

RCW 76.06.200 Forest health assessment and treatment framework.

(1) The department must establish a forest health assessment and treatment framework designed to proactively and systematically address the forest health issues facing the state. Specifically, the framework must endeavor to achieve an initial goal of assessing and treating one million acres of land by 2033.

(2) The department must utilize the framework to assess and treat acreage in an incremental fashion each biennium. The framework consists of three elements: Assessment; treatment; and progress review and reporting.

(a) Assessment. Each biennium, the department must identify and assess two hundred thousand acres of fire prone lands and communities that are in need of forest health treatment, including the use of prescribed fire or mechanical treatment.

(i) The scope of the assessment must include lands protected by the department as well as lands outside of the department's fire protection responsibilities that could pose a high risk to department protected lands during a fire.

(ii) The assessment must identify areas in need of treatment, the type or types of treatment recommended, spatial optimization of forest treatments across landscapes, data and planning needs to carry out recommended treatment, and the estimated cost of recommended treatment.

(iii) The department shall develop a mapping tool to identify small forestland owners within wildfire risk areas and use this tool to evaluate and optimize forest health work at a landscape scale to move high risk wildfire areas to lower risk and to leverage funding and the small forestland owner forest health program and landowner assistance program in RCW 76.13.190 with the greatest impact for wildfire prevention, preparedness, and response.

(b) Treatment. Each biennium, the department must review previously completed assessments and prioritize and conduct as many identified treatments as possible using appropriations provided for that specific purpose.

(c) Progress review and reporting. By December 1st of each even-numbered year, the department must provide the appropriate committees of the legislature and the office of financial management with:

(i) A request for appropriations designed to implement the framework in the following biennium, including assessment work and conducting treatments identified in previously completed assessments;

(ii) A prioritized list and brief summary of treatments planned to be conducted under the framework with the requested appropriations, including relevant information from the assessment; and

(iii) A list and brief summary of treatments carried out under the framework in the preceding biennium, including total funding available, costs for completed treatment, and treatment outcomes. The summary must include any barriers to framework implementation and legislative or administrative recommendations to address those barriers.

(3) In developing and implementing the framework, the department must:

(a) Utilize and build on the forest health strategic planning initiated under section 308(11), chapter 36, Laws of 2016 sp. sess., to the maximum extent practicable, to promote the efficient use of resources;

(b) Prioritize, to the maximum extent practicable consistent with this section, forest health treatments that are strategically planned

to serve the dual benefits of forest health maximization while providing geographically planned tools for wildfire response;

(c) Where possible, partner with federally recognized tribes to expand use of the tribal forest protection act on federal lands managed by the United States forest service and the bureau of land management;

(d) When entering into good neighbor agreements, as that term is defined in RCW 79.02.010, prioritize, to the maximum extent practicable consistent with this section, forest health treatments adjacent to or nearby state lands so as to increase the speed, efficiency, and impact on the landscape; and

(e) Establish a forest health advisory committee to assist in developing and implementing the framework. The committee may: (i) Include representation from large and small forestland owners, wildland fire response organizations, milling and log transportation industries, forest collaboratives that may exist in the affected areas, highly affected communities and community preparedness organizations, conservation groups, and other interested parties deemed appropriate by the commissioner; and (ii) consult with relevant local, state, and federal agencies, and tribes.

(4) In implementing subsection (3)(b) of this section, the department shall attempt to locate and design forest health treatments in such a way as to provide wildfire response personnel with strategically located treated areas to assist with managing fire response. These areas must attempt to maximize the firefighting benefits of natural and artificial geographic features and be located in areas that prioritize the protection of commercially managed lands from fires originating on public land.

(5) The department must establish and implement the forest health assessment and treatment framework within the appropriations specifically provided for this purpose.

(6) The department must explore opportunities and developing markets for the utilization of woody biomass residuals from forest treatments, including biochar. When exploring opportunities and developing markets, the department must consult with the department of commerce, relevant federal agencies, representatives of the forest products sector, environmental organizations, and other stakeholders with a working knowledge of woody biomass technology. [2021 c 298 § 4; 2019 c 305 § 1; 2017 c 95 § 1.]

Short title—2021 c 298: See note following RCW 76.04.505.