

Record of Decision



U.S. Department of Interior
Bureau of Indian Affairs



Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation

*2015 Integrated Resource Management Plan
Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement*

February 1, 2023

AGENCY: Bureau of Indian Affairs, Northwest Regional Office
911 NE 11th Avenue, Portland, Oregon 97232-4169

ACTION: Record of Decision for the Integrated Resource Management Plan on the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, Okanogan and Ferry Counties, Washington.

SUMMARY: The Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation in Washington have prepared an updated Integrated Resource Management Plan (IRMP). Five management alternatives were considered, and a preferred alternative was chosen by the Colville Business Council. The potential environmental impacts of timber harvesting, grazing and agriculture were assessed in relation to the five alternatives in a Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement issued for public review on July 28, 2017. Responses to comments received during the review period were prepared and incorporated into the original Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement, dated August 14, 2018, and revised on December 17, 2018, following agency review and a reduction in the document page count. With the issuance of this Record of Decision (ROD), BIA announces that Alternative 2, an enhancement and improvement of the previous Integrated Resource Management Plan (IRMP) is the action to be implemented. The BIA decision is based on its review of the 2015 IRMP, the Draft Programmatic EIS, the Final Programmatic EIS, and comments received from the public, federal agencies, tribal members and residents of the Colville Reservation and neighboring communities.

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Introduction

The natural and cultural resources of the Colville Reservation are managed under the Colville Tribes' Integrated Resource Management Plan (IRMP). The Tribes' original IRMP was implemented in 2000. In 2014 the Tribes' IRMP team began preparation of a new IRMP. An assessment of the Reservation's natural, cultural and socioeconomic resources was conducted, identifying management issues and concerns to be addressed in the new IRMP. Five management alternatives were developed by the team for consideration and analysis. A community survey was conducted to ascertain community preferences and concerns regarding management of natural and cultural resources and the socioeconomic benefits to the Reservation community.

Integrated Resource Management Alternatives

1. Continue the Current Management Strategy
2. Enhance and Improve the Current Management Strategy
3. Concentrate on Forest and Rangeland Health Problems
4. Expand Forest and Livestock Production
5. Eliminate Timber Harvesting and Livestock Grazing

Based on preliminary analysis and community preferences, the IRMP team recommended Alternative 2 to the Colville Business Council. The Council unanimously approved the development of an IRMP based on Alternative 2. A draft IRMP was released in 2015 for public review and comment.

Although a Programmatic Environmental Assessment may have been adequate for determining the effects of the new IRMP, the Colville Business Council chose to prepare a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that would include scoping meetings with the Reservation community and documented responses to comments in the Final Environmental Impact Statement. A Notice of Intent to prepare a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement was published in the Federal Register on November 21, 2014 (79 Fed. Reg. 69521). The IRMP team prepared a Draft Programmatic EIS in 2016 and Notices of Availability were published in the Federal Register by the BIA (82 Fed. Reg. 27278, June 14, 2017) and the EPA (82 Fed. Reg. 35200, July 28, 2017). Community meetings were held in Reservation communities to receive public comments on the DEIS.

The IRMP team prepared a Response to Comments document and incorporated it into the Final Programmatic EIS. Revisions, corrections and additional analysis were also incorporated into the Final Programmatic EIS. A Notice of Availability was published in the Federal Register on December 1, 2022 (87 Fed. Reg. 73775).

Description of Alternatives

Alternative 1: Continue the Current Management Strategy

This is the "no action" or "status quo" alternative that would continue the management strategy of the 2000 Plan for Integrated Resources Management (the "2000 IRMP"). The management strategy emphasizes regeneration harvesting to address the existing impacts of insects and disease on the Reservation forest and to move the timber stands toward the Desired Future Conditions. The harvest level is set at 77.1 MMBF on 8,589 acres. It includes various tree retention requirements to maintain an over-story of large trees. This alternative addresses forest health issues. Some watersheds are deferred from treatment.

Livestock levels are maintained at 79,594 Animal Unit Months (AUM). Grazing impacts are monitored to reduce overgrazing in sensitive areas and livestock operators are educated in best management techniques. Invasive weeds and feral horses are managed to reduce their impacts on the range.

Alternative 2: Enhance and Improve the Current Management Strategy

This alternative will develop more effective measures to address concerns regarding forest road maintenance, fish and wildlife habitat, and watershed protection. The emphasis on regeneration harvesting addresses the existing impacts of insects and disease on the Reservation forest and moves the timber stands toward the Desired Future Conditions at a harvest level of 77.1 MMBF on 8,589 acres. This alternative adjusts the current rangeland management with more enhanced emphasis on education, range improvements, and monitoring. Livestock levels remain at 79,594 AUMs.

In the course of developing the preferred alternative management approach, the IRMP team reviewed the 2000 IRMP goals and objectives and identified a number of enhancements and improvements to be incorporated into the 2015 IRMP to improve management of the Reservation's natural resources. These include:

- Establishment of Special Emphasis Areas (lakes, habitat, and cultural).
- Enhanced Best Management Practices for forests, agriculture and rangelands.
- Adaptable harvest volume for timber sales based on site conditions.
- Improved enforcement of rangeland grazing permit requirements.
- Development and implementation of a Forest Road Management Plan with construction and closure standards.
- Transportation and timber harvest plans developed with Light Detection and Ranging (LIDAR), a laser-based remote sensing technology.
- Development and implementation of a climate change strategy.
- A new Memorandum of Understanding with the Bonneville Power Administration to re-establish native plants in mitigation areas.

Alternative 3: Concentrate on Forest and Rangeland Health Problems

This alternative reflects the priorities and strategy of the restoration plan prepared by the Oregon State University College of Forestry and Applegate Forestry LLC during the recent lawsuit and subsequent trust claims settlement with the federal government. It involves a forest-wide thinning approach that concentrates on restoration of watersheds and improvement in forest resilience to wildfires. The harvest level would be 58 MMBF per year on approximately 17,269 acres.

Under this alternative livestock levels would be set at 79,594 AUMs and livestock would fully graze the range units during their prescribed grazing season and then rest the next year's units that are currently heavily grazed. The alternative would increase enforcement of grazing contract compliance.

Alternative 4: Expand Forest and Livestock Production

This alternative seeks to maximize revenue derived from timber harvesting and grazing by increasing the annual allowable cut and opening range units to off-Reservation livestock ranchers. The primary goal is to maximize tribal revenue, employment and income. The expanded timber harvest (100 MMBF on 11,100 acres) would increase revenues by 30 percent to an average annual level of almost \$38 million and would facilitate opening a second mill. Expanded grazing would increase annual revenues from \$830,000 to almost \$1.4 million.

This alternative would increase the use of available livestock forage by 50 percent (to 119,391 AUMs). Forage would still be shared among livestock, feral horses, and big-game animals. Allowing livestock grazing by tribal members and non-tribal members residing off-Reservation would increase revenues. Allowing alternate livestock, such as sheep and goats, would aid in the control of fuels and invasive weeds in specific areas.

Alternative 5: Eliminate Timber Harvesting and Livestock Grazing

This alternative would effectively end commercial timber harvesting and livestock grazing on tribal trust lands. This alternative responds to suggestions from community members who feel that the forest should not be used for timber harvesting and desire the elimination of livestock grazing on the Reservation's rangelands. Forest management would not be provided by the Tribes with the exception of fire suppression. Most of the forest access roads would be closed.

Results of the 2014 Community Survey showed that 10 percent of respondents preferred this alternative. Asked about forest management, 31 percent felt that not enough has been done to reduce the environmental impacts of timber harvesting and other forest practices. Asked about livestock grazing, 21 percent felt that grazing should be discontinued.

Issues Evaluated

The Colville Reservation has a long history of timber production and livestock grazing going back to the early 20th Century. Consequently, the forests and grazing lands of the Reservation have been impacted by past management practices such as selective harvesting, fire suppression and extensive grazing.

Historically, the forest landscape of the Colville Reservation was much different than it is today. Early descriptions often refer to an open, park-like setting of large Ponderosa pine trees with an understory of productive grasses. Dense stands of smaller trees characterize today's forest. Fire sensitive species such as Douglas fir and subalpine fir are more common, often forming dense understories that compete strongly with the dominant overstory for limited resources. The change in species composition and structure over time has resulted in significant forest health concerns.

Forest access roads on the Colville Reservation have been constructed over many years, primarily for timber and fire management purposes. Between 1919 and 1960, the construction of logging roads into timbered areas was accomplished primarily by timber operators. Many of those roads became seriously deteriorated due to the lack of sufficient drainage structures or the failure of those structures to function properly. This resulted in extensive erosion and stream sedimentation affecting water quality and fish habitat.

Wildlife populations are impacted by timber harvesting, roads, and livestock grazing. Elk, deer, moose, and bighorn sheep are an important part of Colville tribal culture, providing subsistence and spiritual values to tribal members and their families. The Tribes want to ensure that big game animals, particularly deer, elk and moose are available to tribal members to provide subsistence food sources and to ensure the continuation of hunting as a traditional cultural activity.

The Reservation's vast grasslands attracted cattlemen and sheep ranchers. In the 1920s, there were up to 100,000 sheep and 30,000 wild horses grazing on the Reservation. Cattle grazing increased to a peak of 13,000 head of cattle in 1967. Overgrazing damages the long-term productivity of rangeland forage and allows noxious weeds to invade. Sheep grazing was discontinued, and wild horse populations and livestock numbers have been significantly reduced over time. Recent analysis shows that out of forty-eight range units, only four are currently identified as heavily grazed. These range units are on the west side of the Reservation in lower elevation sagebrush steppe ecological sites that are infested with cheat grass.

The analysis of potential environmental impacts of the five management alternatives were based on data and information gathered in the IRMP planning process. In addition, the Tribes' natural resource programs monitor and analyze resource conditions, including the 2000-2014 period during which the 2000 IRMP was implemented. Inventories of forest and rangelands, assessments, and surveys provided valuable information for the development of the 2015 IRMP and the Programmatic EIS. The preferred alternative would continue the level of timber harvest and livestock grazing conducted during the 2000-2014 planning period, and the data from that period provided a realistic indication of the level of impact that could occur during implementation of the new IRMP.

The ability of a watershed to absorb the changes brought about by natural as well as human caused events and yet recover to a stable former state is a measure of its stability. Stability in this sense is defined by the interaction of geology, soils, vegetation, climate, and a range of other factors. From this principle has come the concept of an open ground equivalency (OGE) threshold or tolerance value as the point beyond which there is a high risk that recovery potential may be permanently impaired through changes in specified physical, chemical and biological factors brought about by management activities or natural events.

Harvest treatments during implementation of the 2000 IRMP affected 159 of the 209 watershed management units (WMU) of the Reservation. Of those 159 WMUs, 141 had harvest activity that resulted in ground disturbances below the low end OGE threshold value, and 6 of the 159 units had harvest activity that resulted in ground disturbances between the low and high end thresholds. The remaining 12 WMUs had harvest levels resulting in ground disturbances exceeding the high end OGE threshold. Of those, 11 were less than 25 percent over the high end threshold. OGE thresholds were also developed for wildfires, which have a dramatic effect on the amount of ground disturbance, and in many cases, greatly exceed the acreage impact of timber harvesting within a given watershed management unit.

The Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation is the single largest employer in both Ferry County and Okanogan County. Primarily, the Tribe provides employment opportunities in forestry, fire control, and social services, as well as numerous positions in tribal management and administration. Additionally, the federal government offers its own array of forestry practices, health services, and land management positions which also require related office and administrative support services.

The median household income on the Reservation as of 2010 was \$35,524, up from \$27,826 in 2000. Per capita, this amounts to \$17,846, which is about 1% less than the per capita income of Ferry County and about 13% less than the per capita income of Okanogan County.

Comparison of Alternatives

	Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3	Alternative 4	Alternative 5
Annual allowable cut	77.1 MMBF	77.1 MMBF	58 MMBF	100 MMBF	0 MMBF
Livestock levels	79,594 AUMs	79,594 AUMs	79,594 AUMs	119,391 AUMs	0 AUMs
Average Annual Employment	803 jobs	803 jobs	737 jobs	937 jobs	6 jobs
Full-Time*	690 jobs	690 jobs	634 jobs	806 jobs	5 jobs
Part-Time*	113 jobs	113 jobs	103 jobs	131 jobs	1 job
Change in Labor Earnings (gross)	\$399 million	\$399 million	\$342 million	\$473 million	\$43 million
Change in Regional Output (npv)	\$995 million	\$995 million	\$885 million	\$1,144 million	\$68 million
*Estimated based on 2014 ratio of full-time to part-time positions					

Alternatives 1 & 2

Due to the similar timber harvest objectives in Alternatives 1 and 2, the EIS analysis of ground disturbance resulting from harvest activity during the 2000-2014 planning period provides an insight into the level of impact that would likely occur during the 2015-2029 planning period under these alternatives. These activities largely stayed within the prescribed ground disturbance thresholds. As the analysis shows, wildfires have had a dramatic effect on ground disturbance, often greatly exceeding the effects of timber harvesting. Wildfires also have the largest impact on air quality and cultural, sacred and Traditional Cultural Properties. Alternatives 1 and 2 include objectives to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire events through forest thinning and harvest.

Water quality analysis identified re-occurring exceedances of standards, however, surface waters are not considered to be impaired. Alternative 2 updates best management practices and improves enforcement of livestock grazing permit requirements. It also includes a new agriculture plan with provisions for soil and water quality protections.

Alternative 2 further enhances the status quo with special emphasis areas for wildlife habitat and travel corridors and includes objectives to re-establish native plants in mitigation areas. Fish and wildlife management that has ensured stable populations of fish and wildlife (particularly big game) will continue.

The Tribes natural resource programs provide substantial revenue and employment that directly benefit the Reservation community and the regional economy. Under Alternatives 1 and 2, these benefits would continue.

Alternative 3

This alternative reflects the priorities and strategy of the restoration plan prepared by the Oregon State University College of Forestry and Applegate Forestry LLC during the recent lawsuit and subsequent trust claims settlement with the federal government. It involves a forest-wide thinning approach that concentrates on restoration of watersheds and improvement in forest resilience to wildfires.

Originally, this approach assumed that a substantial portion of the settlement funds would be used to implement restoration activities. The plan estimated a cost of \$100 million to implement the plan, but other priorities reduced available funding to less than \$30 million.

The forest practices of the plan reduce the annual allowable cut to 58 MMBF but involve over twice as many acres as Alternatives 1 & 2 and significantly more than Alternative 4. Since these practices include a significant amount of non-commercial treatments, the costs of implementation could significantly reduce the net revenue to the Tribes. The reduced harvest would also jeopardize the ability of the Tribes to fulfill timber obligations to the mill. Tribal revenue, employment and income would all be reduced under this alternative.

The forest-wide approach would increase activity on forest access roads, increasing stress on wildlife. Forest thinning practices have the potential to adversely affect wildlife with habitat fragmentation and loss, however, they can also improve habitat.

Alternative 4

Alternative 4 seeks to maximize tribal revenue, employment and income. The expanded timber harvest (100 MMBF) would increase revenues by 30 percent to an average annual level of almost \$38 million and would facilitate opening a second mill. Expanded grazing would increase annual revenues from \$830,000 to almost \$1.4 million.

The proposed harvest level would be well above the sustainable harvest level identified in the forest inventory analysis, even with a greatly reduced rotation age. Ground disturbance levels would significantly exceed thresholds. Associated road construction and use would increase erosion and impacts to wildlife from habitat loss, fragmentation and stress.

Expanded livestock grazing would increase competition with wildlife for forage and increase impacts to water quality and riparian zones. Revenue gains from expanded grazing would likely be offset by significantly increased management and rangeland infrastructure costs.

Alternative 5

Alternative 5 would effectively end commercial timber harvesting and livestock grazing on tribal trust lands. This alternative would greatly reduce the impacts of forest road construction and use, as well as impacts to surface waters and riparian zones from livestock grazing. Efforts would be made to close forest roads and remove fencing that restricts or endangers wildlife. Impacts to culturally important plants from timber harvesting and grazing would also be greatly reduced.

This alternative would bring about a dramatic reduction in direct and induced employment, reducing an average of 803 jobs to only 6, and eliminating more than \$300 million in income over the 15-year planning period. Funding for per capita payments and support services to the tribal membership would be greatly reduced. Under this alternative, the Tribes would not be able to meet the annual 40 MMBF obligation to Omak Mill and would therefore default on their lease agreement.

Eliminating much of forest practices such as thinning, insect and disease control, and planting would not likely restore the forest to historic conditions. Fuels buildup would increase the likelihood of catastrophic wildfires.

In reality, it is likely that much of the BIA's and portions of the Tribes' forestry programs would continue to operate at some level. This reflects the BIA's on-going responsibility to perform minimal forest health and monitoring activities for tribal and allotted forest lands irrespective of the Tribes' forest management policies.

The Environmentally Preferable Alternative

The environmentally preferable alternative is the alternative that best promotes the national environmental policy expressed in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Generally, this means the alternative that causes the least damage to the environment and best protects natural and cultural resources. The Tribes' resolution to adopt holistic concepts and integrated resource management indicates their desire to minimize environmental impacts associated with timber harvesting, grazing and agriculture. All the proposed alternatives acknowledge this goal, and the FEIS evaluates their relative effectiveness.

The status quo Alternative 1 (the original IRMP of 2000) includes many goals and objectives intended to ensure environmentally sustainable management while providing socioeconomic benefits for the Reservation community. The preferred Alternative 2 enhances and improves the approach of the original IRMP with additional provisions and management practices that address forest and rangeland health issues and emphasizes adaptive management to avoid environmental impacts.

Alternative 3 is focused almost entirely on forest health issues as it prescribes forest-wide thinning and disease treatments. This approach would likely be effective in addressing overcrowding, fuels buildup, and disease and may be the environmentally preferable alternative, at least in the short term. However, this alternative involves ground disturbance impacts to more acreage than Alternatives 1, 2 and 4. It also requires the use of more forest access roads, which increases the already significant impact of those roads. It may also be less effective in restoring historic forest composition.

Alternative 4 (Expand Forest and Livestock Production) includes many of the goals and objectives for forest and range health included in Alternatives 1-3, however, the significant increase in production includes a corresponding increase in impacts from ground disturbance, forest access roads and potential overgrazing. Sustainable, long-term management would be more difficult to realize.

Alternative 5 (Eliminate Timber Harvesting and Livestock Grazing) is intended to let nature take its course and return the forest and rangelands to their original state. Impacts from timber harvest activities and livestock grazing would be virtually eliminated except for the residual impacts of the last century's activities that significantly altered the makeup of the Reservation's forests and rangelands. Lack of management addressing forest and range health would not promote restoration of historic conditions and would likely increase the incidence of catastrophic fires and disease.

Although the preferred Alternative 2 would also include environmental impacts from ground disturbance, forest access road activity, and grazing, the additional focus on forest and range health, forest road maintenance, and adaptive management could result in the environmentally preferable approach in the long term.

The Preferred Alternative

The IRMP Core Team held a series of workshops in 2014 to identify alternative management strategies and to prepare a recommendation to Council designating a preferred alternative. The five alternatives described above were developed during these workshops and the IRMP Core Team assessed the relative merits and environmental consequences of each approach.

In the 2014 Community Survey, respondents were asked to choose the management alternative they preferred. The majority (53%) preferred Alternative 2 to enhance and improve the Tribes' current management strategy. The second largest response (45%) was for an approach that would concentrate on forest and rangeland health problems (Alternative 3). Although most respondents chose only one alternative, 291 chose more than one. The majority of them (203) chose a combination of Alternatives 2 and 3.

The strong support for addressing forest and rangeland health problems was further emphasized by responses to a question concerning the importance of controlling insects and disease. The responses were almost unanimous (97%) that controlling insects and disease was important.

Only 7% of respondents want to see a management focus that expands forest and livestock production. More respondents (10%) would prefer to entirely eliminate both timber harvesting and livestock grazing on the Reservation. Accelerating timber harvesting was supported by only 13% of respondents. Allowing off-Reservation livestock ranchers to lease range units (even at market rate) was opposed by 71% of respondents.

The IRMP Core Team chose Alternative 2 (Enhance and Improve the Current Management Strategy) as the preferred alternative to be developed as the new IRMP. The team, which includes the Tribes' natural resource managers, felt that the expiring IRMP had established an effective integrated resource management strategy and that enhancements and improvements to the plan, to better address environmental impacts, would ensure progress in achieving the Desired Future Conditions in compliance with the Holistic Goal.

Although there was significant support for the restoration focus of Alternative 3, the Team felt that the preferred alternative included sufficient restoration emphasis and would still ensure the economic viability of the Tribes' forest enterprises. Both alternatives 4 (expanded harvest and grazing) and 5 (ending harvest and grazing) presented obstacles that would likely prevent the achievement of the Desired Future Conditions and compliance with the Holistic Goal.

The details of the alternatives, and the IRMP team's assessment and recommendation, were presented to the Colville Business Council on June 3, 2014. The Council passed Resolution 2014-367 approving the recommendation by a vote of 10 to 0.

Mitigation Measures

Timber harvesting, livestock grazing, and agriculture provide socioeconomic benefits to the Reservation community, but also impact the environment with soil disturbance, vegetation removal, water and air pollution. For a century, mitigation of these impacts was not prioritized in the management of the Reservation's natural resources.

With the development of an IRMP in 2000, sustainable, holistic, management goals and objectives were developed to ensure the protection of natural resources and address the legacy of environmental impacts on the Reservation. In 1996, as the IRMP was under development, the Colville Business Council enacted the Holistic Goal, calling for sustainable enterprises that maintain healthy forests, rangelands, croplands, and surface waters.

The IRMP process included the development of a list of Desired Future Conditions that specifies healthy watersheds and aquatic systems, biodiversity, clean air and water, preservation of cultural resources and traditional practices, and economic stability. The goals and objectives of the IRMP provide a management strategy emphasizing the achievement of the Holistic Goal and the Desired Future Conditions by utilizing best management practices that mitigate the environmental impacts of timber harvesting, livestock grazing and agriculture. These goals and objectives are reinforced by the Tribes' Natural Resource Codes.

Best Management Practices

The Forest Management Plan and the Range Management Plan include best management practices (BMP) intended to protect natural resources and achieve the restoration of historic, and desired future conditions. The Range Management Plan includes BMPs to control livestock access to water and reduce impacts to riparian areas. Vegetation BMPs include planting and reseedling to establish native and desirable non-native species and to control noxious weeds.

The Forest Management Plan includes BMPs to protect the Reservation's soils by retaining coarse woody debris on regeneration and intermediate harvest sites. Soils are further protected by limiting soil disturbance to enable natural regeneration of ground cover and other vegetation. Prescribed burning practices reduce fire intensity to minimize heat impacts to soil structure. Other BMPs address soil compaction by minimizing skid trails and conducting ground-based harvest activities when soils are dry or are frozen and have a protective snow cover. The Forest Management Plan also includes BMPs to minimize the impact of forest access roads.

Tribal Natural Resource Codes

Management of the Reservation's natural resources requires compliance with the Tribes' Natural Resource Codes as well as federal laws and their associated regulations. The Tribes' natural resource departments and programs not only comply with these legal requirements, in many cases, they are charged with their enforcement. The Tribes' Natural Resource Codes are

periodically reviewed and updated to address changing conditions and advances in environmental science and resource management practices.

As noted in the FEIS, 93 violations of tribal natural resource codes were documented during the 15-year planning period (averaging about 6 per year). Of these, 37 involved violations affecting either riparian and streamside zones or involved erosion problems from roads that could potentially affect surface waters (averaging less than 3 per year). During this time, there were over 70 timber harvest projects affecting 113 watershed management units for a total of 136,733 acres. Over 1,590 miles of roads were reconstructed and over 600 miles of new roads were constructed. This is a large workload, but the Tribes' natural resource managers are committed to reducing or preferably eliminating the number of violations and to consider and incorporate new strategies for achieving full code compliance.

Decision

Almost all of the alternative management approaches considered in the FEIS involve environmental impacts resulting from timber harvesting and livestock grazing. Over the years, the Tribes have recognized the need to mitigate these impacts with improved management practices that emphasize holistic concepts and sustainability.

The preferred Alternative 2 enhances the holistic approach of the previous IRMP with sustainable timber harvest levels and forest and range health objectives. The plan also benefits the Tribes and the community with continued revenue, employment and income. It was also the most favored alternative in the Community Survey.

Although Alternative 3 had substantial support in the Community Survey and focuses on restoration and forest resilience, the forest-wide thinning approach and significantly increased acreage disturbance could result in adverse impacts to forest composition and wildlife. It also reduces revenues with increased costs that compromise the viability of the approach and may not be sustainable.

Alternative 4 that expands timber and livestock production has the potential to significantly increase revenue, employment and income. However, given the increase in impacts to resources and the unsustainable level of harvest, this alternative would not fulfill the Tribes' Holistic Goal or achieve the Desired Future Conditions.

Alternative 5 avoids many environmental impacts by effectively ending commercial timber harvesting and livestock grazing. However, this would also result in a dramatic reduction in revenue, employment and income. A significant impact of this approach would be the reduction in efforts addressing forest health and the reduction in fuels buildup.

For these reasons, the preferred Alternative 2, which enhances and improves the current management strategy, best achieves the balance prescribed in the Colville Tribes' Holistic Goal and Desired Future Conditions.

Implementation

Implementation of the 2015 IRMP will continue timber harvesting and livestock grazing at essentially the same levels as the 2000 IRMP. These activities will be conducted in compliance with federal laws and regulations and with the Tribes' Natural Resource Codes. The Project Proposal Process will provide multidisciplinary review for individual projects affecting Reservation lands to ensure consistency with these legal requirements as well as requirements under NEPA for environmental assessment.

Adaptive management will allow projects such as timber harvests to be modified to mitigate environmental and cultural impacts based on specific site conditions. Updated Best Management Practices will improve the Tribes' ability to achieve water quality objectives. Improved enforcement of rangeland grazing permit requirements and efforts to control invasive weeds, emphasizing non-herbicidal treatments will improve range vegetation. Re-establishing historic forest species composition and native plants will move the Reservation towards the Desired Future Conditions envisioned in the IRMP.

Significantly, the development of a Forest Road Management Plan with construction and closure standards, and annual funding for forest access road maintenance, will address the impacts of new roads as well as the legacy of unmanaged roads from a century of timber harvesting. Goals and objectives to manage the fish and wildlife resources on the Reservation and the region should continue the Tribes' success in ensuring that tribal members benefit from the availability of subsistence food sources such as fish and game.

Wildfires will continue to have dramatic impacts on the Tribes' ability to manage natural and cultural resources, as will the effects of climate change. Economic factors such as the housing construction market, will also affect the viability of the Tribes' forest products enterprises, as will the market for beef production, along with rising production costs. The Tribes will continue to diversify their economic enterprises to provide resilience to market disruptions, including the development of agricultural ventures.

Advances in science and technology such as Light Detection and Ranging (LIDAR) will enhance the Tribes' ability to monitor resource conditions and more effectively plan timber harvest and forest road systems to avoid environmental impacts and ensure the health and stability of the Reservation's watersheds.

By my signature, I indicate my decision to implement Alternative 2 to enhance and improve the current management strategy as presented in the Colville Tribes' 2015 Integrated Resource Management Plan and as evaluated in the Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement.

Bryan Mercier, Regional Director
Northwest Regional Office
Bureau of Indian Affairs

Appeal

Any person who may be adversely affected by this decision may appeal the decision to the Interior Board of Indian Appeals (IBIA) at 801 N. Quincy Street, #300, Arlington, Virginia, 22203 or Brian Mercier, Regional Director, Northwest Regional Office, Bureau of Indian Affairs, 911 NE 11th Avenue, Portland, Oregon 97232-4169, in accordance with the regulations set forth at 25 CFR Part 2. The notice of appeal must be signed and postmarked within thirty days of the date of this decision. The notice will clearly identify the decision being appealed, and a copy of the decision will be attached to the notice of appeal. Copies of the notice must be sent to the Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs, MS 4140-MIB, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1849 C Street, N.W., Washington, D.C., 20240, as well as to my office and to all other interested parties known to the person appealing the decision. The notice of appeal to the must also certify that the appealing party sent copies to each of these parties. The IBIA or Regional Director will notify an appealing party of further appeal procedures. If no appeal is timely filed, this decision will become final for the Department of the Interior.