

July 25, 2007

For Immediate Release

For more information contact:

Lloyd McGee, president of Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition, (509) 680-1468

Tim Coleman, Conservation Northwest, (509) 435-1092

Ron Gray, Avista, Kettle Falls Generating Station, (509) 738-1502

## **Forestry Coalition Finds Balance in the Woods**

Local community groups and businesses develop model forest management plan

**Colville, WA** – A broad coalition that includes mill workers, conservationists, business owners, recreationists, loggers, and foresters announced today that they have developed a broad and comprehensive proposal to improve forestry, wildlife habitat, and recreation on the Colville National Forest in northeast Washington.

The Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition, a local, citizen-led cooperative effort, came together in 2002 to begin a dialogue about solutions to increasingly complex management challenges on federal forests. These challenges include a decline in forest health; an increase in the risk of hotter, more intense fires; expanding and competing recreational needs; and shrinking agency budgets. The coalition has over two dozen active participants, including businesses such as Vaagen Brothers Lumber Company and Avista and conservation groups such as Conservation Northwest and The Lands Council, and has been highlighted by Congress as one of the most successful community collaborations in the West.

“It’s encouraging to see a coalition of diverse local interests working together to find solutions to very difficult issues that have come to characterize our Forest lands,” said Lloyd McGee, president of the Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition and an employee of Vaagen Brothers Lumber Company. “This is a great opportunity to create more natural resource jobs while improving fire safety near our communities and keeping our wilderness traditions alive.”

The Coalition’s “Blueprint for the Colville” strives for a balanced approach in managing the national forest and promotes a variety of activities in three different management zones: Responsible Management Areas, Restoration Areas, and Roadless/Wilderness.

Because projects developed under the Blueprint are based on a collaborative, science-based approach, the Coalition believes they will gain broader public support and move through the public process and environmental review much more quickly, resulting in more wood getting to the mill in a timely way, while protecting important wildlife habitat, roadless lands and old-growth forests.

A recent economic analysis of the Blueprint, conducted for the Coalition by Headwaters Economics (<http://www.headwaterseconomics.org/newash.php>) found that the proposal has the potential to create 220-440 jobs in the woods products industry, assuming that other influential factors such as markets and log prices remain steady.

Under the Blueprint, timber mills would be able to continue operating with a more secure supply of timber into the future. A third of the forest would be available for responsible forestry to reduce fire risk near communities through careful thinning and to provide a sustainable timber harvest with a minimum of new road construction using methods that conserve soils, water, and wildlife habitat. This area would also provide opportunities for non-motorized and motorized recreation activities and trail development.

The economic report also found that wilderness and other protected public lands are associated with local economic growth and well-being.

(cont.)

The Blueprint identifies sixteen roadless areas with wilderness characteristics, such as the Thirteen Mile Basin in Ferry County and Abercrombie Mountain in Pend Oreille County, which provide for high-quality backcountry hunting, fishing, hiking, and equestrian opportunities. The blueprint proposes that these areas would be managed to maintain and restore their wilderness qualities and provide secure habitat for wildlife and opportunities for non-motorized recreation.

“Northeast Washington is the only place in the entire state that is lucky enough to still have the full complement of wildlife species that were here when Lewis and Clark arrived in the Northwest,” said Tim Coleman of Conservation Northwest, a coalition member. “Maintaining wilderness ensures that this legacy will continue for our next generations.”

The Coalition has also identified other parts of the forest that would benefit from active stewardship and enhancement projects for wildlife habitat and recreation trail development. Restoration projects in these areas would include thinning of dense forest stands to reduce fire risk and encourage the growth of big, fire resistant trees; restoration of important wildlife habitat; and creation of new opportunities for the growing demand of all types of recreation.

“Our approach aims to provide wildlife habitat; restore healthy, fire resilient forests; ensure an array of recreation opportunities; and develop sustainable, local jobs in the woods,” said Ron Gray, with Avista’s Kettle Falls Generating Station, a member of the Coalition.

Above all, the economic report highlights the importance of moving away from adversity and towards a collaborative, problem-solving approach to land management. Though difficult to quantify, creating a “can-do” atmosphere that is attractive to people and business may be the most effective way of encouraging economic growth and local investments.

“We hope we can be a model for other communities struggling to find solutions to increasingly complex forest management issues,” Gray added.

The proposal has been submitted to the U.S. Forest Service as a strategy for the Colville Forest Management Plan, which is currently being revised. The concept of the Blueprint was presented and discussed at the larger collaborative Forest Plan meetings for the Colville National Forest.

Forest Supervisor Rick Brazell was encouraged by the outcome. “The Coalition helped bring so many varied interests together in a way that met most everyone's needs. The concept was well received and I'm committed to working with our counties, partners, and collaboration volunteers to flesh out what this could mean to the citizens of the three counties and the general public at large,” said Brazell. “Workable solutions that serve the land and the people are the best investment for future generations the government can make.”

This summer the Coalition will be hosting presentations and community meetings to solicit feedback on the initial Blueprint and develop a more thorough plan. Following community involvement and input, the Coalition will seek authorities to establish restoration and responsible forestry zones, designate new wilderness, and provide funding to pay for new recreation facilities including trail development and maintenance, community wildfire protection and forest restoration.

MAPS OF PROPOSAL AND MORE INFORMATION ARE AVAILABLE FOR DOWNLOAD ONLINE:  
<http://www.newcommunityforestry.org>

###