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Washington Department of Natural Resources 2022 Annual Report for the Washington Association of Conservation Districts

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At the Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR), we work every day to ensure that our state's lands, waterways, and communities thrive – now and for future generations. We accomplish that mission, in large part, with strong coordination with Washington's Conservation Districts and with local jurisdiction. This past year (2022) has been full of accomplishments. The following annual update represents a snapshot of outcomes.

HB 1168 – Wildfire Response, Forest Restoration, and Community Resilience

With a head start on planning, DNR was able to achieve some remarkable successes even with the compressed timeframe represented in this report, in addition to supply chain delays that affected equipment and purchases, or the fact that drought and wildfires kept staff from implementing certain projects. Highlights of progress to date represents significant progress toward accomplishing the goals of the 10-Year Wildland Fire Protection Strategy, 20-Year Forest Health Strategic Plan: Eastern Washington, and 2020 Washington Forest Action Plan across each of the main themes of the new Wildfire Response, Forest Restoration, and Community Resilience Account.

DNR's implementation of HB 1168 this biennium greatly benefitted from our ongoing partnership with Washington Conservation Commission and Conservation Districts. Some highlights include:

- DNR contracted with State Conservation Commission (SCC) to gather input from Conservation Districts in geographies that recently experienced wildfires to help inform how our agency establishes a Post Fire Recovery program and invests in local communities impacted by fires.
- SCC and individual conservation districts are helping to test and inform development of Forest Health Tracker, an online platform to display and provide information on planned and completed forest health treatments statewide.
- Conservation Districts participate with DNR staff in forest collaboratives, helping us to collaboratively plan landscape scale forest health projects. One example is participation from both Okanogan and Cascadia Conservation District in the North Central Washington Forest Health Collaborative.
- Cascadia Conservation District stepped forward with DNR financial support to lead a collaborative monitoring work group in the Upper Wenatchee priority landscape aimed at effective implementation of the US Forest Service's Upper Wenatchee Pilot Project. This included hosting training of work group members on DNR's stand level monitoring protocol.
- Conservation Districts across the state coordinate closely with our Service Forestry Program engagement with small forest landowners

Highlights in Wildfire Response

- Utilized funding to transition several existing hand crew leadership positions on 3 twenty-person hand crews to year-round position to improve retention and cohesiveness of crews. Additional positions were split out for crew leadership positions for 4 short hand crew modules in Western Washington, and 3 new 20-person crews in SE Region (Chelan, Kittitas, Klickitat).
- Recruited for fifteen permanent Program Specialist positions needed to manage the span of control and supervise both the existing resources and the additional resources provided by the Account. These positions plan work, hire and train seasonal firefighters and function as overhead on extended attack and large fires. A majority of these positions were able to be filled prior to the 2022 wildfire season and the remaining will be filled in fiscal year 2023.
- Purchased 6 Logistics Trailers, a semi-tractor, pumps, hand tools, hose and fittings, chainsaws and generators for assisting with state mobilization incidents. This provides state mobilization fires with the same resources as other larger fires improving the likelihood of keeping fires smaller. With complications due to supply chain issues, the equipment was received and utilized on the landscape for the 2022 season, but the trailers were unable to be readied in time for the 2022 season. Build work and construction will continue in the off-season and should be completed for use during the 2023 fire season.
- Awarded \$550K in grants to 43 local fire protection districts across the state that provided the opportunity for the districts to acquire and/or improve existing, new, Federal Excess Property or Federal Firefighter Property, DNR Surplus Engines or other equipment related Wildland Fire suppression activities. This allowed departments or districts with insufficient primary funding or budgets to enhance their response capabilities.
- Awarded \$1.1M to 12 fire protection districts across the state to expand their ability to respond to wildland fire suppression efforts and other active fire related needs through the acquisition of additional operational firefighting and/or suppression equipment.
- Awarded \$90K to 5 fire protection districts across the state to allow acquisition of additional operational firefighting and/or wildland firefighting personal protection equipment.
- Awarded \$600K to 55 fire protection districts across the state that were paired with US Forest Service Volunteer Fire District Assistance grants program providing fire protection districts the opportunity to purchase wildfire suppression equipment and/or supplies.
- Purchased and received fourteen out of sixteen heavy equipment “dozers” for constructing fire containment lines. Fourteen dozer transports are arriving now at a vendor to configure additional loading and unloading functions. These resources will be available for 2023 fire season.
- Enhanced the effectiveness and use of wildfire suppression aircraft by hiring 2 Aviation Operations Program Managers in spring 2022, 2 fixed-wing pilots and a Tanker Base Manager. DNR is recruiting 2 additional airplane pilots and an Unmanned Aerial Systems Coordinator.
- Successfully awarded contracts for 2 DAHER Kodiak K100 utility type aircraft.

- Invested in extending the service of the state’s fleet of UH-1H “Huey” helicopters including installing new, modern composite tail rotor blades on 100 percent of the fleet, and new composite main rotor blades on 75 percent of the fleet. In addition, DNR began upgrading digital cockpit with 1 of 9 aircraft complete.

Highlights in Forest Restoration

- Awarded over \$2.5 million in All-Lands Direct Investments to 20 organization to conduct forest health treatments on 3,339 acres, prep and layout forest health treatments on 3,000 acres, maintain 1.5 miles of road, install 34 beaver dam analogs, re-locate 15 beavers onto national forest lands in drought vulnerable watersheds, plant 700 native plants, and distribute 200 lbs. of native seed in priority landscapes.
- Invested \$476K through the Building Forest Partners competitive grant program to forest collaboratives to engage communities and grow partners, resulting in 23,167 acres of collaboratively developed forest health treatments planned.
- 10,773 acres of forest health treatments completed through financial cost-share with small forest landowners to date using and leveraging funds from the Account, including expansion of cost-shares to western Washington small forest landowners for the first time.
- Launch of [DNR’s Landowner Assistance Portal](#), a one-stop shop for a small forest landowners information needs including a new [Find Your Forester online map tool](#) to help landowners find the technical expertise to address their needs.
- Hired a Federal Lands Environmental Planning NEPA Team Program Manager to support increasing the pace and scale of landscape scale restoration planning on national forests with contracted projects to support NEPA on 2 national forests completed in FY22.
- Using the Good Neighbor Authority on federal lands, DNR has 30 active projects funded by and/or leveraging funds from the Account. To date 36,000 MBF sold, 5,800 acres of treatment completed, 10 fish passage projects completed, 108 miles of road maintenance completed and 6 road miles decommissioned.
- State Uplands sold 614 acres of commercial forest health timber sales and completed 9,968 acres of non-commercial treatments using initial allotments.
- State Uplands completed an additional 5,925 acres of non-commercial forest treatments, implemented 51 miles of road maintenance/closures to reduce sediment delivery to surface waters, and conducted 988 miles of roadside weed control.
- State Uplands successfully completed over 200 acres prescribed burns, including a cooperative, cross-boundary prescribed fire operation on more than 250 acres of land in northern Okanogan County. Funding from the Account funded DNR staff and resources to deliver 1,613 acres of prescribed burns and 775 piles burned on Colville Confederated Reservation, federal, local, and private lands in FY 2022.

- Establishment of a Post-Fire Recovery Program including investments to local, state, and federal partners for accomplishing on the ground efforts to establish, implement, and coordinate post-fire recovery.
- Completed field data collection on post-wildfire natural tree regeneration from wildfires that burned between 201-2017. Data will be analyzed and a scientific report completed by June of 2023 to inform managers.
- Fulfillment of the Forest Health Assessment and Treatment Framework including assessment of forest conditions to quantify forest restoration and management needs across 37 priority landscapes covering 4,165,780 acres in eastern Washington, each with a completed landscape evaluation providing a scientifically grounded blueprint of forest health treatment need.
- Increase in the number and diversity of partnerships, leading to a corresponding increase in the size and complexity of forest health projects and wildfire risk reduction activities being planned and implemented across the state.
- Cutting-edge forest health monitoring, led by DNR scientists, to track progress toward our goals while monitoring the effectiveness of forest health treatments in the face of wildfire, drought, and insects and disease. This includes continued development of [Forest Health Tracker](#) to provide a powerful dashboard to visualize and learn more about forest health treatments statewide in complement to our ongoing forest health treatment tracking.

Highlights in Community Resilience

Wildfire Ready Neighbors: In spring of 2022 DNR launched a new program called Wildfire Ready Neighbors with rollout in 3 counties in eastern Washington: Spokane, Chelan and Yakima. ([Wildfire Ready Neighbors! | There's Strength In Neighbors \(wa.gov\)](#))

Wildfire Ready Neighbors focuses on increasing community resistance and resilience in the face of ever increasing wildfire danger. WRN uses an innovative outreach approach that employs the power of “social marketing” to drive community awareness and interest in making their homes and small, private forests better prepared for wildfire. The initiative also harnesses existing community partners such as conservation districts, local fire districts, and non-profit organizations to add capacity to complete home and forest wildfire assessments. Achievements as a result of the initial launch of the program:

- 1,058 WRN visited the web site and received an online plan or requested a home visit
- 591 in-person Wildfire Ready Home Visits and/or Forest Health Consultations were requested
- 15 community partners engaged, including conservation districts.
- 4,997 individual actions participants committed to take some action to reduce their wildfire risk.
- In winter 2022, entered into a \$100,000 agreement with the SCC to support WRN with direct pass-thru to Conservation Districts.

Community Wildfire Defense Grants (CWDG): CWDG is a new grant program under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and DNR is the lead for Washington in working with partners to apply for these grant funds. The purpose of this program is to increase actions taken by homeowners and landowners on their

property to be prepared for the next wildfire. Specific activities include developing and working with Firewise USA™ sites and to partner with WRN marketing campaigns including community events and to conduct wildfire home risk assessments. The program will allocate \$160M per year to states for the next five years in support of these activities. Community Wildfire Defense Grants applications opened August 2022 and closed on October 2022. There were 45 applications submitted during the application period with a total amount requested for grants under the program of \$53.9M. This included 18 requests for updates to existing Community Wildfire Protection Plans as well.

Micro Grants: The purpose of the micro grant program is to encourage Firewise USA™ sites and communities to celebrate Wildfire Awareness Month. Funds from the program are used to implement Firewise USA™ site action plans and to encourage communities to host events with the goal of becoming a Firewise USA™ site. In the spring of 2022 DNR provided 22 micro grants to existing Firewise USA sites and/or potential sites.

Equity and Inclusion Grants for Wildfire Preparedness: DNR is continuing to work on finalizing a two year funding agreement with Latino community organizations on programs to reach more Spanish speaking members with wildfire preparedness and prevention education. In 2022 DNR was able to focus efforts in Latino communities that included completing 60 WRN, Wildfire Ready plans. In the same communities held fourteen community events to provide wildfire adaptation and prevention education and vegetation cleanup.

Conservation District Community Response: This program directs funding to the Washington State Conservation Commission for coordination with Conservation Districts. The purpose of this program is to increase actions taken by homeowners and landowners on their property to be prepared for the next wildfire. Specific activities include developing and working with Firewise USA™ sites and partner with WRN marketing surges in community event and to conduct wildfire home risk assessments.

- FY 22 DNR funded them \$368,225.26 and they completed the following.
- 106 wildfire ready home site plans
- Supported 10 Firewise USA sites in maintaining or developing new Firewise USA sites.
- Organize chipping events with at least 1,349 households/landowners served.
- Put on 13 workshops with at least 200 residents participating with the public learning about wildfire preparedness.
- Organized training for 75 people on how to complete a Wildfire Ready Plan.

Central Washington Initiative – a partnership with the US Forest Service

In June the DNR and US Forest Service signed a Memorandum of Understanding to restore forest health and reduce wildfire risk on 350,000 acres over the next decade in and around the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest. This work will be implemented as part of the federal government's 10-Year Wildlife Crisis Strategy with funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the DNR. The focal geography spans from Winthrop to Naches; DNR, USFS and their partners will treat approximately 35,000 acres per year using an all lands, all hands approach.

Within DNR this work is being facilitated by the Forest Resilience Division and in primary coordination with DNR's Southeast Region.

Tillicum Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project

The US Forest Service and DNR recently used the Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) to implement the Tillicum Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project on the Entiat Ranger District in spring of this year.

Located within the Central Washington Initiative landscape, this non-commercial hazardous fuels reduction project spans than 4,000 acres northwest of Entiat. As one of the 39 priority areas defined within the 20-Year Forest Health Strategic Plan, DNR put forward \$3.3 million of funding from House Bill 1168 for the project, a massive undertaking to reduce wildfire fuels and restore the nature forest structure in one of the most fire-prone areas of Washington. It is a proof of concept for forest health and restoration projects at a landscape scale.

Post-Fire Recovery

With substantial input from SCC, DNR launched the new Post-Fire Recovery program, kicking off with a distribution of funds to Southeast Washington for further work with private landowners and the hiring of a new Post-Fire Recovery Program Manager. The Conservation Commission worked with DNR to provide an assessment on where the Post-Fire Recovery Program can best interact with Conservation Districts. Currently, the program is working with the Methow Beaver Project and may still engage with Okanogan Conservation District in Lightning Creek affected by the Walker Fire outside of Tonasket. This program is likely a strong future partner for Conservation Districts when addressing post-fire recovery needs that result in restored ecosystem services and functions at the local level.

Service Forestry

In 2022, the DNR Service Forestry Program expanded to include the entire state. Previously, only one Service Forester served all of western WA and there was no financial assistance available to small forest landowners through the DNR in western WA. The program now boasts over 60 individuals, over half of which have been working in their current position for less than one year. Our program has not yet reached its full potential and we continue to increase the level of support we give to forest landowners in Washington as well as look for ways to partner with Conservation Districts and others.

In Federal Fiscal Year 2022, our Service Foresters assisted 3,398 landowners, helped write or provided financial assistance for a consultant to write 43 Integrated Forest Stewardship plans covering 4,469 acres and have almost 3,000 financial assistance projects that either were completed or ongoing, covering 18,552 acres.

Future steps include working with the Conservation districts to understand the DNR's Service Forestry Program and how our work can complement the work of the Districts. This includes expanding partnerships with Districts to other areas as our program expands and we have capacity to engage with the Districts. In addition, Wildfire Ready Neighbors will expand to Western WA and Service Forestry will have a substantial role in that program, similar to our role in Eastern WA. Given the large number of landowners we hope to reach, partners with Conservation Districts and Fire Districts will be critical to the success of this role out and help us meet our common goals.

Small Forest Landowner Office

The Family Forest Fish Passage Program (FFFPP) assists private forestland owners in removing culverts and other stream crossing structures that keep trout, salmon, and other fish from reaching upstream habitat. Road culverts and other structures that are aging, too small, or improperly installed can block fish from reaching their spawning grounds, and young rearing salmon from reaching the ocean. The program funds the replacement of eligible barriers with new structures.

For the 2022 construction season, we had 5 Conservation Districts sponsor 8 FFFPP projects. The FFFPP hired the Lewis, Spokane, Snohomish, Stevens, and Ferry Conservation Districts to sponsor and oversee the removal and correction of 8 fish barrier projects opening a total of 30.31 miles of habitat:

PROJECT	CREEK	CONSERVATION DISTRICT	HABITAT GAIN (MILES)
Rise	King Creek	Lewis	6.44
Hanson	Little Hanford Creek	Lewis	1.97
Smith	Berwick Creek	Lewis	0.27
Power	Newaukum Tributary	Lewis	2.56
Bernhardt	Coon reek	Snohomish	4.21
Carey	Little Spokane River	Spokane	5.28
Hansen	North Fork Miller Creek	Stevens	5.96
Maw	Long Alec Creek	Ferry	6.74

Certified Burner Program

The Washington State Legislature granted DNR the authority to establish a certified burner program in 2018 when it adopted [House Bill 2733](#). DNR launched the program in the spring of 2022 to help educate professionals and private citizens gain the knowledge and skills needed to successfully implement prescribed fire on their landscapes. The multi-day workshops happen 2-3 times each year in different parts of the state. Instruction include both classroom and field work. **The next class will take place November 2022 in Sedro-Woolley, Washington.** The Certified Burner Program is open to Conservation District staff and members of the public and is a recommended way to help accelerate the use of prescribed fire in Washington.

Northeast Region

Agricultural Work with local Conservation Districts

Currently, our Agriculture program has been working with two conservation districts mainly. Okanogan County and Stevens County, and both have been great to work with.

In Okanogan County the district has helped facilitate the Coordinated Resource Management (CRM) Meetings for our permit range program. As well as working with two of our lessee's to find funding for fence replacement on DNR managed lands.

In Stevens County we have been working cooperatively with Department of Ecology and the Conservation District on a small water quality demonstration project on Deep Creek in northern Stevens County. They have also been working with us and providing input on a grazing related issue that was brought to our attention in eastern Stevens County.

Heights Camp Work with local Conservation Districts

Currently, our Heights Camp conducts work for 5 local conservation districts. Lincoln County, Stevens County, Palouse Rock Lake, Pine Creek, and Whitman County. Palouse Rock Lake and Pine Creek are located within Whitman County.

Typically in late winter these conservation districts reach out and schedule our crews for spring planting. Lately though, we have been conducting fall planting as the plants are having a greater survival rate than planting only in the spring season.



The conservation districts plant several types of trees such as ponderosa pine, aspen, rocky mountain juniper, and piñon pine as well as several species of willows. In addition to the trees, we plan several different types of bushes.

Through the various types of planting, our crew's members are able to understand and become educated with vegetation management, stream restoration, animal habitat improvement, and fire restoration.



In addition to planting, our crews are utilized to assist in other projects. Recently, we completed a 1.2 mile foot trail along an island in a wetland. The conservation district asked us to construct a 160 foot bog bridge to access the island in the wetland. The landholder will be using this island as an educational tool for groups. This bog bridge was constructed of cedar sleepers and rough cut planks.

Southeast Region

Wildfire Ready Neighbors

Forest Resilience staff have been working in collaboration with our Fire Districts, Conservation Districts, and Wildfire Program to launch Wildfire Ready Neighbors (WRC) in Chelan, Kittitas, Yakima and Klickitat County. Across the 4 counties we have seen an increase in Forest Health Consultations and an increase to our cost share clients. We have also been able to identify "spark plugs" for communities that will hopefully engage in future cost share/contract projects with the program.

Post Fire Recovery Planning

The Region received \$150,000 from Division (Mike Norris) to implement post fire recovery activities. This is a new concept for the Region as this is not our typical bread and butter but we are going to try and get a few seeding projects off the ground prior to the end of the biennium.