

Integrating Aquatic Restoration and Riparian Buffer Management

Presentation Overview

- My background
- Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest and the North Central Washington Forest Health Collaborative
- Supporting an important FS paradigm shift: elevating aquatics



The Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest

- 4 million acres
- 70% of the land base of Okanogan and Chelan counties
- High proportion of dry forest ecosystem types



The Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest

- Fire suppression => overly-dense, disease-prone stands dominated by fire-intolerant species => uncharacteristically large and severe wildfires.
- Legacy of logging, road-building, and other watershed modifications have altered aquatic landscapes:
 - Fish passage barriers
 - Geomorphic and habitat impacts
 - Increased sediment input
 - Altered hydrologic regimes
- Climate change will only exacerbate these problems.



North Central WA Forest Health Collaborative

- Diverse stakeholder group dedicated to accelerating landscape-scale forest restoration on the OWNF in Chelan and Okanogan counties. Launched in 2013 by the Upper Columbia Salmon Recovery Board.
- Includes timber industry representatives, conservation groups, tribal government, elected officials, and local, state and federal land managers working together.



Objective of the NCWFHC

- Help the OWNF achieve Forest Restoration Strategy objectives:
 - Implement large-scale forest restoration projects to restore forest **patterns**, **processes**, and **functions** to increase **resilience** to climate change and to **disturbances**
 - Work collaboratively and strategically across landscapes to double our restoration footprint by 2020.
 - Equal focus on restoring terrestrial and aquatic landscapes.



OWNF Forest Restoration Strategy

- Terrestrial landscape evaluation approach has been honed.
- Aquatic landscape evaluation approach is in-process.
- Challenges to implementation:
 - Elevating and integrating aquatics; the need for robust analyses leading to project prioritization.
 - While the Restoration Strategy emphasizes equal focus on aquatics, FS staff are hamstrung by capacity limitations, reduced budgets, and high turnover.



Key Questions

- How can Collaboratives best support the Forest Service in their development of robust aquatics assessments for watershed-scale projects?
- How do we support effective integration of terrestrial and aquatic analyses to achieve truly holistic restoration strategies?
- With the Forest Service faced with dwindling capacity and funding, how do we best leverage our collective resources to help ensure (1) the application of robust aquatic assessment tools/methods to identify restoration priorities; and (2) implementation of holistic, watershed-scale projects?



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