

File Code: 1500
Date: July 31, 2023

Dear Chelan Ranger District Neighbor,

The Chelan Ranger District on the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest is proposing fuels (vegetation) management treatments to reduce wildfire risk, protect communities, and improve firefighter safety and efficacy. The proposed Cooper Ridge Fuel Break project (the “project”) lies within Chelan and Okanogan counties, approximately 38 miles north of Wenatchee and 5 miles west of Highway 97 (T29N, R21E, S1-25; T29N, R22E, S5-9, 15-16, 20-22, 27-30, 33-35; T28N, R22E, S2, 5-6, 8, 11-13), Figure 1. The project is located on National Forest System land administered by the United States Forest Service.

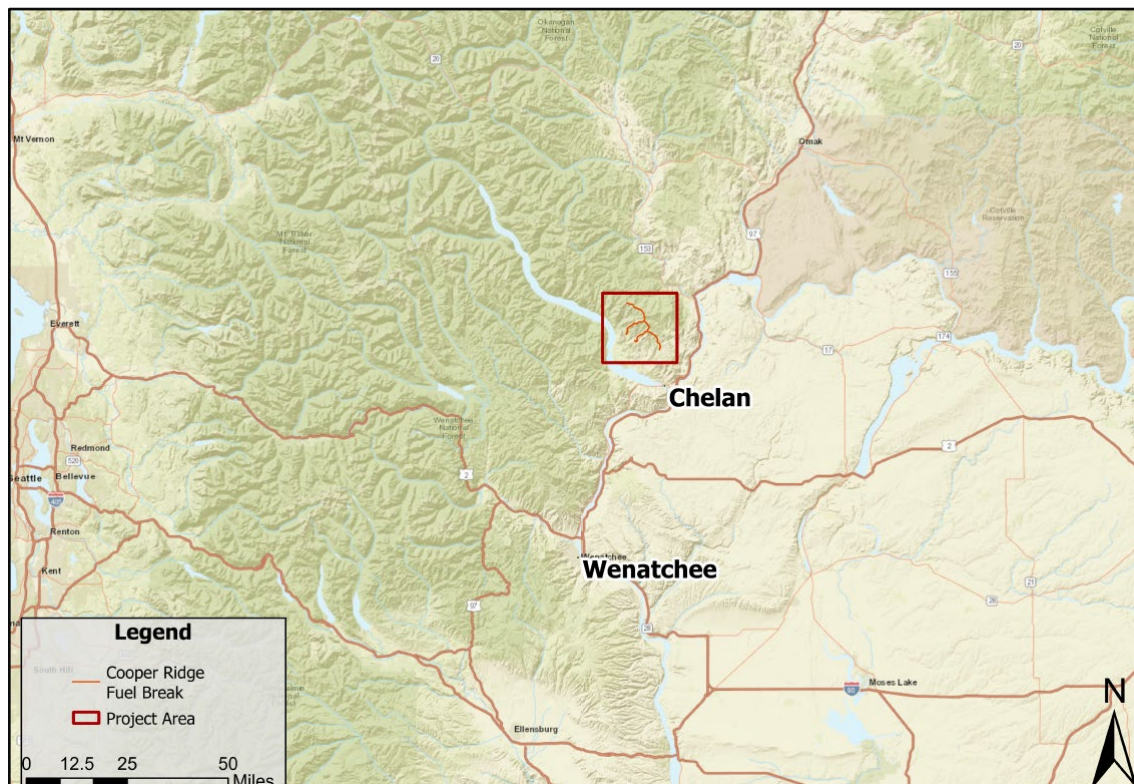


Figure 1: Cooper Ridge Fuel Break Project Area.

Purpose and Need

Frequent wildfires around Chelan, WA, pose a threat to the area and neighboring communities of Manson, Pateros, and other smaller communities in the Methow Valley. When fuels (vegetation) are unmanaged, fires can spread quickly and burn intensely. These factors make firefighting efforts particularly difficult. The Washington Department of Natural Resources has identified much of the project area and adjacent land as High to Very High Fire Risk.

The purpose of the project is to reduce long-term wildfire risk to local communities. The existing fuel break in the project area needs fuel maintenance to ensure readiness and utility.

Proposed Action

The project will modify and remove fuels in specific areas along historic fuel breaks and adjacent road sections (including FS8045 (East Joe Creek), FS8213, and FS8210 (Johnson Creek), FS8020 (Cooper Ridge), and FS8010 (Echo Ridge)) to reduce the risk from wildfires. By cutting, thinning, and modifying fuels, the project will reduce excessive fuel loadings. The treatment width will not exceed 1000 ft. and will adhere to the parameters defined by Public Law No. 117-58, Section 40806.

Vegetation thinning methods will include mechanical and non-mechanical techniques to remove fuels and add spacing to canopy and overstory. Live trees larger than 16 inches diameter will be retained regardless of spacing. Brush taller than 3 feet in height will be cut or mulched to a height of no more than 6 inches above the ground in openings and areas dominated by brush fuels. Smaller diameter trees may be removed and pruning of branches on retained trees will occur.

The resulting material, including smaller diameter trees and existing downed trees, may undergo various treatments such as mastication, piling for future burning, scattering, air curtain incineration or hauling to processing locations. Excess biomass may be processed into chips or biochar for restoration purposes or other projects. Logs may be decked along the road edge, in existing landings/disturbed areas, used for another project, small deck sale, or personal firewood.

The project will contribute to long-term wildfire risk reduction, safeguarding both human lives and the natural environment. Additionally, it will enhance the operational capabilities of firefighters, enabling them to combat wildfires more effectively while maintaining their own safety.

Timing

The project is estimated to take 5-6 years to complete. Once the project is completed, regular fuels maintenance over the 15–20-year lifespan of this project will be necessary to ensure its long-term success.

Letter Purpose

The purpose of this letter is to request your input regarding the proposed action. Any input you may have will assist my interdisciplinary team and me as we move forward with this project. The District has conducted a preliminary review of environmental laws, regulations, policies and plans and has determined that the project, as proposed, falls under a categorical exclusion under Public Law No. 117-58, Section 40806. The proposed action will be excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment (EA), or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and no extraordinary circumstances exist.

How to Comment and Timeframe

Written comments must include: your name, address, title of the proposed project on which you are commenting; specific facts or comments along with supporting reasons that you believe the Responsible Official should consider in reaching a decision; and your signature as an individual or as a representative of an organization or tribal

government.

To comment on this project:

1. Write a letter to the Forest Service and mail it to: Paul Willard, District Ranger, Chelan Ranger District 428 West Woodin Ave Chelan, WA 98816 .
2. Submit an electronic comment. Electronic comments are preferred and must be submitted through the Comment and Analysis Response Application (CARA) website located at: <https://cara.fs2c.usda.gov/Public/CommentInput?Project=64352> .

Comments on the project must be postmarked no later than 30 days after the date of this correspondence. It is the responsibility of all individuals and organizations to ensure their comments are received in a timely manner.

Input submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered. Please be aware that names, addresses, and phone numbers that are submitted with comments on proposed projects are subject to release if a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request is received.

For further information regarding this project visit <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=64352> or contact Andrew Hall, North Zone Fire Management Specialist (24 West Chewuch Road, Winthrop, WA 98862, and phone: (509) 680-9727, email: andrew.hall@usda.gov).

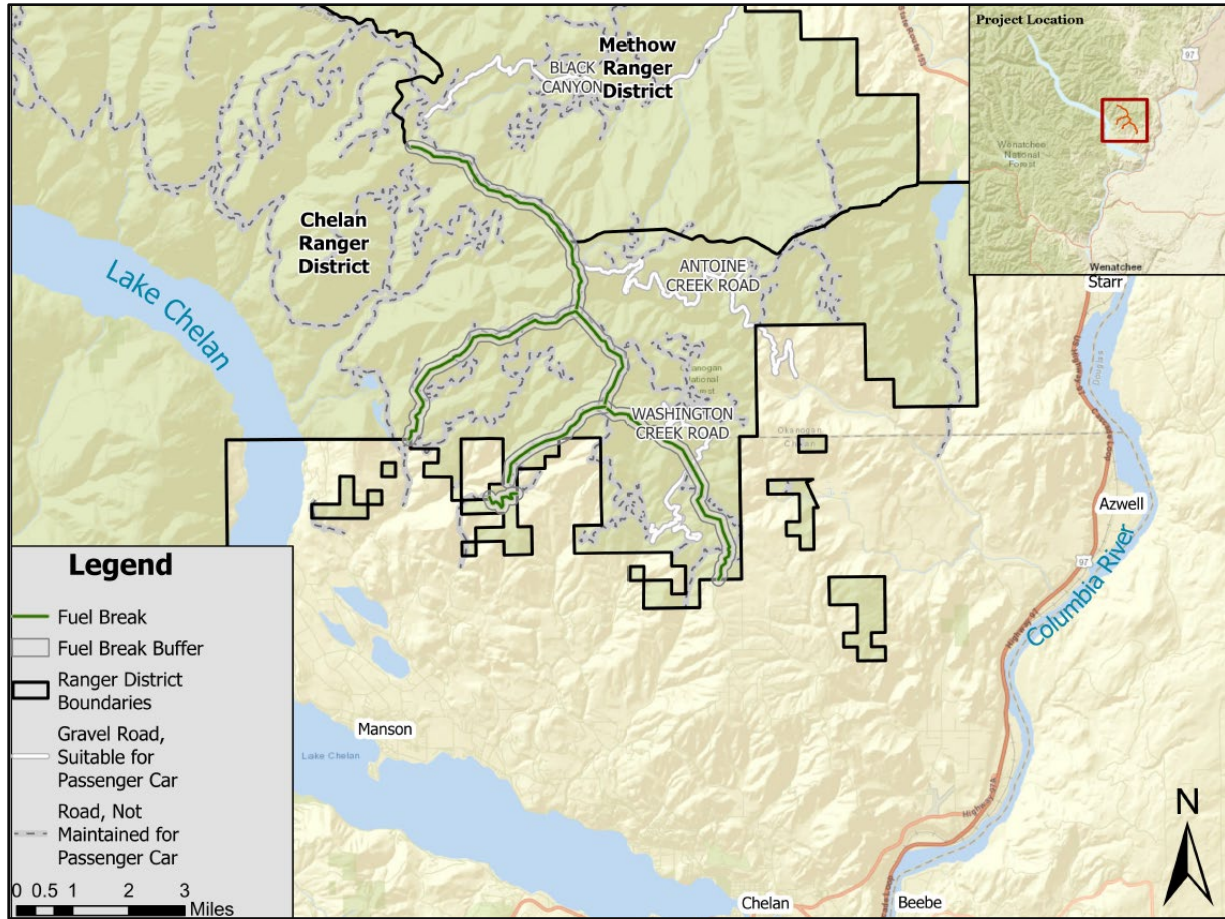
Thank you for your interest in the management of the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest.

Sincerely,

PAUL WILLARD
District Ranger
Chelan Ranger District

Attachments:
Attachment A: Additional Project Map

Attachment A: Additional Project Map



A-1: Detailed Project Map with Ranger District Boundaries.