SXᵂUYTN-KANIKSU CONNECTIONS 'TRAIL' PROJECT

Purpose and Need for Action

This project is needed to improve forest health and resilience to disturbance, address insect and disease outbreaks; reduce the potential for future outbreaks; limit the severity of impacts due to uncharacteristic wildland fires; meet state and federal water quality guidelines; provide quality aquatic habitat; contribute to the local economy; and connect lands and people. The project's proposed action is based on direction in the Colville National Forest Land Management Plan (Forest Plan, 2019) as well as consistency with the Pend Oreille County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP, 2005 as amended).

The following objectives were developed to address the need for action.

Objective 1: Trend the forest to the historic range of variability, reduce hazardous fuels and improve resilience to disturbance

High-density forest conditions dominate the planning area. These density conditions reflect severe competition between trees, reduced tree vigor, increased tree mortality and above normal buildup of dead fuel on the forest floor. Dense forest conditions throughout the planning area reduce the resilience of these forests to disturbance and contribute to uncharacteristic wildfire behavior.

- Trending the forests to their historic range of variability (e.g., changing stand structure to increase patch sizes, tree diameter, age, spacing and species composition; reducing competition). *(Forest Plan, 2019, pages 34-36)*

- Improving forest resiliency to disturbance agents such as fire, drought, insects, and disease. (*Forest Plan 2019, pages 34-40, 106, 109*)

Objective 2: Improve water quality and aquatic/riparian habitat conditions

Some roads in the project area are contributing to loss of aquatic system integrity (e.g., change to water flow, restriction to fish passage). In addition, Riparian Management Areas are now more susceptible to higher than historic levels of severe wildfire because of drier conditions in the surrounding vegetation. Treatment is needed to reduce uncharacteristic wildfire risk and loss of adjacent vegetation which could lead to increased sedimentation.

- Improving or maintaining water quality (e.g., reduce sedimentation rates into streams, maintaining water temperature). (*Forest Plan 2019, pages 45, 51*)

- Improving aquatic and riparian habitat conditions (e.g., support native aquatic and riparian dependent plant and animal species, distribution of conditions is similar to reference condition watersheds, hydrologic connectivity, and sediment regime is within the natural range of variation). (*Forest Plan 2019, pages 50-51*)

- Providing aquatic organism passage. (*Forest Plan 2019, pages 53-54*)

Objective 3: Improve habitat conditions for big game and federally protected species

Habitat for big game and federally protected species can benefit from reducing open road density and improving the amount and quality of available forage.

- Improving habitat conditions (e.g., amount, distribution, and connectivity of habitat, forage availability, seclusion) for big game and federally protected species such as grizzly bears and wolverines. (*Forest Plan 2019, pages 59-60)*

Objective 4: Provide opportunities for members of the public to connect to the landscape and projects that can contribute to the local economy

There is an active public interest in the recreational and economic value of the Sxʷuytn project area.

- Continuing to provide opportunities to contribute to the local economy (e.g., jobs, forest products, recreation). (*Forest Plan 2019, Forestwide Direction – Social Systems)*

- Providing opportunities for connecting people to their land (e.g., recreation, interpretation, citizen science, and maintaining access to traditional cultural resources). (*Forest Plan 2019, Forestwide Direction – Social Systems)*