



Finding Balance in the Woods of Northeast Washington

Meet the Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition



Hillsides golden with larch, night skies lit only by starlight, and a still vibrant timber industry make our home in the Columbia Highlands of northeastern Washington a special place to live, work, and play. Here, where the Columbia enters the United States, the great river shapes the landscape. Heavily glaciated, forested uplands connect the Selkirk Mountains of the western Rockies through the Kettle River Range and on to the Okanogan Highlands. The valleys are rich in wildlife.

From cutting-edge collaborative forestry on projects from Burnt Valley to Malo East Lakes, to the call for lasting stewardship of our wilderness heritage for places including Abercrombie Mountain and the Kettle Crest, the Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition is finding the right balance to sustain strong local communities and a diverse natural landscape.

"I support the concept of a blueprint for sustainability in the forest systems of northeast Washington State, to create jobs and properly preserve forest resources for future generations and economic growth in our state."

—Representative George R. Nethercutt, Jr., 5th District of Washington

A Winning Plan for



Thirteenmile Basin in the Kettle River Range. Photo Jasmine Minbashian

In May 2002, after years of legal gridlock, timber industry and forest conservation leaders decided to stop fighting, start talking, and invite the public in to take part. The Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition is a collaborative forestry alliance that includes timber mill owners, conservationists, government

workers, contract loggers, and others. They all share the desire to tackle challenges and find solutions to restore damaged forests, protect homes and communities from wildfire, provide for the needs of wildlife, and maintain our wilderness heritage in and around the Colville National Forest.

Working Together

The Coalition has developed a blueprint for cooperative communication and, from that, a community plan.



Coalition members in the field. Photo Jim Doran

The plan offers a balance of management in the Colville National Forest that restores healthy forests and maintains the traditional ways of life dependent on those forests. Here are some of the goals of what the Coalition is proposing:

- Thin forests to reduce fire risk to homes and create a defensible space for fire-fighters to fight wildfire.
- Sustainably manage our forests using innovative forestry techniques to support rural economies.
- Use thinning to restore historic, old-growth forests.
- Maintain the wilderness characteristics of our roadless backcountry.
- Work with the Forest Service to create a streamlined decision-making process.
- Maintain access for a diversity of recreation interests.

“Just the fact that people from all sides are sitting down together and coming up with solutions ahead of the problem rather than just responding to problems is such a major step forward.”

**—Dean Cummings,
commissioner for Pend
Oreille County**



The Right Balance

Today the Coalition has grown to include more than two dozen active participants, including businesses such as Columbia-Cedar, Ponderay Newsprint, Vaagen Brothers Lumber Company, and Avista, as well as conservation groups such as Conservation Northwest and The Lands Council, and other recreation interests.

The Coalition has turned its problem-solving skills to the Colville National Forest, crafting a management proposal that restores healthy forests, protects clean water, safeguards wildlife, reduces wildfire risk, supports recreation needs, and maintains a viable timber industry.

Local Economy

In 2007, the Coalition hired Headwaters Economics to analyze the economic impact of its forest management proposals on counties in northeast Washington. The report predicted that timber harvests from the Colville National Forest under the Coalition's plan could create 220 to 440 new jobs in the wood products industry. Their analysis also found that across the West similar counties showed long-term growth after federal lands were protected.



Lynx. Photo Don Getty

People and Wildlife



Vaagen Brothers mill. Photo James Johnston

“As much as we long for the good ol’ days, we must move forward for the health of our communities and forests—and that is what the Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition is doing.”

—Ron Gray, Avista Utilities, Kettle Falls Generating Station

“Peer analysis shows that the economies of counties similar to those in the study area with wilderness solidly outperform similar counties with little or no wilderness. This is true both for growth measures like employment and total personal income, and quality measures like earnings per job and per capita income.”

The Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition has six years of collaborative success stories, that represent a model of cooperation, including zero appeals of timber projects, development of principles of good forestry, job preservation and creation, and environmental protection. The Coalition’s community plan promotes ecosystem health, economic growth, and protection of wild forests.

A Place for Wildlife

The Columbia Highlands and Colville National Forest are home to diverse wildlife, including animals more common to the Rocky Mountains such as moose and bighorn sheep. These lands give important habitat for grizzly bear, lynx, wolverine, fisher, marten, mountain caribou, and red-band, bull, and westslope cutthroat trout.

Nearly 200 bird species also frequent this unparalleled area. Dozens of sensitive species of ferns and flowers grace the landscape, including scalloped grape fern and yellow lady’s slipper orchid. The mountainous terrain provides excellent habitat and hunting opportunities for mule deer, white-tailed deer, elk, turkeys, and black bear.

“The Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition has done more locally to balance the environmental, social, and economic long-term effect of federal land management than any single group currently working in the Western United States.”
—John Eminger, owner of 49 Degrees North ski area and Coalition member



Elk. Photo Trygve Steen

Sportsmen’s Bounty

Many sportsmen travel into the woods and to the wild streams for an escape and to bask in a place free of everyday stress. Primitive backcountry areas, missing the drone and exhaust of our busy working world, offer a perfect environment to hunt, fish, and view wildlife.

“If hunters and anglers were a corporation, they would rank #11 on the Fortune 500 list, as they contribute \$70 billion to the annual economy through licenses, fees, taxes, and accommodations,” says a report by the Sonoran Institute on the economic benefits of hunting.

Roadless wild forests are home to thriving fish and wildlife populations. For example, according to Trout Unlimited, today more than 60 percent of the remaining healthy populations of westslope, greenback, and Colorado River cutthroat trout are found in roadless areas.

Just as roadless wild forests contain some of the best hunting and fishing opportunities, they also provide critically important refuge for wildlife.

“The Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition consists of highly dedicated, technically sound professionals from a diversity of interests and backgrounds. Their collaborative efforts are exemplary: Colville National Forest management has improved, timber harvest has increased, and the Tri-County area has benefited financially.”

—Claudia Michalke, retired, Stevens County Conservation District



Community fire planning meeting with the Chewelah Fire District near Burnt Valley.
Photo Lloyd McGee

“It is important that we consider all points of view as we manage our resources and respect the environment we all share. Cooperation and collaboration are essential to finding common ground in our efforts to promote sustainable economic development.”

—Malcolm Friedman, commissioner for Stevens County



Fireweed on Abercrombie Mountain. Photo James Johnston

Reducing Fire Risk, Increasing Timber Production

The Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition has worked to raise money for projects that reduce the wildfire risk for communities near forested areas and that generate more board feet of timber. The Coalition has already helped raise Colville National Forest timber production from 20 million board feet in 2002 to 40 million board feet in 2007. Here are some of the successful projects the Coalition has recently been involved in.

Quartzite was the Coalition's initial involvement in collaborative forestry to improve a Forest Service project bigger than 4,000 acres. The Quartzite Stewardship Project is now nearing completion.

Burnt Valley, the first project completed with the Coalition's involvement, generated around 1.2 million board feet of timber while focusing on the area of greatest priority for the Forest Service and high priority in the Chewelah Wildfire Plan. Here, stewardship contracting authority was used to thin stands and create fuel breaks. Burnt Valley is currently being used as a model template for future wildfire reduction projects and as a banner example of the collaborative effort.



Large trees were retained through selective thinning at the Orient Stewardship Project site. Photo Dave Heflick

Orient Stewardship Project, involving 513 acres, was also recently completed by the Coalition to protect communities from wildfire by reducing fuels in the wildland-urban interface. The Coalition is finishing planning on two other fuels reduction projects meant to reduce fire risk near homes and towns: the Malo-East Lakes Stewardship Project in Ferry County and the Misery Lakes Stewardship Project in Pend Oreille County. The projects are expected to generate 10 million board feet each.

Bangs WUI Project is located southwest of Kettle Falls and extends to the Colville National Forest boundary with lands of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Indian Reservation. The Coalition gave the Forest Service a high level of support in this wildland-urban interface, or WUI, because the project was focused around communities and included no road construction or logging of old growth. As a result, 1,277 acres were treated and 4 million board feet of timber removed—thanks to the support and help of the Coalition.

"The Coalition, with the help of many others, created the first attempt to look at fire planning in the big picture and I was excited to work with them. I give the Coalition the credit for working hard to get everyone on board and taking many disparate efforts and bringing them together."

—Dick Dunton, 35-year veteran of the Department of Natural Resource's fire management program and Coalition member

Get Out in the Woods with the Coalition

Join the Coalition on one of our forest field trips exploring the beauty and bounty of the Columbia Highlands. Upcoming tours include fall monitoring trips to Bangs Mountain and Burnt Valley, and fall 2008 field tours.

Call 509-747-1663 for more information.

Help Bring Balance Back to the Woods

Write your representatives!

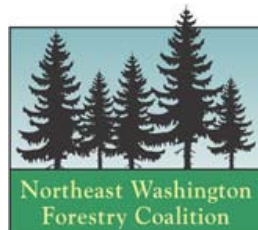
Contact Representative Cathy McMorris Rodgers, Senator Maria Cantwell, and Senator Patty Murray to let them know you support the Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition's community plan to restore, enhance, and maintain healthy forests in the Colville National Forest.

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Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition



Coalition board meetings are held monthly and are open to the public. If you or your group would like to give a presentation to the steering committee or would like the Coalition to give a presentation to your club, organization, business, or church, please contact Executive Director Claudia Michalke at 509-684-3281 or claudia@ultraplix.com.

Visit www.newforestrycoalition.org