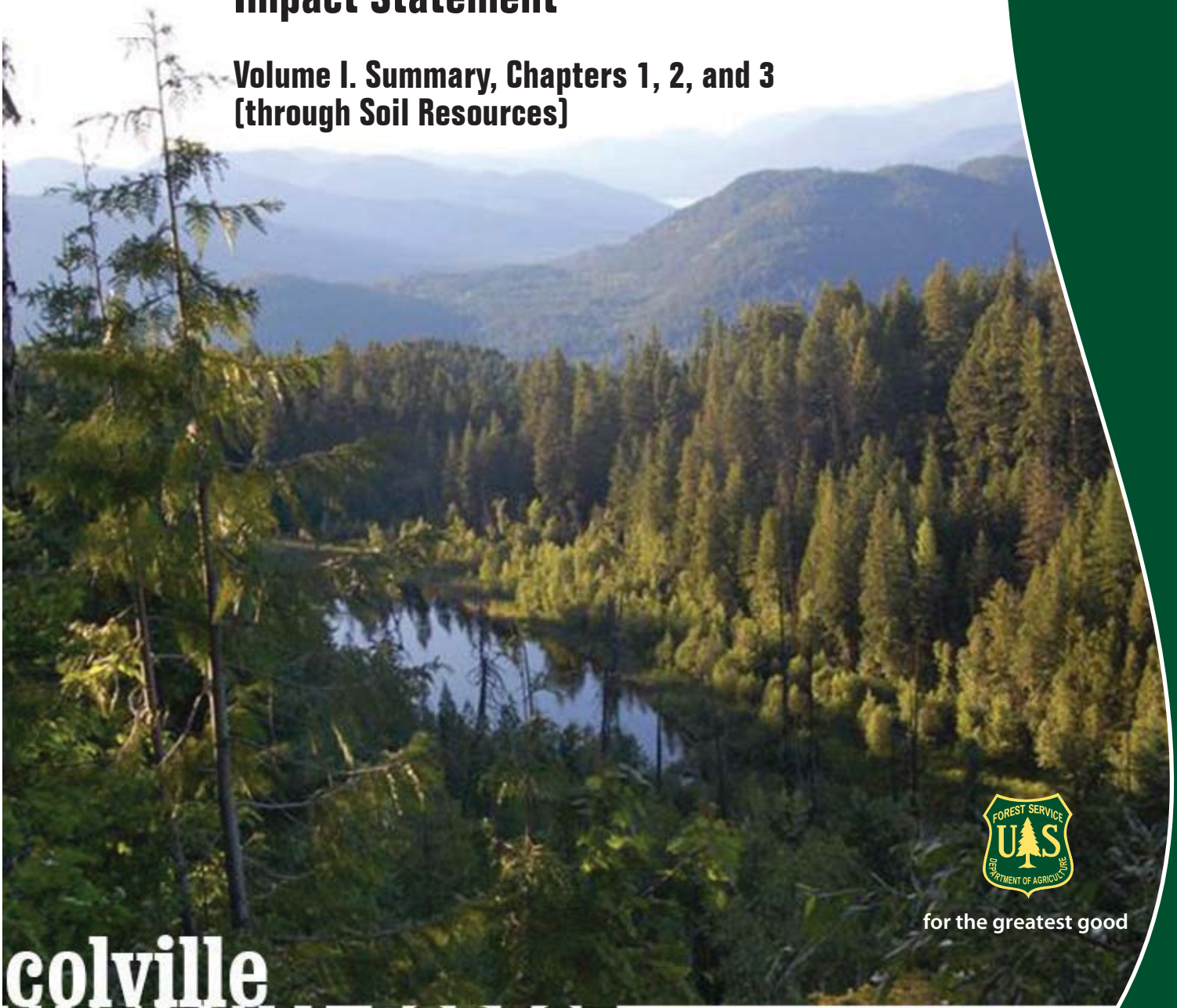
USDA

United States Department of Agriculture

Proposed Revised Land Management Plan for Colville National Forest

Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement

Volume I. Summary, Chapters 1, 2, and 3 (through Soil Resources)



for the greatest good

colville NATIONAL FOREST

January 2016

Cover Photo: First Thot Lake, Three Rivers Ranger District

Proposed Revised Land Management Plan for the Colville National Forest Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement Stevens, Ferry, and Pend Oreille Counties of Washington State

Lead Agency: USDA Forest Service

Cooperating Agencies: Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation
Kalispel Tribe
Spokane Tribe of Indians
State of Washington
Ferry County, Washington
Pend Oreille County, Washington
Stevens County, Washington

Responsible Official: Jim Peña, Regional Forester
USDA Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Region
1220 SW 3rd Avenue
Portland, Oregon 97208

For Information Contact: Amy Dillon, Forest Plan Revision Team
Colville National Forest
Colville Supervisor's Office
765 South Main
Colville, Washington 99114
(509) 684-7000

Website: http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/colville/landmanagement/planning

Abstract: This draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) documents the analysis of six alternatives (no action, proposed action, and alternatives P, R, B, and O) developed by the Forest Service for the programmatic management of approximately 1.1 million acres administered by the Colville National Forest. For ease of reference, the accompanying proposed revised land management plan (revised forest plan) reflects the preferred alternative. The alternatives are described in chapter 2. The no-action alternative would keep in place the management direction from the 1988 land and resource management plan (1988 forest plan), as amended. Alternative P is the preferred alternative.

The proposed action and alternatives P, R, B, and O address the following needs for action: (1) maintain or restore ecological conditions that contribute to the recovery and viability of terrestrial plant and wildlife species; (2) manage forest vegetation conditions to be more resilient to disturbances; (3) address climate change implications and vulnerabilities; (4) address changed social and economic conditions and preferences in light of ecosystem capacity; (5) accelerate improvement in watershed condition across the forest; and (6) integrate watershed and aquatic strategies across the forest.

Alternatives P, R, B, and O address new information and concerns that emerged during the implementation of the 1988 forest plan and comply with Federal laws, regulations, and policies. These alternatives also address significant issues (unresolved conflicts with the proposed action) that were identified from comments received during the scoping and public involvement period.

The Forest Service will use the "predecisional administrative review process," also referred to as the "objection process" described in 36 CFR 219 Subpart B of the 2012 Planning Rule. This process gives an individual or entity an opportunity for an independent Forest Service review and resolution of issues before the approval of a plan revision; this subpart identifies who may file objections to a plan revision, the responsibilities of the participants in an objection, and the procedures that apply to the review of the objection. Generally, individuals and entities who have submitted substantive formal comments related to this plan revision during the opportunities for public comment for this decision may file an objection.

It is important that reviewers provide their comments at such times and in such a way that they are useful to the agency's preparation of the final EIS and proposed revised forest plan. Therefore, comments should be provided before the close of the comment period and should clearly articulate the reviewer's concerns and contentions. The submission of timely and specific comments can affect a reviewer's ability to participate in subsequent administrative or judicial review. Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be part of the public record for this proposed action. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, anonymous comments will not provide the respondent with standing to participate in subsequent administrative or judicial reviews. Comments on the DEIS should be specific and should address the adequacy of the statement and the merits of the alternatives discussed (40 CFR 1503.3)

Send Comments to: **colvilleplanrevision@fs.fed.us**

OR

Amy Dillon, Forest Plan Revision Team
Colville National Forest
Colville Supervisor's Office
765 South Main
Colville, Washington 99114
(509) 684-7280 FAX

Date Comments Must Be Received: Within 90 days following publication of the notice of availability of the DEIS in the Federal Register. The notice is expected to be published on or around February 5, 2016; however, it is the commenter's responsibility to calculate the end of the 90-day period.

Summary

Proposed Action

The Colville National Forest (or the Forest) proposes to revise its 1988 land management plan (forest plan). The area affected by the proposal includes about 1.1 million acres of public land. The revised forest plan would allocate National Forest System (NFS) lands to 13 management areas (MAs) including: Focused Restoration, General Restoration, Backcountry, Backcountry Motorized, Wilderness-Designated, Wilderness-Recommended, Eligible and Suitable Wild and Scenic Rivers, Scenic Byways, Administrative Recreation Sites, and Riparian Management Areas. The proposed MAs represent different management themes with varying emphasis such as vegetation management, watershed restoration, motorized and non-motorized recreation, or special designations designed to sustain the social, economic, and ecological attributes of the Forest.

Allocation to a specific MA is not intended to mandate or direct the Forest Service to propose or implement any action; rather, the MAs provide direction on desired conditions and allowable activities and uses, as described in the revised forest plan, regarding:

- Timber harvest/timber production;
- Commercial and personal use of special forest products and firewood;
- Fire (planned and unplanned ignitions);
- Livestock grazing;
- Motorized use;
- Mechanized use;
- Over-snow motor vehicle use;
- Road construction and reconstruction; and
- Minerals (leasable and saleable mineral materials).

Purpose and Need

The purpose of the action is to revise the 1988 forest plan for the Colville National Forest. The revised forest plan would guide natural resource management activities on the Forest, and address changed conditions and direction that have occurred since the original forest plan (1988 forest plan), while meeting the objectives of Federal law, regulation, and policy. Specifically, the revised forest plan would provide management direction for forest resources both forestwide and specific to management areas.

Over the 25-year life of the forest plan, economic, social, and ecological conditions have changed. New laws, regulations, and policies are in place. Congressional direction, court decisions, conservation agreements, recovery plans, and scientific findings contribute to changed management conditions and support the need for revision. Endangered Species Act species listings have been updated, and new information based on monitoring and scientific research is available. Specific need for change topics include wildlife habitat, vegetative systems, climate change, social systems, and aquatic and riparian systems.

Due to these changed conditions and the age of the forest plan, the Colville National Forest began the process of revising its plan in 2003. The need for revision is based on legal requirements, changed

conditions, and the Analysis of the Management Situation (2015). Revision is also warranted because the forest plan is beyond the 10- to 15-year duration provided by the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) (16 U.S.C. 1606(e) (5) (A)).

Public Involvement

The Colville National Forest started forest plan revision in 2003, followed by public participation, which began in 2004 with community workshops about the need to change the existing forest plan. We held workshops in communities throughout northeastern Washington, with additional workshops on specific topics, including wilderness and recreation from 2005 to 2008. Meetings with representatives from local counties began in 2004, and are being held on a continuing basis throughout the forest plan revision process. Government-to-government consultation with tribal nations and staff-to-staff consultation with their resource specialists began early in the process and continues. State agencies are cooperating agencies. Federal agencies the Forest Service works closely with are the Department of Homeland Security and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. A 2007 memorandum of agreement with the Washington State Association of Counties provides a framework for our work with the three local counties. Three federally recognized tribes have engaged at varied levels: the Colville Confederated Tribes (the Forest's largest neighbors), and the smaller Spokane and Kalispel Tribes. We held additional meetings with interest groups, user groups, State and Federal officials, tribal staff, and industry groups.

In June 2011, the Forest Service published a combined notice announcing that the proposed actions for the Colville and Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forests were available for public review and comment. Public meetings and outreach efforts continued through 2013, based on the information related to both forests.

The 90-day comment period per the 2011 notice drew 27,274 comment letters, of which 889 contained unique and substantially different comments. We received letters, emails, form letters, and public comment forms from tribes, individuals, organizations, agencies, businesses, and groups from 15 states in the United States and British Columbia, Canada; however, this does not include state affiliation for all of the form letters. We analyzed 3,250 comments from the 889 comment letters to identify the significant issues driving the alternatives.

After the comment period, the regional forester determined that the most effective process to reflect public input and resource needs was to separate the Colville and Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forests' plan revision effort. Moving forward from today, the DEIS reflects issues and alternatives specific to the Colville National Forest only. The Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest is in the process of developing a proposed forest plan and completing a separate analysis specific to its resource needs and public input specific to that forest. All input, including public comments received to date, will continue to be part of each forest plan revision, as appropriate.

Significant Issues

Six significant issues led to the development of multiple programmatic strategies (or alternatives) for revising the plan. A summary of these alternatives as well as analysis of the environmental consequences they pose are the focus of this draft environmental impact statement (DEIS).

- Old forest (late-successional) management, and timber production
- Motorized recreation trails
- Access
- Recommended wilderness areas

- Wildlife
- Riparian and aquatic resource management

Alternatives

The six issues led the agency to develop six alternatives. Table 1 provides a short description of each alternative.

Table 1. Short description of alternatives considered in detail

Alternative	Short Description
1988 Forest Plan – No-action alternative	The "no-action alternative" reflects current management practices under the existing forest plan, as amended and implemented. It provides the basis for comparing the existing condition to the proposed action and the alternatives. If the decisionmaker were to choose to continue to implement the 1988 forest plan versus choosing a revised alternative, interim direction in the Inland Native Fish Strategy for the Intermountain, Northern, and Pacific Northwest Regions (INFISH) and the Management Direction Establishing Riparian, Ecosystem and Wildlife Standards for Timber Sales (Eastside Screens) would be considered final direction for the Colville National Forest (i.e., would no longer be considered interim). Continuing with the current forest plan would provide an annual predicted wood sale quantity (PWSQ) volume of 41 MMBF with an estimated wage contribution of $19,335,000. There is no recommended wilderness in the 1988 forest plan.
Proposed Action	The June 2011 proposed action addresses the need for change. It applies landscape ecology concepts to provide for ecological resilience to disturbances, including the effects of climate change and incorporates new science related to the recovery of terrestrial and aquatic threatened and endangered species. The overarching emphasis of this alternative would be to apply active vegetation management in a dynamic landscape approach to increase vegetation resilience and move the landscape toward desired conditions. Silvicultural prescriptions such as variable density thinning and free selection would promote structural and landscape complexity on 71 percent of the forest. Planned and unplanned ignitions would be used as management tools across the Forest, but would be emphasized on 30 percent of the Forest. The proposed action would provide an annual predicted wood sale quantity (PWSQ) volume of 62 MMBF with an estimated wage contribution of $31,224,000. The proposed action would recommend 101,390 acres of additional wilderness and would provide backcountry recreation management emphasis on 14 percent of the Forest. The proposed action adopts the Aquatic and Riparian Conservation Strategy (ARCS), replacing INFISH with a long-term strategy that uses best science and aligns species and water quality recovery plans.
Alternative P	The overall vegetation management approach, outputs in alternative P, and backcountry recreation management would be similar to the proposed action. Alternative P would create the Kettle Crest Special Interest Area (approximately 82,800 acres). This management area allocation would recognize and protect outstanding recreation opportunities in a semi-primitive setting while allowing continued motorized and mechanized recreation opportunities. In response to comments on the proposed action, alternative P would recommend 68,300 acres of wilderness. Like the proposed action, alternative P would adopt ARCS. However, it would also expand the key watershed network, and increase riparian protection through additional plan components (ARCS-modified).

Alternative	Short Description
Alternative R	Alternative R would emphasize a large-scale reserve approach for late-successional forest structure, emphasizing a passive management approach to reach desired conditions. Silvicultural prescriptions such as shelterwood with reserves and variable density thinning would be used on 22 percent of the Forest, in consideration of the 21-inch upper diameter limit on cutting live trees. Planned and unplanned ignitions would be used as management tools across the Forest, but would be emphasized on 75 percent of the Forest. Alternative R would provide an annual predicted wood sale quantity (PWSQ) volume of 14 MMBF with an estimated wage contribution of $6,692,000. Alternative R would recommend 207,800 acres of additional wilderness. Alternative R would take the same aquatic strategy approach as alternative P through ARCS-modified.
Alternative B	The intent of alternative B is to addresses the concerns of multiple constituencies in one alternative by balancing land allocations between areas emphasizing active management (timber management zones) (43 percent), emphasizing a mix of active and passive management (Restoration Areas) (31 percent), and emphasizing passive management (recommended and designated wilderness) (23 percent). Alternative B would retain the Eastside Screens, 21-inch upper diameter limit for cutting live trees, and the large-scale reserve approach for late-successional forest structure. It would include additional plan components limit mechanical restoration treatments (timber harvest) in late-successional structure to dry plant association groups only. Alternative B would provide an annual predicted wood sale quantity (PWSQ) volume of 37 MMBF with an estimated wage contribution of $17,428,000. This alternative would recommend 220,330 acres of additional wilderness and would emphasize non-motorized recreation opportunities. Alternative B would retain and integrate the INFISH, continuing riparian area management similar to the no-action alternative. Where plan components were not identified by the collaborative group, the 1988 Colville Forest Plan (no-action alternative) would provide plan direction (remain unchanged).
Alternative O	Similar to alternative B, the intent of alternative O is to balance land allocations between areas emphasizing active management (Responsible Management Areas) (39 percent), emphasizing a mix of active and passive management (Restoration Areas) (34 percent), and emphasizing passive management (backcountry and recommended/designated wilderness) (25 percent). Alternative O would create the Kettle Crest Special Interest Area. This management area allocation would recognize and protect outstanding recreation opportunities in a semi-primitive setting while allowing continued motorized and mechanized recreation opportunities. Similar to alternative B, alternative O would retain the Eastside Screens, 21-inch upper diameter limit for cutting live trees, and the large-scale reserve approach for late-successional forest structure. It would include additional plan components to limit mechanical restoration treatments (timber harvest) to a one-time entry. This alternative would recommend fewer acres of additional wilderness (15,950 acres) than alternative B, and would instead emphasize backcountry recreation opportunities (21 percent). Alternative O would provide an annual predicted wood sale quantity (PWSQ) volume of 38 MMBF with an estimated wage contribution of $17,465,000. Where the collaborative group did not identify plan components, the proposed action would provide plan direction. This includes the proposed action's approach to adopt ARCS.

All alternatives represent, to varying degrees, the principles of multiple-use, and ecological and economic sustainability. The alternatives provide basic protection of forest resources and comply fully with applicable laws, regulations, and policies. In addition, all the alternatives would:

- Meet the purpose and need for change or address one or more significant issues;
- Conserve soil and water resources and not allow significant or permanent impairment of the productivity of the land;
- Provide protections for riparian areas;
- Maintain air quality that meets or exceeds applicable Federal, State, and/or local standards or regulations;
- Include measures for preventing the destruction or adverse modification of critical habitat for threatened and endangered species;
- Protect heritage resources;
- Recognize the unique status of American Indian tribes and their rights retained by trust and executive order with the United States, including consultation requirements;
- Provide sustained multiple uses, products, and services in an environmentally acceptable manner (including leasable and locatable minerals, timber, livestock forage, and recreation opportunities);
- Retain existing designated areas (e.g., wilderness areas, scenic byways, national scenic trails); and
- Retain all existing permitted activities and facilities.[1]

The following would not change among alternatives:

- **Developed Recreation Sites –** Existing developed recreation sites would be retained in all alternatives, and no developed recreation sites would be removed or created. Allocation of administrative recreation sites would remain constant for all action alternatives.
- **Eligible Wild and Scenic Rivers –** The two rivers identified as eligible for inclusion in the Wild and Scenic River System for the 1988 forest plan (8 miles) are carried forward in this revision effort and would not vary by alternative.
- **Designated Wilderness –** The Salmo-Priest Wilderness Designation would remain constant for all alternatives.
- **Research Natural Areas (RNAs) –** Allocations of RNAs would remain constant for all alternatives.

Comparison of Alternatives

Chapter 3 presents a detailed description of the effects of the alternatives. Table 2 provides a summary of effects by revision topic.

[1] All permits will be reviewed for compliance with the revised forest plan. Any permit found to be out of compliance will be brought into compliance as soon as practicable using a variety of tools, including modifications or amendments to the permit.

120 **Table 2. Comparison of some plan revision key indicators**

Resource and Indicator	No-action	Proposed Action	Alt. P	Alt. R	Alt. B	Alt. O
Vegetation						
Uses a Fixed Reserves, connectivity corridors and Diameter Limit Management Approach for Managing Late-successional Reserves and Old Forest Habitat Versus Dynamic Landscape Management Approach	Fixed Reserves, connectivity corridors and Diameter Limit	Dynamic Landscape	Dynamic Landscape	Fixed Reserves and Diameter Limit	Fixed Reserves, connectivity corridors and Diameter Limit	Fixed Reserves, connectivity corridors and Diameter Limit
Timber Production[2]						
Acres/Percentage Suitable for Timber Production	535,725 48%	653,242 59%	656,628 60%	129,420 12%	384,485 35%	347,535 32%
Acres/Percent Harvest Allowed for Other Resource Objectives	323,025 29%	205,508 19%	202,122 18%	729,330 66%	474,265 43%	511,215 46%
Predicted Wood Sale Quantity[3] MMBF CCF	41 82,800	62 125,900	62 125,400	14 28,900	37 77,000	38 77,000
Roads						
Percent of Forest Suitable for Roads	83%	73%	75%	75%	74%	74%
Recommended Wilderness						
Acres/Percent Recommended for Wilderness	0	101,390 9%	68,300 6%	207,800 19%	220,330 20%	15,950 1%
Designation of Kettle Crest Special Interest Area	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Recreation						
Percent Forestwide Where Roads, Trails, and Areas may be Designated for Motor Vehicle Use	89%	79%	80%	76%	75%	78%
Wildlife						
Old Forest Management Plan Direction Contribution to Viability	Low	Moderate	High	High	Low	Low
Riparian Habitat						
Number of Subwatersheds with Improved Trend	7	12	15	15	15	7

[2] All outputs present in annual measurements
[3] Predicted wood sale quantity includes both commercial and non-commercial (e.g., firewood) wood products sold, on average, per year.

Table of Contents

Volume I: Summary, Chapters 1, 2, and 3 (through Soil Resources)

Volume II: Chapter 3 (Wildlife through Tribal Resources), Chapter 4, Literature Cited, Glossary, Appendices, and Index

Volume I. List of Tables

Volume I. List of Figures