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Sx^wuytn- Kaniksu Connections ‘Trail’ Project Frequently Asked Questions

The Colville National Forest is proposing a large-scale ecological restoration project on its Newport-Sullivan Lake Ranger District. Proposed activities include vegetation and fuels treatments, watershed and aquatic restoration treatments, sustainable management and maintenance of the National Forest System (NFS) road system, wildlife habitat improvement, and enhancement of recreation infrastructure.

Topics covered in these FAQ’s include: [LOCATION](#) [IMPETUS](#) [PURPOSE & PROCESS](#)
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LOCATION

Where exactly is the Sx^wuytn -Kaniksu Connections “Trail” Project?

The Trail Project is on the Colville National Forest’s (CNF) Newport-Sullivan Lake Ranger District in northeastern Washington’s Pend Oreille County, four miles north of Newport. The project area consists of portions of five large watersheds covering approximately 90,700 acres. The project area is bordered by the Pend Oreille River on the west, the Idaho Panhandle National Forest on the east, and stretches to the southern boundary of the Newport Ranger District. The north border follows the Middle Creek-Pend Oreille River watershed’s north boundary. For maps and other information about the project, visit the Kalispel Department of Natural Resources website at knrd.org and navigate to the Sx^wuytn project or click [here](#).

Special features in the project area include the Geophysical Observatory (seismometer for the USGS Advanced National Seismic System Program) with hiking, cross-country ski and mountain bike trails; Pioneer Park; Indian Creek Community Forest; and multiple lakes with access to camping, boating, fishing and hiking. Small neighborhoods are clustered around lakes and key access routes.

What does the name Sx^wuytn-Kaniksu Connections mean?

Sx^wuytn (*su-who-y-tin*) is a Salish word meaning trail or connections. The name perfectly fits the purpose and intent of this project as we aspire to connect all peoples to the management of their landscapes. The project’s nickname is ‘Trail’.

Who owns the land in the project area?

Land ownership within the project boundary is a mix of private, tribal, state, and federal. The CNF manages 46% (41,600 acres), private lands cover 41% (37,000 acres), WA DNR manages 9% (8,200 acres) and 4% of the project area is owned by the Kalispel Tribe of Indians. The WA Department of Fish & Wildlife manages the LeClerc Wildlife Area (<1%, 200 acres).

IMPETUS

What does as “All Hands, All Lands” approach mean?

This means every land owner – private, agency, organization, tribe, state or federal – are invited to be involved. Careful planning for action across ownerships mimics nature, as ecosystems and natural events



don't stop at ownership or administrative boundaries. However, this NEPA analysis only analyzes actions on the CNF. Action on ownerships other than the CNF are at the discretion of the landowner; no one is forced to participate nor told what to do. The key is coordination of efforts and actions and information sharing.

We are using a diverse leadership team, engagement with our local collaborative, an enhanced public outreach, and developing a demonstration forest for small forest landowners to meet that all hands approach through the overarching project. NEPA is but one part of that approach to multi-jurisdictional land management.

How did this project get started?

A number of factors came together in the beginning of 2018 which allowed the Trail Project to use a unique combination of resources and laws to take an All Lands-All Hands approach. The CNF had developed a 20-Year Management Plan which called for assessment and project planning in each of 20 landscape units across the Forest. The Kalispel Tribe, concerned about wildfire-prone forests surrounding their reservation, asked the CNF to take action to reduce that risk. The Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and CNF had just started using The Good Neighbor Authority, allowing the agencies to work much more closely together, sharing resources, personnel and funding in specific ways to speed up forest restoration. The DNR had also recently culminated several years of collaborative work to develop a 20-Year Forest Health Strategic Plan for Eastern Washington which identified large watersheds, like Trail, at high risk to insect, disease and wildfire threats.

The WA State legislature designated grant funds to help facilitate increasing the pace and scale of forest restoration according to that Strategic Plan. When unprecedented prospect presented itself, all parties decided to take advantage of the opportunity to work together on the Trail Project. The Northeast Washington Forest Coalition (NEWFC) then applied for that state grant funding to support the Trail Project by filling gaps in organizational capacity. An Interdisciplinary Team was created with specialists from the CNF, DNR and the Kalispel Tribe. A NEWFC member was hired, under contract, to help coordinate the project, the IDT and public engagement. This truly is an All-Lands – All Hands project.

How does this project approach differ from past management?

This is a different approach than smaller, more scattered treatments of the past. This All Lands – All Hands approach is consistent with WA DNR's recently completed 20-Year Forest Health Strategic Plan and will maximize the effectiveness of forest health treatments while improving stream habitat and function, enhancing wildlife habitat, protecting sensitive plants and cultural resources, while supporting recreation opportunities and economic vitality. Our vision is to work with each other and across boundaries. Your participation is vital to the success of that vision.

Does this mean projects will be implemented on all ownerships?

No. The Environmental Assessment focuses only on proposals on U.S. Forest Service lands. However, the entire landscape was analyzed to better understand aquatic systems and conditions, vegetation patterns and species historically present and projected future conditions. We understand that wildlife habitat, aquatic systems, wildfires, recreation opportunities and other resources don't stop at administrative boundaries. Therefore, we looked at the whole landscape, but went into much greater detail on US Forest Service lands. Tiering off of this analysis, DNR and the Kalispel Tribe will be implementing



treatments on their adjacent lands that support and complement Trail Project objectives. We're also working with other agencies that can help and support actions on private lands by willing owners.

We believe these data will be helpful to all project area landowners and for a proposed project on the adjacent Priest River District, with which we're also coordinating.

Are private forest landowners expected to treat their lands too?

Nothing that we're proposing places a responsibility on other landowners. Working with adjacent private large commercial forest landowners, we hope to coordinate treatments and access to minimize impacts to the ecosystem.

Small private forest landowners are encouraged to participate in forest restoration and wildfire risk reduction. The Pend Oreille County Community Wildfire Protection Plan provides helpful guidance for effective action around your home and within your neighborhoods. *(See Collaboration section below for more information.)*

Likewise, help, from advice to financial support, can be found by contacting the DNR's Landowner Assistance Program (<https://www.dnr.wa.gov/sflo>), the Pend Oreille County Conservation District, and WSU's Pend Oreille County Extension for forest and aquatic health and protection. The range of programs, advice and support is impressive.

PURPOSE AND PROCESS

Why is this project necessary?

Healthy forests and watersheds that provide fish and wildlife habitat, clean water, and protect our social and cultural values, are important to all who live and work in Pend Oreille County. When forests become overstocked, dense, and stressed, this sets the stage for insects, disease, and uncharacteristic wildfire to occur and threaten the very reason many of us live here. We believe an All Lands-All Hands approach, involving all parties, is a bold and necessary step to improve the current ecosystem conditions.

The Trail Project purpose and need described below follows the guidance of the recently revised CNF Forest Land Management Plan (September 2019).

What is the purpose of this project?

The project has multiple purposes: to increase forest health; address insect and disease outbreaks and reduce the potential for future outbreaks; limit the severity of wildland fires; meet state and federal water quality guidelines; provide quality aquatic habitat; contribute to the local economy; and connect lands and people. Specifically, there is a need for:

- Trending the forests to their historic range of variability in species and spatial distribution
- Improving forest resiliency to disturbances such as fire, drought, insects, and disease
- Improving or maintaining water quality
- Improving or maintaining aquatic and riparian habitat conditions
- Providing aquatic organism passage
- Improving habitat conditions for big game and federally protected species
- Continuing to provide opportunities to contribute to the local economy
- Providing opportunities for connecting people to their land



How are you developing proposed actions?

The first step was extensive planning on how to efficiently and effectively coordinate this unique All Lands-All Hands approach and securing the funding and commitment from all partners. We then tasked specialist teams with data collection, convened a recreation collaborative, and began public involvement through a series of workshops to get everyone's input and ideas and better understand public concerns. The Interdisciplinary Team of specialists (IDT) from all agencies met repeatedly in committees or collectively to compare findings and address significant problems that spanned all ownerships, such as an existing road system far more complicated and dense than necessary and ways to maintain and sustain the scenic beauty of the area.

What kinds of projects are you proposing?

The Forest, DNR and KTI are proposing a suite of restoration tools such as thinning, prescribed fire, culvert replacements, some road obliteration and more to increase wildfire resilience as well as improve forest, wildlife and aquatic habitat health in the watershed. The project also aims to reduce wildfire risk within the wildland urban interface and provide a transportation system that is affordable, safe and efficient for the administration, public use and forest protection. Recreation, cultural uses and access to enjoy public lands are also important additions to the suite of projects.

RESOURCES AND ACCESS

Is there habitat for threatened or endangered species in the project area?

Threatened and endangered wildlife, fish and plant species habitats are always a concern. There is no designated recovery habitat for endangered species in the project area. There is habitat for Canada lynx and bull trout, both threatened species.

The CNF does not contain designated critical habitat for Canada lynx, but follows current science direction for managing Canada lynx habitat. High-elevation lynx habitat was impacted by the Tower Fire (2015) so areas of lynx habitat within the project area will be avoided. The project area includes critical habitat for bull trout. Much of this habitat is already protected by stringent riparian management direction but extra care is taken to avoid impacts to and where possible, enhance these specific stream reaches.

Project proposals are sensitive to, and protective of, habitat and nesting areas in or around the project area for species of concern such as goshawk. Forest Plan direction is very specific in terms of providing nest protection and undisturbed alternate nesting zones.

A project-specific survey for the presence of any of a specific list of sensitive plants is being conducted focusing on signature habitats where these species might be found. If found, activity will be avoided in the area.

Are you proposing changes to the road system?

Over many years, forest management and access needs across all ownerships has created a complex network of roads throughout the project area. Older logging systems required much closer road spacing but high road densities (number of miles of open road per square mile) negatively impact wildlife habitat and aquatic systems. The current road density far exceeds science-based goals in the CNF Forest



Plan. To meet the project's purpose and need (see above) and the Forest Plan, the road density and the problems it creates need to be addressed.

We've identified many miles of road segments, spur roads and old road prisms that are redundant, grown-in and/or impassable. Many of those, pending evaluation and final determination, will be 'put to bed' and the landscape restored, reducing stream sedimentation, hydrologic disruption and reconnecting wildlife habitat. Some existing open roads are proposed to be closed to public motorized use and put into storage (naturalized but not obliterated so they can be used in the future). The proposed decommissioning and closures will also move the landscape towards meeting Forest Plan goals.

There are important reasons to keep an efficient and effective road system for fire suppression and future management. Roads are also important for recreation. That's why we're balancing decommissioning proposals with ensuring there are a variety of roads for public access and enjoyment. This includes creating more loop routes and maintaining access to other motorized and non-motorized recreation opportunities.

We proposed to build some temporary roads to accomplish certain parts of the project, and when the project is complete those routes will be put to bed. A small amount of permanent new roads are proposed.

Our approach considers the entire road system and coordinates with adjacent landowners in sharing easements so we can use the least impactful routes and reduce the overall road density in the project area without eliminating important access.

PARTNER INVOLVEMENT

Why are you using the Tribal Forest Protection Act (TFPA) here?

Under TFPA authority the Kalispel Tribe of Indians (KTI) requested the Forest Service engage in a partnership to "advance our shared interest in ecosystem restoration, forest health, and hazardous fuels reduction on Colville National Forest lands adjacent to the Kalispel Indian Reservation". The Forest Service accepted the Tribe's proposal in a letter dated January 4, 2018. The Tribe refers to the project as Sx̣ẉuytn, which is the Kalispel Salish word for trail. It has informally become known as the Trail Project.

What's the Tribal Forest Protection Act do?

TFPA (Tribal Forest Protection Act, PL 108-278 of 2004) authorizes the Forest Service to give special consideration to tribal proposals for projects on lands administered by the Forest Service bordering or adjacent to tribal trust lands, specifically for work conducted on Forest Service land requiring restoration or posing a risk to trust assets. This unique legislation provides opportunities to reduce the risk of catastrophic fire, insects, disease, invasive species and other potential adverse effects to tribal lands and to restore National Forest System lands.

Title to most tribal lands in the United States is held by the United States government in trust for the benefit of existing and future generations of tribal populations. Under federal Indian trust responsibility the government must protect tribal treaty rights, lands, assets, and resources (e.g., water, oil, timber, wildlife, fish...). TFPA does not grant additional rights on or proprietary use of federal lands to any tribe.



How is the Kalispel Tribe involved?

Along with requesting action on US Forest Service lands surrounding their reservation and communities, the KTI has contributed extensively to the project in multiple ways. KTI shares extensive natural resource knowledge of the area; significant project funding and support of specialists to participate in the interdisciplinary planning team; contracts with specialists to help support the planning process; provides a representative to the Project Leadership Team; and uses its invaluable community network to engage members of the public.

How is the WA DNR involved?

The WA DNR is involved in myriad ways. Several years ago the DNR collaboratively wrote the 20-Year Forest Health Strategic Plan for Eastern WA (Strategic Plan) with goals and strategies to increase the pace and scale of restoration of high risk forests. The Strategic Plan identified this project area as high risk. The WA State legislature put money into a grant program to stimulate and support forest restoration which is being used on Trail. DNR can work on Forest Service projects like this through the Good Neighbor Authority, which allows work on federal lands near or adjacent to State lands through a revolving fund.

The DNR is providing personnel and project support such as: a representative on the Project Leadership Team; specialists on the project interdisciplinary planning team; procuring temporary road easements; project layout and contracting; and other work to support the project through planning and implementation. However, all work follows USFS direction, specifications and applicable federal law.

COLLABORATION

Is Northeast Washington Forest Coalition, the local forest collaborative, involved?

Northeast Washington Forest Coalition or NEWFC is involved in two ways. NEWFC applied for a DNR grant (\$400,000) to support the Trail Project planning effort. Most of those funds were directed to the Kalispel Tribe to support innovating new aquatic surveys and assessments, and to support public engagement and education through workshops and field trips – both of subjects of high interest to NEWFC. NEWFC retained some funds to contract project coordination and support additional public engagement.

NEWFC promotes increasing the pace and scale of sustainable forest restoration and conservation. But that does not imply automatic support of all Trail project proposals and design details. NEWFC is independently following its normal process of collaboration where project concepts and/or prescriptions fall outside guidelines collaboratively developed by NEWFC's diverse members.

How did you come up with recreation proposals?

Recreation specialists from the Kalispel Tribe, the CNF and NEWFC contacted a broad spectrum of organizations representing many types of popular area recreation. Representatives from those organizations formed a temporary collaborative group, regularly meeting over a period of months. They developed a long list of options and opportunities and then prioritized them to the top ten, ensuring that everyone was satisfied that their needs would be met while minimizing conflict with other uses.



How are interested private citizens involved?

We have a robust mailing list of people who have expressed interest in this type of project and citizens who have attended any of our six workshops and/or field trip in 2019. We've received very helpful suggestions, comments and insights.

Team leaders met several times with homeowner associations for consultation on recreation project activities proposed near their neighborhoods. We encourage local landowners to consider restoration actions on their own properties to improve aesthetics and property value while decreasing risk.

Where can a small private landowners to get advice and help for restoration projects on their land?

There are quite a few services, programs, grants and education sources (most free) available through:

- Washington State Department of Natural Resources' Small Landowners Assistance Program (<https://www.dnr.wa.gov/sflo>) or 509-684-7474.
- USDA Natural Resource and Conservation Service (NRCS) at 509-447-4217 or (<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/>), and
- Pend Oreille County Conservation District (<https://www.pocd.org>) or 509-447-1155

Washington State University Extension has put together multiple tools and lists:

- a statewide brochure on programs and contacts which can be mailed to you or downloaded at <https://pubs.extension.wsu.edu/forestry-education-and-assistance-for-washington-forest-landowners>
- helpful links for small forest landowners at <https://extension.wsu.edu/stevens/nrs/nrlinks/>
- a very comprehensive list of information and assistance by resource at <http://forestry.wsu.edu/resources/>
- Or call 509-447-4217 or 509-667-6540

For more information about the Sx'uytn-Kaniksu Connections 'Trail' Project, review the project documents and comment on-line at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=54315>. You can also get more information or provide comments at the Newport-Sullivan Lake Ranger District, 315 North Warren Avenue, Newport, WA 99156, 509-447-7300.