

Diana Dupuis
Director



STATE OF WASHINGTON
WASHINGTON STATE PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION

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July 18, 2024

Item E-3: Sale of Excess Timber from Forest Health Treatments - Requested Action

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: This item asks the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission to approve the sale of excess timber resulting from forest health projects at Nisqually and Riverside state parks. This item advances the Commission’s strategic goal: “Resource Protection: Protect ecosystems and habitat for long-term sustainability.”

SIGNIFICANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION: Through RCW 79A.05.035, the Legislature directs that the Commission shall “manage timber and land under its jurisdiction to maintain and enhance aesthetic and recreational values” and “apply modern conservation practices to maintain and enhance aesthetic, recreational, and ecological resources.” At present, some of Washington’s state park forests are in poor ecological condition as a result of wildfire suppression, historic cutting practices, fragmentation, insect and disease infestations, invasion by exotic species, and direct impacts of park development and recreational activities. These factors alone or in combination compromise forest health and increase the risk of catastrophic loss of entire forest stands to wildfire, disease, and pests. Poor forest health also increases the likelihood of failure of individual trees and branches, thereby increasing risk to the safety of park visitors, staff, and property.

Stewardship interventions are sometimes required to enhance the health of our forested park landscapes. Treatment methodologies often include salvage of diseased and infested trees, removal of hazards, and thinning of smaller trees to reduce competition between trees. The aim of these treatments is to improve overall forest health, making forests in the park more resilient. Staff is proposing treatments at Nisqually and Riverside state parks to enhance forest health.

Nisqually State Park is a 1,300-acre property in Pierce and Thurston counties that will become the first new full-service state park created since 1996. Acquisition of park lands began in 1991, with most property purchased from Weyerhaeuser Company. The park’s former industrial timber plantations were clearcut and replanted from the mid-1980’s to early 1990’s. The resulting forest arose from 30 years of passive management that allowed some level of plantation failure and natural succession, but which has largely resulted in densely stocked, uniform Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) stands. There is a high incidence of a native forest pathogen, laminated root rot (*Coniferiporia sulphurascens*) in the Douglas-fir trees within the park’s former timber plantations.

The proposed forest health treatments at Nisqually State Park seek to:

- Thin dense monodominant Douglas-fir plantation forests in portions of the park to reduce the risk of stagnation and stand collapse, enhance residual tree health and vigor to be resilient to natural disturbances, improve wildlife habitat, promote the maturation of diverse natural forest species and structure, and improve both aesthetics and the recreational experience for park visitors.
- Reduce populations of noxious weeds in the forest.
- Represent the interests of the Nisqually Indian Tribe in forest health management.
- Remove hazard trees that threaten visitor and staff safety, park property, utility infrastructure, and public roadways.

The proposed thinning will take place on approximately 209 acres of forest in four different management units within the park. The thinning will be completed by a contract logger and the majority of the timber will be removed from the park and sold to local mills. The estimated volume of timber to be sold is 1.6 million board-feet.

Riverside State Park is a 9,400-acre park along the Spokane River near Spokane. The park is dominated by dry ponderosa pine forest that, in many areas, is overstocked due to suppression of natural fires over the last century that the ecology of these forests depends on. In the Seven Mile Road area of the park, the forest stands consist of multi-story mature ponderosa pine with some Douglas-fir on shadier slopes, intermittent legacy trees, and an understory with scattered individuals and dense thickets of young trees.

The proposed forest health treatments at Riverside State Park seek to:

- Thin densely spaced trees in portions of the forest to reduce the risk of future catastrophic fire and insect infestation events, enhance residual tree health and wildlife habitat, return tree species composition and forest structure to a more historical and resilient state, and improve both aesthetics and recreational experience for park visitors.
- Reduce wildfire risk to park lands, neighboring homes and property, and the broader Spokane community.
- Remove hazard trees that threaten visitor and staff safety, park property, utility infrastructure, and public roadways.

The proposed thinning will take place on approximately 342 acres of forest in one contiguous area within the park. The thinning will be completed by a contract logger and the majority of the timber will be removed from onsite and sold to local mills. The estimated volume of timber to be sold is 1.1 million board-feet.

These two forest health projects are proposed to begin in fall of 2024 and continue through spring 2025. Due to the low merchantable value of the wood being removed and the high logging costs associated with thinning, it is not clear at this time whether the sale of timber from these projects will be a net positive or negative in log sale revenue relative to the cost of tree felling and removal. A reasonable estimated maximum of \$100,000 in net timber sale revenue is anticipated from both projects combined. A full appraisal will be generated before the sale of any timber or selection of a logging contractor. Additional project costs, including staff time, consultants, materials, permitting, and post-treatment cleanup and mitigation are not factored into revenue estimates from the sale of timber. These costs are expected to exceed the maximum expected net revenue, meaning both projects are expected to result in a net cost to the agency.

Under WAC 352-28-020 (3), the Commission must approve sales of timber where the cruised volume of the timber is in excess of one million board-feet. Both the Nisqually and Riverside projects exceed this threshold. Therefore, Commission approval is needed if the trees from these two proposed forest health treatments are to be sold.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: For the proposed forest health projects at Nisqually and Riverside state parks, cutting trees and leaving them on the ground is incompatible with current recreational use, unnecessary for ecological purposes, increases the risk of wildfire, and exacerbates insect and disease infestations. Staff therefore believes that these trees exceed park needs and recommends that the Commission approve their sale in accordance with adopted agency rules and policies. Staff further recommends that the Commission affirm existing policy to limit use of proceeds of timber sales to natural resource stewardship and related interpretive activities only.

LEGAL AUTHORITY: RCW 79A.05.035

SUPPORTING INFORMATION:

Appendix 1: Map of Proposed Forest Health Treatment Area at Nisqually State Park

Appendix 2: Map of Proposed Forest Health Treatment Area at Riverside State Park

REQUESTED ACTION FROM COMMISSION:

That the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission:

1. Delegate to the Director authority to approve the sale of timber at Nisqually and Riverside state parks, as recommended by staff.
2. Affirm that cash proceeds from the sale of timber will be reinvested into natural resource stewardship and related interpretive activities as recommended by staff.

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Reviewer(s):

Kira Swanson, SEPA REVIEW: Reviewed June 27, 2024 - On June 25, 2024, Washington Department of Natural Resources issued a Determination of Non-Significance, under the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA), for Nisqually State Park Forest Health Thinning. The SEPA comment period will close July 9, 2024. On June 27, 2024, Washington Department of Natural Resources issued a Determination of Non-Significance, under the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA), for Riverside State Park – 7 Mile FHT Harvest. The SEPA comment period will close July 9, 2024.

Van Church, Fiscal Impact Statement: Reviewed June 24, 2024 - While it is uncertain at this time whether this sale of timber will cover the cost of tree felling and removal, the net impact (costs versus revenue) of this action is expected to have a marginal fiscal impact.

Andy Woo, Assistant Attorney General: Reviewed June 26, 2024.

Lisa Lantz, Stewardship Director: Reviewed June 20, 2024.

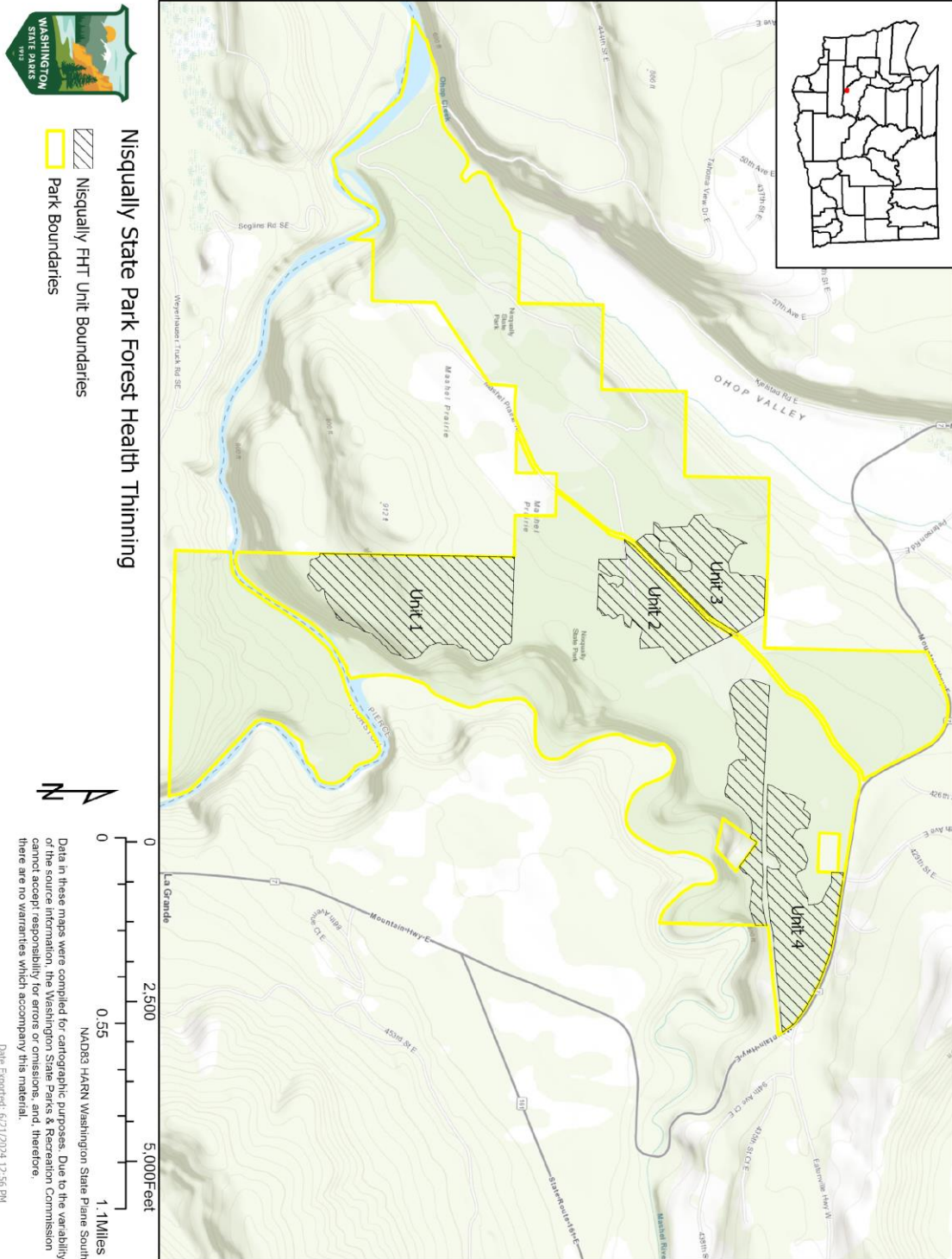
Approved for Transmittal to Commission



Diana Dupuis, Director

APPENDIX 1

Map of Proposed Forest Health Treatment Area at Nisqually State Park



APPENDIX 2

Map of Proposed Forest Health Treatment Area at Riverside State Park

