

A Summary of Washington State's Historic Climate-Related 2021 Legislation and Its Beneficial Impact on the Forestlands Sector of the Methow Valley – Prepared by the Climate Action Plan's Implementation Hub

A. Methow Valley Climate Action Plan (CAP) – Forestlands Sector

1) Following are some key recommendations in the CAP

- Prioritize long-term investments in the forest health and restoration with a 100+ year outlook;
- Adopt restoration practices for warmer, drier weather;
- Use prescribed fire to maintain open forest structure, integrate tribal knowledge to improve fire management and burning practices;
- Limit development in forested landscapes when it endangers people and habitat;
- Engage with land management agencies; and
- Adopt Firewise and fire adapted landscape codes and guidelines.

2) All of this should be accomplished with the overriding goal of achieving environmental justice for all.

B. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report (IPCC)

- The recent landmark IPCC report states that there is no remaining scientific doubt that humans are fueling climate change. The only real uncertainty that remains, its 234 authors state, is whether the world can muster the will to stave off a darker future than the one it already has carved in stone.
- UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres called the findings “a code red for humanity”.
- Carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has risen to levels not seen in 2 million years, the authors state.
- Weather related disasters are growing extreme and affecting every region of the world.
- The authors are not without hope, however. In the best-case scenario, the world rapidly phases out fossil fuels, embraces renewable energy on a massive scale and overhauls how humans work, eat and travel. Natural systems such as forests and human inventions such as carbon-capture operations pull more and more carbon out of the atmosphere.
- In this scenario, the world reaches “net-zero” emissions around the year 2050, and warming stabilizes at about 1.5 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels. Humans adapt to the new planet we have created.
- Notably, the IPCC report underscores that humans have a profound opportunity to shape a better future by sharply reducing emissions. “Every little bit counts”, say the authors.

C. Climate Change and Social Vulnerability in the United States: A Focus on Six Impact Sectors

- EPA's new, peer-reviewed report shows the degree to which certain socially vulnerable populations – defined based on income, educational attainment, race and ethnicity, and age – may be more exposed to the highest impacts of climate change.
- The report quantifies six types of impacts, including those to health from changes in air quality and extreme temperature, disruptions to weather-exposed workers, and flooding threats to property.

D. Historic Washington State legislation in 2021 will beneficially impact the forestlands sector of the Methow Valley.

1) Wildfire Response, Forest Restoration and Community Resilience Act – HB 1168

- This spring, the Washington State Legislature passed HB 1168, a first-of-its-kind wildfire response, forest restoration, and community resilience funding in the state budget.
- This bill supports proactive wildfire resilience across Washington – including community preparedness, forest health and fire response capacity – and will move Washington to a more sustainable and fire resilient landscape.
- This bill prioritizes workforce development in historically underrepresented and marginalized communities, partners with tribal nations, and increases engagement with non-English speaking communities on wildfire preparedness.
- The legislature noted that “opportunities exist to boost our rural economies through wildfire preparation and preparedness that maintain and attract private sector investments and employment in rural communities.”
- The legislature also stated its intent to ensure that Washington’s most vulnerable populations are not disproportionately burdened by the impact and consequences of wildfire.
- The legislature intends to provide \$125 million every two years over eight years for a total of \$500 million to fund the following crucial investments:

a. Fully fund DNR’s Wildland Fire Protection 10-Year Strategic Plan and DNR’s 20-Year Forest Health Strategic Plan.

b. Wildfire response:

i. Aerial firefighting: DNR plans to spend \$17.2 million to buy new aircraft and improve its aging helicopter fleet.

ii. Firefighters: 100 firefighters will be added and DNR will pay minimum wage to the Department of Corrections for crews staffed with incarcerated people.

- iii. New technology: Among other technologies, a camera system will replace many fire lookouts.
- iv. Bulldozers: DNR plans to purchase and staff 20 new bulldozers which will be used to create fire breaks between fires and populated areas.
- v. Local fire crews: DNR plans to spend \$11.8 million to expand local fire departments in fire-prone areas of the state.

c. Forest restoration:

- i. Restore fire-prone forests: In addition to fully funding DNR's 20-Year Forest Health Strategy Plan, which calls for DNR to restore natural wildfire resistance to 1.25 million acres of forest, a forest restoration workforce will be paid to make Washington's state and federal lands less combustible.
- ii. Train the forest restoration workforce: The bill will enable Washington to set up programs at Washington State University and other institutions to train the forest restoration workforce.

d. Community resilience:

- i. Invest in defensive strategies: DNR will invest in defensive strategies at the community level, such as creating fuel breaks, prescribed fire, and creating defensible green space.
- ii. Firewise: DNR will provide direct assistance to homeowners to secure their property with programs like Firewise. \$13 million has been designated for the new Wildfire Ready Neighbors program in Okanogan County.
- iii. Community grants: \$4.3 million will be devoted to grants to help communities at risk of catastrophic fires prepare for them.

Questions should be directed to Darwin Forsyth at darwin.forsyth@dnr.wa.gov.

2) Evergreen Communities Act - HB 1216

- Landmark legislation for urban forestry in Washington.
- The Act will provide grants to use for tree inventories and canopy analyses to identify priority projects and locations for urban forestry enhancements.
- Grants will also be available for funding tree planting, maintenance projects, public education, and tree ordinances.
- Grants must be spent within the fiscal year (July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2022).

Questions should be directed to Ben Thompson at ben.thompson@dnr.wa.gov.

3) Utility Wildland Fire Prevention Advisory Committee – HB 5158

- Two years ago, the Washington State Legislature created the Electric Utilities Wildland Fire Prevention Task Force that focused on ways to prevent wildfires.
- The critical work included an effort to begin drafting model agreements to remove dangerous trees, developing communications protocols, and begin considering investigation recommendations.
- After the task force released its recommendations to the Legislature, Washington State Senator Brad Hawkins sponsored SB 5158, that will direct Public Lands Commissioner Hilary Franz to work with the Utility Wildland Fire Prevention Advisory Committee to implement recommendations offered by the Utility Wildland Fire Prevention Task Force.

Questions should be directed to Senator Hawkins' office at (360) 786-7622 or brad.hawkins@leg.wa.gov.

4) C-6 Forest to Farm

- The Washington State legislature agreed to fund the C6 Forest to Farm's biochar research demonstration project in the Methow Valley.
- C-6's plan is to establish local infrastructure to cleanly and efficiently process forest waste materials into biochar. Biochar production offers the opportunity to sequester about half the carbon contained in the forest waste materials with little carbon released and produce a highly stable soil amendment that can significantly increase crop yields by helping to improve agricultural soil health.
- C-6's research project lays the groundwork for productively using the excess forest fuels that feed extreme, catastrophic wildfires.

Questions should be directed to Tom McCoy, Executive Director, C-6 Forest to Farm.

5) Conservations Works

- The Washington State legislature approved a capital budget package totaling \$448 million for important projects statewide, including \$16.3 million for Community Forest grants that protect working forest jobs and keep economic gains local.

- Eligible projects: Cities, counties, towns, non-profit nature conservancy organizations, Native American tribes, special purpose districts, public development authorities, and State agencies that:
 - a) Purchase land to conserve working forests and
 - b) On the purchased land, projects may also restore forest and habitat health and develop recreational facilities.

E. Carbon Sequestering Programs

- 1) Existing incentive programs currently provide a variety of opportunities for forest landowners in Washington to maintain or enhance carbon storage and sequestration.
- 2) These programs range from carbon offset markets, which engage forest landowners in selling credits to companies or individuals to compensate for carbon emissions elsewhere, to more indirect incentives such as US Department of Agriculture cost-share programs that support forest stewardship actions such as tree planting or writing a forest management plan.
- 3) Forest carbon offset programs exist for private landowners in the Methow Valley who own standing timber, and who agree to not harvest the large trees for a significant period of time so large amounts of carbon are sequestered in the soil. Programs also exist for private landowners who lost standing timber as a result of natural disturbances such as wildfires, and who plan to replant trees in the disturbed area.
- 4) The Implementation Hub will serve as a resource to private landowners in the Methow Valley who are interested in exploring forest carbon sequestering programs.

F. For a deeper dive, following are links to additional forestlands-related resources in Washington:

- 1) DNR's 20-year Forest Health Strategic Plan.
<https://www.dnr.wa.gov/ForestHealthPlan>
- 2) Washington State Wildland Fire Protection 10year Strategic plan
https://www.dnr.wa.gov/publications/rp_wildfire_strategic_plan.pdf
- 3) Urban and Community forestry paper prepared by DNR.
<https://www.dnr.wa.gov/urbanforestry>
- 4) Growing Healthy forests in Washington paper prepared by DNR.
<https://www.dnr.wa.gov/ForestHealth>

5) Washington Environmental Council's "State of our Forests and Public Lands – 2021" paper.

<https://wecprotects.org/state-of-our-forests-and-public-lands/>

6) Washington State Senator Brad Hawkins' Washington Wildfires Legislation summary.
<https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/WALEGSRCHAWKINS/bulletins/2bcd734>

7) EPA's new Environmental Justice Report.
<https://www.epa.gov/newsreleases/epa-report-shows-disproportionate-impacts-climate-change-socially-vulnerable>

8) Summary of Natural and Working Lands Carbon Inventories and Incentive Programs in Washington.
https://app.leg.wa.gov/ReportsToTheLegislature/Home/GetPDF?fileName=DNR%20Carbon%20Sequestration%20Report_8f19b00b-5acf-4c97-83b4-16cecb559803.pdf