
South Fork Mill Creek Collaborative Working Group – Final Forest Management Recommendations

The following report from the South Fork Mill Creek Collaborative Working Group presents conclusions and recommendations for which there was the greatest general agreement among participating stakeholders and should therefore be viewed as the highest priority for implementation. The report also identifies whether each recommendation was developed by consensus or by majority opinion and outlines some of the issues for which there was less general agreement.

Recommendations

1. Consensus. The Working Group felt that there was now general agreement that portions of the South Fork Mill Creek Watershed are in Fire Condition Class 2 or 3 indicating that these areas have missed one, two or more fire cycles resulting in a build up of fire fuels, encroachment of tree species into areas that they did not historically exist, and over stocking of some stands. Ground surveys by the Forest Service are needed to confirm Fire Condition Class (FCC) before any treatments, other than the projects identified in Recommendation #7, are to occur. Treatments will be designed to improve FCC.
2. Consensus. There is a goal to dramatically reduce the risk of large-scale fire event that causes damage to drinking water.
3. Consensus. Aggressive wildfire suppression must continue to occur throughout the watershed and adjacent areas until a Fire Management Area Plan is completed. The Working Group recommends the development of a fire management plan that would consider alternatives which may include use of prescribed natural fire (PNF) within the Watershed if conditions warranted.
4. Consensus. High-intensity ground fires increase the risk to water quality due to loss of soil cover and creation of hydrophobic soil conditions, two conditions that combine to increase erosion potential and runoff rates.
5. Consensus. Retain all sound snags of the largest diameter class available and of the tree species present that will persist the longest into the future.
6. Consensus. All recommendations for management within LSR areas must meet existing LSR requirements and guidance within the Forest Plan.
7. Consensus. Develop and maintain defensible space around the perimeter of the Watershed and along designated interior roads; continued maintenance of this space is critical. The perimeter roads recommended for treatment include 1720, 1700, 1700-660, 1700-662, and 1720-193. The interior roads recommended for treatment include 1721, 1720-170, 1720-011, 1720-191, 1720-192, 1720-196, 1720-197, and portions of 1720-190. Work along perimeter roads should be planned to minimize potential adverse impacts to wildlife and scenic values.

8. Consensus. Coarse woody debris reduction is warranted in some areas to reduce potential risk to water quality from high-intensity ground fires. The Working Group recommends adopting the downed wood targets presented in the table below, and the prioritization criteria outlined in the attached document titled *South Fork Mill Creek Collaborative Working Group - Final Woody-Debris Reduction Recommendations*. Retained downed wood shall represent the largest diameter classes available.

Elevation zone	Coarse Woody debris target
Below 3000'	5-15 tons/ac
3000' to 4000'	<20 tons/ac
Wet sites above 3600'	15-25 tons/ac

9. Consensus. Variable-density thinning of plantations that focuses on trees less than 12" dbh and coupled with fuels abatement should occur. For the purposes of these recommendations, plantations were defined as follows:
 "Stand of trees initiated-
 (A) through direct or indirect seeding; or
 (B) by planting seedlings following any harvest method, including salvage logging, that removed more that 90 percent of the over story of the original stand on contiguous areas larger than 5 acres."
 There was not agreement among Working Group members on the issue of whether stands with less than 90% over-story removal, such as shelter wood harvests, could be considered plantations.
10. Consensus. No-touch riparian buffers should be established for any activity.
11. Consensus. Prescribed fire should be utilized in areas that are ready for it.
12. Consensus. No new permanent roads should be developed. There was not agreement on the issue of temporary roads.
13. Consensus. The first priority is to complete Recommendation #7; other work can occur concurrently to the extent that it does not detract from completion of this project.
14. Consensus. The second priority is the thinning of plantations and associated fuels abatement; the Working Group believes that thinning in these areas would require less survey, planning, and approval to initiate needed work.
15. Majority opinion. Thinning in non-plantation stands should target younger and smaller-diameter trees in the stand that have become established since the exclusion of fire and should be coupled with downed wood reduction and fuels abatement. Highest priority stands for treatment must irrefutably be FCC 3 based upon field surveys.

Minority opinion. Bark understands that we, along with the other members of the collaborative group, have been tasked with a primary goal of ensuring clean drinking water for the city of The Dalles through a forest management recommendation to the Forest Service. Forest fire was provided to the group as a number one concern and therefore Bark believes that we must focus on treatments that are 1) most effective, and

2) do not themselves increase risk to water quality. Logging focuses on removing the least flammable component of the forest (trunks), often increases the volume of litter on the forest floor, and by opening the canopy results in drier conditions with faster wind speeds and can significantly increase a fire's rate of spread, flame length, and create more erratic shifts in fire speed and intensity. In addition, logging requires heavy machinery, roads, landings, and skid trails that have known negative impacts to hydrology. Bark is willing to accept these risks as it pertains to creating a defensible perimeter for The Dalles watershed, but believes that other treatments as outlined above provide more effective protections for the water quality of the South Fork of Mill Ck.