

Washington Dry Forests Fire Learning Network

2.4 million acres

The dry forest ecosystems of the Inland Northwest have changed significantly in ecological character over the last century. One of the main causes of the changing forest character is nearly a century of fire exclusion across these landscapes. The result has been that forests in these landscapes are less resilient and more susceptible to insects, diseases and large wildfires, resulting in reduced values for nature and people. To reverse negative trends in forest health, there is increased recognition of the need to work in larger landscapes, work across ownership boundaries, grow collaborations and coalitions, and learn while implementing. High level barriers to landscape-level restoration include policy issues, a lack of public understanding of the benefits and tradeoffs of managing fire for resource benefits, and the loss of forest product infrastructure that offset the cost of restoration treatments. Also needed are more robust, efficient planning, and innovative funding mechanisms. The Washington Dry Forest FLN is focusing on supporting the establishment of a Washington state prescribed fire council and two landscapes—the Tapash and the Sinlahekin—to devise and test strategies to break down these barriers.



Conner's Lake, Sinlahekin Wildlife Area

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Network Vision

Across Eastern Washington, we envision healthy and resilient forest landscapes cared for by the people whose livelihoods and cultures they support.



Mount Rainier and Nelson Ridge, viewed from a Bald Mountain site recently acquired by partners in the Tapash Sustainable Forest Collaborative
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In 2011, FLN partners:

- Worked with the North Central Washington Prescribed Fire Council to expand its charter to encompass the entire state and developed a conference on forming a Washington State Prescribe Fire Council that is scheduled for March 2012 in Wenatchee, WA;
- Drafted Forest Assessments on the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife Methow Wildlife Area; and
- Negotiated an allowance for regulated amounts of prescribe burning where there had been a burn moratorium in the Yakima Valley.

For more information:

Washington State Prescribed Fire Council
www.waprescribedfire.org

Sinlahekin Wildlife Area
wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_areas/sinlahekin

Tapash Sustainable Forest Collaborative
www.tapash.org

Tapash Sustainable Forest Collaborative
Sinlahekin Ecosystem Restoration Demonstration Landscape



map © 2011 Liz Rank /TNC

Network Partners

- Center for Natural Lands Management
- Stewardship Forestry Alternatives
- The Nature Conservancy—Washington
- USDA Forest Service—Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest
- USDA Forest Service—Pacific Northwest Research Station
- Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife—Methow Wildlife Area, Sinlahekin Wildlife Area
- Washington State Prescribed Fire Council



Washington Guides and Outfitters on their annual “ride to rendezvous” in Pipestone Canyon at the Methow WMA © Tom McCoy/WA DFW

Partners have begun looking to the Methow Wildlife Area, west of the Sinlahekin, which is also managed by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. This 31,000-acre area in the Methow River watershed in Okanogan County in north-central Washington includes about 5,000 forested acres. Neighboring land owners include the Methow Ranger District, BLM, Washington State Department of Natural Resources, and a diverse public—including ranchers, farmers, and recreationists (the valley is a prime recreation destination in the state). FLN partners are working on an assessment of forest restoration need, prioritization and development of treatment prescriptions. This work is intended as a catalyst to:

- engage stakeholders in a new or expanded landscape;
- define landscape-level future desired conditions and forest restoration needs;
- define treatment and implementation strategies;
- further define shared, compatible ownership objectives, barriers and cross-ownership implementation projects;
- estimate the costs to implement treatments to reach future desired conditions, and secure the needed funding.

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Sinlahekin Ecosystem Restoration Demonstration Landscape

Washington Dry Forests FLN
Washington
102,000 acres

The Sinlahekin Wildlife Area, situated in North Central Washington within the Sinlahekin Valley, is managed by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). These lands consist of a mosaic of shrub steppe, lakes and wetlands, and dry, low elevation forest. The Washington Biodiversity Council ranked this area as having the highest biodiversity significance in the Okanagan ecoregion, a result of this rich diversity of habitats found in a relatively small area. The 14,300-acre Wildlife Area is home to a remarkable number of species: 173 birds, 43 mammals, 16 fish, 75 spiders and over 540 plants. The 87 butterfly species represent 62 percent of all butterfly species found in the state. The ponderosa pine and shrub-steppe have been identified as focal habitats for restoration, due to habitat loss and degradation; fire exclusion is the primary contributor to the degradation of these fire-dependent systems.

The Sinlahekin Wildlife Area is an active anchor of restoration work with nearby federal, state, and private forests. The partners' goal for this landscape is to determine whether synergies can be developed among land managers such that they are able to develop shared, landscape-level objectives—in other words, objectives that meet individual ownership needs, and add up to a restored landscape—and to implement treatments.

Landscape Vision

The dry forests of the Pacific Northwest have been subjected to an active program of fire suppression for the last 100 years, resulting in highly altered conditions. Management has begun shifting toward a program of thinning overstocked stands and conducting prescribed burns in the understory to reduce the risk of high severity, stand-replacing fires and improve the health and vigor of legacy trees and ecosystem function. In the Sinlahekin, collaborative work is underway to plan, implement and assess innovative treatments to improve the health and resilience of this forest and restore its fire regime using both prescribed and naturally-occurring fire. Through this process it is hoped that fire will be the primary management tool in the future.



Before and after photos of a prescribed burn on the Sinlahekin FLN landscape. This was one of several spring burns that together treated 530 acres. These were the first prescribed burns conducted as part of the Sinlahekin Ecosystem Restoration Project, which is funded through a State Lands Restoration grant from the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office and a Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program grant through the Natural Resources and Conservation Service. In the fall of 2011, an additional 350 acres were burned under prescription. In total, these grants will allow fuels reduction and reconfiguration treatments, including logging and hand thinning, on about 2,000 acres.

© Justin Haug/Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife

The Sinlahekin Wildlife Area is home to 173 species of birds, 43 mammals, 16 fish, 75 spiders and over 540 plant species.

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map © 2011 Liz Rank /TNC

Landscape Partners

- Bureau of Land Management
- Stewardship Forestry Alternatives
- The Nature Conservancy—Washington
- USDA Forest Service—Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest
- Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife—Methow Wildlife Area
- Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife—Sinlahekin Wildlife Area

Treatment Progress

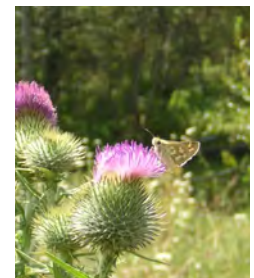
Between fall 2010 and spring 2011, about 200 acres were mechanically treated or hand thinned, and the slash fuels allowed to cure through the summer. Prescribed burning efforts began in fall 2010 with fire-line layout and construction, and in March 2011 prescribed burning began in light fuels (grasses and forbs); partners completed 535 acres of prescribed burning by late April. Fall burning began in October, again in primarily light fuels. Treatments of heavier fuels were delayed by the extensive unit preparation required (for example, 4,000 feet of hose-lay with sprinklers was needed), rains, and the onset of hunting season; nonetheless, another 350 acres were accomplished by the time the season ended in November. About 200 acres of slash units remain to be burned; this treatment is planned for spring 2012. Phase 2 of the Sinlahekin Ecosystem Restoration Project recently received funding. This phase targets an additional 960 acres for thinning and burning treatments.



Top: Partners toured several restoration sites in May 2011.

Bottom: Photos were taken just before (left) and 12 days after (right) the area was treated with prescribed fire in mid-April, demonstrating good response to the treatment.

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Wildlife found in the Sinlahekin includes (left to right) white-breasted nuthatch, bighorn sheep, gopher snake, showshoe hare and Juba skipper butterfly. Photos: www.wdfw.wa.gov/lands/wildlife_areas/sinlahekin/gallery; snake: Andreas and Christel Nöllert

Tapash Sustainable Forest Collaborative

Washington Dry Forests FLN
Washington
2.3 million acres

From the forests of the East Cascades to the arid, sage-dotted hills of the Columbia Basin, the rugged hills and canyons of this landscape support some of the few remaining mature groves of ponderosa pine in the state and provide habitat for white-headed woodpeckers, golden eagles, Rocky Mountain elk and mountain lions. These forests, riparian areas and faunal communities have changed dramatically in ecological character over the last century.

The landscape faces threats common to many in the west: Fire regimes have been altered by decades of fire exclusion. Drought, disease and insects are taking a toll, and long-held industrial forest lands are being sold, expanding wildland-urban interface and making fire management more complicated.

All of these factors are exacerbated by the difficulty of land management coordination due to a checkerboard ownership pattern that developed in the 19th century. Stakeholders now agree that it is beyond the ability of any single group to ameliorate these threats and restore the forests and the communities they support.

In 2011, the Collaborative worked to expand its membership and create an improved structure for partnership communication and involvement. Partners were also able to re-negotiate an allowance for some prescribed burning, which had been disallowed under a burn moratorium in the Yakima Valley. On lands



Standing on a ridge in the original 10,000 acre Tieton checkerboard acquisition project are participants in the 2009 Tapash Leadership Tour, including the Commissioner for Public Lands, Regional Forester, Forest Supervisor, Acting Director for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Conservancy State Director, Acting Director of the Yakama Nation Tribal Government and leaders from Tapash Collaborative affiliate sponsor organizations. In the background is the next 10,000 acre checkerboard project the group is buying together. © Julie Conley/TNC

purchased in the Tieton, 1,200 acres of restoration treatments have been identified across Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife and Conservancy lands; implementation will begin in the summer of 2012 with mechanical treatments that will set up forest conditions for the safe and effective use of prescribed fire.

Collaborative Statement

The Tapash Sustainable Forest Collaborative is a coalition of public, non-profit and tribal land managers that was born out of a defined need to more efficiently manage forest across a checkerboard of alternating ownerships.

The Tapash is organized under a Memorandum of Understanding to work cooperatively to meet shared objectives. The Tapash Collaborative provides coordination, funding, facilitation and engagement with interest groups, local citizens and academia. Joint problem-solving generates projects that integrate economic, cultural, social and ecological values to find solutions.

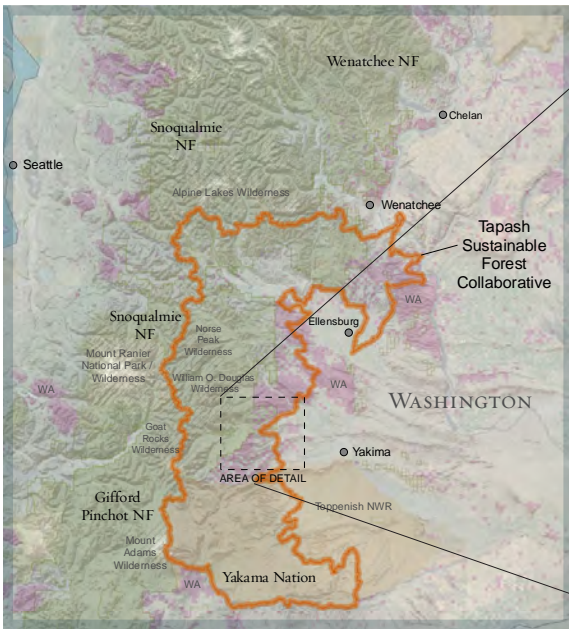


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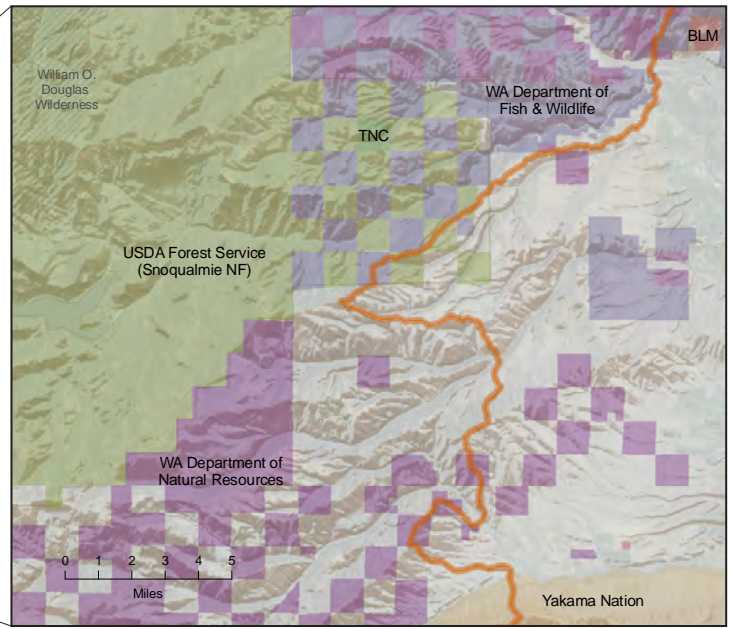
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Detail of the boxed area in map at left; at this scale, the checkerboard land ownership pattern in this landscape is clear. Partners are working both to acquire lands and to work across boundaries so that lands can be managed at appropriate scales. *ownership data from TNC-WAFO, December 2011*

Landscape Partners

- American Forest Resource Council
- Conservation Northwest
- Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
- The Nature Conservancy—Washington
- The Wilderness Society
- USDA Forest Service—Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest
- Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife
- Washington Department of Natural Resources
- Yakama Nation

Mount Rainier and Nelson Ridge, viewed from a Bald Mountain site recently acquired by Tapash partners © David Hagen



Related Projects

Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP)

The Tapash Sustainable Forests Collaborative is one of 10 projects across the country selected by the Forest Service in 2010 for CFLRP restoration implementation funding. Among the Tapash Collaborative's CFLRP accomplishments in its first year are 5,100 acres of hazardous fuels reduced near communities and 600 acres of forest habitat improved.

Integrated Landscape Assessment Project (ILAP)

In partnership with the Conservancy's ILAP and a research team affiliated with the Forest Service Pacific NW Research Station, Oregon State University and the Institute for Natural Resources, the Collaborative is using a suite of analytical models to develop a shared long-term and landscape-scale vision for forest restoration and management methods. The ILAP models will allow the Collaborative to directly compare the predicted ecological and economic outcomes of different management scenarios over time. Examples of management scenarios being modeled include: continuing the current rate of mechanical thinning and prescribed fire, doubling the current rate of mechanical thinning and prescribed fire, applying prescribed fire only, and using mechanical thinning only.

The ILAP models explicitly incorporate the main drivers of forest ecosystems within the Tapash Landscape—fire, insects, disease, growth, harvest/active management—and forecast forest structure/composition, species habitat, annual timber and biomass production, and annual fire-insect disturbances. Tapash partners are currently developing input for current treatment rates across the Tapash will meet early in 2012 to compare the outcomes of current and alternative treatment scenarios. This process will enable Tapash partners to evaluate whether their current cross-ownership treatment efforts are effectively meeting collaborative goals, and will guide adjustments in strategy if that is required.