forest practices in riparian areas have the potential to negatively impact riparian function, water quality and the aquatic life that depend on clean and cool water. Ecology recommends incorporating a multi-objective strategy to prioritize forest health, resilience, and water quality protection. Consider incorporating stream restoration activities into forest practices activities where feasible to make most efficient use of limited resources.

Ecology looks forward to continuing our partnership with the Forest Service to ensure waters of the state remain protected. Please contact me at chris.briggs@ecy.wa.gov or (360) 890-5882 with any questions.

Sincerely,

Chris Briggs

Forestry Policy Lead

Water Quality Program

Washington Department of Ecology

ATTACHMENT-LETTER TEXT: NWFP_amendments_comments_ECY_3.17.2025.pdf; This is the same content that is coded in text box; it was also included as an attachment