



Formal Approvals

Item	Action-Decision
Proposed January 8, 2025 SC agenda	Approved. The final will be posted online at: https://www.ncwfhc.org/meetings/
Proposed December 4, 2024 SC meeting summary	Approved. The final will be posted online at: https://www.ncwfhc.org/meetings/
Proposed extension of hiatus on new membership.	Decision: 3-month continuation of hiatus on new membership operating protocols are complete
Bring the updated operating protocols excluding structure and roles to the full Collaborative for a decision at the February Quarterly meeting	Approved

Next Steps

Item	Follow-up
Share Northwest Forest Plan update public meeting details to Collaborative	Victoria Wilkins; Karen Berg sent out to collaborative
Share article re. FS withdrawing the national old growth amendment planning process	Victoria Wilkins
Draft letter to regional supervisor Tara Umphries re. LSRA approval and sent a week ahead of February Quarterly meeting.	Lloyd McGee, Karen Berg, Co-chair Ngari, Patrick Haggerty
Email out amendment to DNR grant shifting \$13,000 from Facilitator/Coordinator salary to monitoring	Karen Berg

Attendance

In-Person:

Patrick Haggerty (Cascadia CD); Jim Passage (Lake Wenatchee Fire Adapted Community); Lloyd McGee (TNC); Catherine Waterston (TNC); Karen Berg (NCWFHC); Gabby Vermeire (UCSRB); Erica Taecker (OWNF), Lorah Super (Okanogan CD); Anjolene Ngari (Hampton Lumber); Commissioner Andy Hover (Okanogan Co); Kari Grover-Wier (OWNF); Seth Kammer (OWNF); Gia Landis (Sustainable Northwest); Yesenia Perez, Marco Fernados (Wenatchee Café)

Online:

Chris Furr (OWNF); Victoria Wilkins (OWNF); Tara Umphries (OWNF); Josh Anderson (Vaagen Brothers Lumber); Bob Keller (Chumstick Wildfire Stewardship Coalition), Tom McCoy (C6 Innovations), Rachel McClure (Rep. Dan Newhouse) ; Brandon Rogers (Yakama Nation); Tom Partin; Rebecca Hunt (Colville Confederated Tribes); Mike Kaputa (CCNRD); Matthew Danielson (Conservation Northwest); Amy Ramsey (WDNR); Signe Stroming (Blue Forest); Megan Birzel (TWS); Chuck Hersey (DNR); Ruby Gaston (Rep. Kim Schrier); David Walker (LWFR); Lisa Dowling (WDFW); Susan Crampton (interested public)

Welcome and Introductions

Facilitator Berg opened the meeting. Members introduced themselves and reviewed the draft January 8, 2025 meeting agenda and draft December 4, 2024 Steering Committee meeting summary. Facilitator Berg noted that the highlighted answer from Seth Kammer on funding for the 10-workplan had been added to the December meeting summary but was provided after the actual meeting. Collaborative members voted to approve the agenda and summary.

Decision: Approve the January 8, 2025 SC agenda and December 4, 2024 SC meeting summary as presented.

Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest (OWNF) Updates

Updates from the Forest Supervisor's Office

Kai Grover-Wier, lead for the Central Washington Initiative, introduced Tara Umphries as the new regional Forest Supervisor.

Tara updated the Collaborative on several items for the region:

The FS is currently the middle of the Northwest Forest Plan revision. Victoria Wilkins said that the revision was happening at the regional level with a planning services group. The group will lead a series of public meetings next week. The meeting in Wenatchee will be on Thursday 1/16, with the other meetings in Everett and Olympia. The information from the meetings will be mainly high-level overviews of proposed revisions to the plan and instructions for submitting public comment. Work group members will be available to answer general questions but may not be able to provide specifics at this time.

Victoria will share the meeting information with the Collaborative.

Tara advised that she started permanently in her position on Dec. 1 and was transitioning from working in Colorado. Overall, she said that the FS was still dealing with the consequences of the agency-wide seasonal hiring decision for 2025 field season. The FS remains in a continuing resolution on the budget and will have more clarity after March 14 on how the budget and change in administration and will impact operations.

Co-chair Ngari asked if there was a headcount cap for FS staff. Tara said that their headcount for permanent employees was 134, and did not include permanent seasonal or seasonal (non-1039) employees or vacancies. They are currently right at their headcount.

Victoria Wilkins added that the FS was withdrawing the national old growth amendment planning process and shared an article about it with the Collaborative (<https://www.fs.usda.gov/inside-fs/leadership/national-old-growth-amendment>).

CWI Update

Kari Grover-Weir provided the following updates for the Central Washington Initiative:

- The CWI Science Symposium is planned for Feb 5th and 6th in Wenatchee. Its goal is to connect wildfire researchers and land managers on current CWI projects/issues. It will be an opportunity to bring researchers doing work on fire prevention together with local land managers so they can learn the status of research projects and how to put the data to use.
- Budget – The CWI is operating on funds carried over from last fiscal year for salaries and other CWI expenses. The FS won't know this year's funding status until Congress appropriates money in the federal budget.
- Current projects under the CWI include: UWPP, Snowbrush Fuel Break, Coal Ridge Fuel Break, FRB, Twisp Restoration, cultural surveys, and DNR Good Neighbor Authority work.
- This is likely the last year the CWI will receive substantial funding, since past funding has drawn mainly from the Inflation Reduction Act and Bipartisan Infrastructure Act funds.

Kari noted that the investment in the Initiative has been well worth it to create opportunities for future work with partners like CCNRD, DNR through the GNA, and tribal governments.

Q: Will loss of CWI funding impact the total number of permanent FS employees?

Kari said that there was still money from wildfire strategy funding and that staff covered by the headcount would remain. She said that while losing funding did not mean the FS would lose those positions covered by the funding, there is just no way to know how much Congress will allocate this year.

District Ranger Updates

Chelan/Entiat Ranger Districts:

In the Chelan RD, the FS is working on implementing the Cooper Ridge Fuel Break project.

In the Entiat RD, the FS is doing pile burns in Tillicum. Securing a forest-wide contract for pile burning has allowed the FS to add to crews doing pile burning. Planning in the RD is being done for the Lower North Shore Project.

Wenatchee River RD

Erica Taecker gave updates for the Wenatchee River Ranger District.

UWPP – Activity for this project includes ongoing timber sales, with harvest started promptly this winter. The project has been dealing with snowmobiling routes and will be conducting outreach to that community. Work is slated under the Forest Resilience bond. Other work includes mastication and forest thinning, Rx burning, fuels projects, and creating a rough schedule for timber sales. Rough phasing of timber sales is subject to change. They are hoping that LSRA will address the more intense treatments in LSRs. The 2nd decision is on hold with the LSRA with the goal being to see what work can be done in the meantime.

Condition-based management under NEPA includes ongoing surveys and monitoring.

She provided a list of accomplishments for UWPP, send along with this summary.

Chumstick to LP – This project is a work in progress. A contractor has been secured and the draft EA will be coming out in a couple of months. Once the ESA consultation level 1 is kicked off, they will be authorized to hire detailers, archaeologists and fish biologists. They are eventually planning public outreach for the project.

Q: How are things being prioritized? Is there a way to more effectively share resources for timber, timber sales before planning?

A: Both of these are highest priority for district work.

Q: Can salary funds be used for contractors?

A: No, salary funds can only be used for FS salaries.

LSRA update request

The Collaborative and Forest Service representatives discussed the difficulties with the Late Stage Successional Reserve Amendment (LSRA) process, which is holding up several projects for treating areas for wildfire.

FS representatives gave an overview of the situation:

The LSRA was updated and approved by the FS in May 2024. Consultation with USFWS is at a sticking point and next steps are unsure, which is holding up projects. Factors in the delays include the following:

- Timber board feet has declined
- The agency-wide seasonal hiring decision
- Lack of capacity to make biological decisions
- Trees in OWNF suffering from insect mortality
- Habitat for the Northern Spotted Owl has declined in the LSR network
- USFWS opinion on Spotted Owl habitat in LSRA not in agreement with FS opinion
- Over 16k acres would need to be treated per year to move forest to historically represented condition
- Reduction of budget

Members of the Collaborative asked how the Collaborative could help. Is USFWS lack of approval a funding or capacity issue? Is there definitive timeline on LSRA?

Tara Umphries advised that the LSRA signed in May was not being recognized for several reasons, and consequently the FS was looking to go into facilitated dialogue with USFWS. She noted that under the Wildfire Crisis Strategy, the OWNF is an agency-wide priority. She said that the FS was engaging in science-based discussions with the FWS, but that there was no definitive timeline at this point.

Q: Has there been any progress in the last 6 months?

Yes, stability in staffing has improved relationships with USFWS. Having a contracted facilitator through DOI to serve as a neutral third party during conversations with USFWS is a big step in the right direction. Tara said that she has personally made time to meet with her equivalent at USFWS.

Chris Furr noted that for the Midnight project, they had received feedback from LSR working group and that consultation could be a hurdle in the future but is not holding the project up currently.

Commissioner Hover asked why USFWS isn't present at the Collaborative meetings. Lloyd McGee from TNC said that personnel resources are limited at the agency and collaboration is not part of individual workplan objectives like consultation is, and as a result activity in collaboratives is a side-venture for agency employees.

Methow RD

Chris Furr gave updates on activity in the Methow Ranger District. He said he will aim to pull together a list of accomplishments similar to the one Erica shared for Wenatchee River.

Mission – Contractors are working on restoration for the project, with summer operations and spring burning efforts in the area planned.

Midnight – There is no update on the Midnight draft EA at this time. The FS is working with a contractor on NEPA, and there are plans to meet with USFWS staff on the BA.

Upper Methow – Scoping is scheduled to start in June. The FS will conduct NEPA engagement then and will engage with the public prior to that. The FS is currently waiting on the aquatic portion of the landscape evaluation.

Twisp Restoration – Implementation for this project is on track. Next steps are to advertise GNA sale with DNR in late spring/ summer.

Tom Partin asked if there had been a pullback in funding for the Twisp Restoration project as a result of less CWI funding going towards it. FS advised that some funding will be unavailable until future CWI funding is decided.

Q: Is there an update on the timeline for forest-wide fuels?

The FS is hoping to scope for the forest-wide prescribed fire EA next quarter.

Q: Is there an update on the prescribed burn smoke pilot project?

A: The Rx Burn smoke pilot project is an intra-agency effort to increase the scale of Rx Burning. The FS is including county health departments, fire adapted community groups, and other public health partners in the process to figure out how to communicate and service communities re. Rx Burn smoke. The project is modeled after a similar project in Bend, OR called the West Bend Project. A working group for the project is meeting regularly to discuss questions including if more air quality monitors or purifiers are needed. David Farmer is lead for this, with project work being done in the Entiat and Methow

districts. The project is bringing regulators onsite to help with problem solving for issues like narrow drainages and short burning windows, with the intention of building understanding with regulators.

Project Work Group Updates

Co-Chair Ngari provided updates from Project Work Group.

Monitoring

- Extra funds from the DNR grant will go to monitoring plots out on the landscape. Kerry Kemp and FS are involved in making sure monitoring is in the correct location.
- The FS worked with DNR's Amy Ramsey to make an amendment to the DNR grant that will shift money from paying for the NCWFHC Facilitator salary to monitoring work.
- The Amendment will be voted on by the Collaborative by 24-hour vote by email. If approved, \$13,000 will go to monitoring.

January Agenda Overview

PWG is potentially moving forward with the Nason Restoration Project Collaborative Engagement Agreement and letter. Further discussion planned for 1/22 mtg.

Other January agenda items include:

- Draft EIS for Northwest Forest Plan: Where do we have common ground in alternative B?
- Kerry Kemp will provide an update on surveys and monitoring under CFLRP.

NWFP DEIS

There have been initial discussions on commenting on the Northwest Forest Plan and Draft EIS. PWG will attempt to compile high level items of consensus to submit a letter

Forest-wide Prescribed Fire Project

In the FS Written Updates there is a suggestion for the PWG to consider the collaborative engagement process for the Okanogan-Wenatchee Prescribed Fire EA, formally known as Forest-wide Fuels Reduction EA, planning to scope in early 2025. Further discussion planned for 1/22 mtg.

Next Project Work Group Meeting – January 22nd in-person in Wenatchee and virtually.

Outreach Work Group Updates

Outreach Work Group Chair Lloyd McGee provided updates:

Lloyd reported that the outreach work group had had a productive meeting that morning. While outreach has been ad hoc for the Collaborative so far, resurrecting the outreach work group will change this.

The group will look into outreach to communities affected by UWPP, Bear Mountain Rx Burn (Rx Burn taking place in April), Mission, Twisp Restoration, and the Upper Methow.

The working group will be broken into 3 geographies (Leavenworth and Upper Wenatchee; Chelan and Entiat; and Okanogan and Upper Methow) with a point person for each geography.

The next step for the group is building a work plan. Catherine Waterston has volunteered to be chair of the work group. Others who want to be involved in the work group can contact Catherine.

Upcoming Meetings and Trainings

Co-chair Lorah Super updated the Collaborative on upcoming meetings and trainings.

Best Practices Collaborative Training (March 20-21)

This training is offered by the FS and built by Sustainable Northwest. Hold the dates.

2025 Schedule Quarterly and SC Meetings

The 2/5 quarterly meeting has been moved to 2/12. It will be held at Thriving Together, 810 Eastmont Ave., East Wenatchee.

The SC will continue to meet on the first Wednesday of the month, with Quarterly meetings held on the every three months — February, May, August, November — subject to change upon changing the operating protocols.

New membership –

Review of March 2024 hiatus extension

Co-chair Ngari advised that the governance subcommittee had decided to make a hiatus on new membership until new operating principles had been established. This hiatus is currently in place; Chair Ngari said that they were asking for an extension through March.

Decision: 3-month continuation of hiatus on new membership operating protocols are complete

Lunch Break — End of General Steering Committee Meeting – CLOSED SESSION

LSRA Overview & Discussion

Full membership invited to join.

The Collaborative steering committee discussed reasons for delays in approving the LSRA, problems for project implementation caused by delays, and ways that the Collaborative could be useful in moving the process forward. Members expressed frustration that it had taken 7 years to update the LSRA and that the FS had internally approved it, but that final approval by USFWS was still holding up projects. Commissioner Hover noted that USFWS and project partners shared a common interest in treating land and preventing wildfires, since wildfires will also destroy species habitat.

Lloyd McGee asked if the steering committee wanted to draft a letter to region Supervisor Umphries on LSRA approval information requests to put before the full Collaborative.

- Co-chair Super said that Collaborative action could be decided over email before the next meeting if needed, but that the Collaborative should not act if it undermines the process or slows things down in any way.
- Patrick Hagerty from CCD offered to reach out to the consulting agency who did the EA to see how long it would take and how much it would cost for them to do a review.
- The steering committee decided to draft a letter to Tara Umphries to put before the Collaborative by email and send to Tara a week in advance of the February Quarterly meeting.
 - The letter will emphasize the need for urgency and transparency in getting the LSRA approved.
 - Lloyd McGee will help draft the letter and Co-chair Ngari and Facilitator/Coordinator Karen Berg will assist. Patrick Hagerty will try to get information from the former contractor for the letter.

Operating Protocol Proposal from the Governance Subcommittee

Full membership invited to join.

Co-Chair Super gave an overview of the Collaborative's efforts to update the NCWFC's operating protocols. A steering committee retreat in 2022 revealed that there were challenges within the Collaboratives in managing differences of opinion. A governance subgroup was formed and decided to hire KKR consulting group to identify a set of recommendations to improve the group's functioning.

The final report from KKR said that members felt disengaged from the group's work, questioned the Collaborative's efficacy, and felt an overall lack of transparency and trust.

- The report recommended improving operating protocols to increase member engagement, increase transparency, provide direction and parameters, clarify roles and commitment levels, build cohesion among members, and to codify behavior monitoring and conflict resolution processes.
- The governance work group took the documents from the report and after small edits, put them to the full Collaborative for a vote in November.
- New operating protocols included new structure and roles, a recommitment process, a new onboarding procedure, an updated vision and mission, and codified pro-social behaviors and practices.

- Feedback from the Collaborative included concerns about permanent voting membership, having 2 community group slots, lack of rules for removing a member but not their organization, and questions about the difference between an executive and steering committee
- Since there seemed to be less agreement on the revised structures and roles, members suggested setting those pieces aside and putting the rest of the revised operating protocols to the Collaborative for a vote.
- Cmr. Hover suggested it would be easier if voting by the full Collaborative was done on a modified consensus basis, and this will be part of the governance discussion.
- Lloyd McGee made a motion to bring the updated operating protocols save structure and roles to the full Collaborative for a decision in February.

Decision: Bring the updated operating protocols excluding structure and roles to the full Collaborative for a decision at the February Quarterly meeting 2/12.

Building Forest Partnerships Grant Amendment

Due to discussion about monitoring needs and reallocating the group's DNR BFP grant funding, there is now an amendment underway to shift \$13,000 from salary to monitoring (a minimum of 10 plots).

An email vote on shifting the funds is forthcoming.

Roundtable Sharing

Lloyd McGee said that a journalist at the Seattle Times was interested in writing an article about the Collaborative. It was noted that this journalist had written an article in the past that was opposed to a fuel break that the Collaborative was in favor of. The OWG will move this along and keep the collaborative apprised.

Wrap-up and adjourn

The Quarterly Meeting will be February 12, 2025 (NOTE THE DATE CHANGE)

Location: **Thriving Together, 810 Eastmont Ave., East Wenatchee.** (entrance located off of southeast parking lot at the ground floor level)

The next Steering Committee meeting will be March 5, 2025.

Co-Chair Super Adjourned the Meeting at 4:00 pm