

DNR Sacheen Field Day

23 September 2022

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Edited by DNR for Clarifications, Corrections and Release

1. Introduction

DNR hosted a field day on Friday, 23 September 2022 to inform people about forest management in general and to walk parts of Section 36, south of Sacheen Lake and east of Sacheen Southshore Rd, to discuss specific examples of forest management. Portions of Section 36 will be harvested in 2024 through 2026. The DNR representatives were:

- Andrew Stenbeck
- Mary-Ellen Reyna
- Dylan Walters

There were nine community members present. Based on the interaction between DNR and the community as well as accolades at the end of the walk, the information was well received and highly appreciated. Andrew provided most of the wealth of information which I will attempt to summarize herein.

DNR provided three handouts:

- A map of the South Sacheen Forest Health Treatment area. This map was sent to the community by Grant Miller via the Sacheen emails. It defines specific areas of Section 36 as “X Year Old Reprod” areas (number of years of new tree production), and Unit numbers that will be harvested.
- A handout on managing working forests, key policies and regulations, and information about the South Sacheen Forest Health Treatment as well as the six-year timeline for the project. This handout was also provided at the June 2022 SLA Annual Meeting, at which DNR presented a solid overview of their practices and the Section 36 project.
- A handout discussing prescribed fires for forest restoration.

2. General Forest Management and Some History

Andrew provided an overview of how Washington State acquired as much land as they did from the Federal government. He indicated that at the time, the Federal government was rich with land, but cash strapped. The state purchased the lands with the concept that they would use the DNR Trust Lands to produce funds for the state. Seventy five percent (75%) of the funds are earmarked for building schools. The remaining 25% of the sales is used by DNR to manage the land. Until the 1990’s DNR provided 50% to 60% of all of the State funds for building schools through the forest harvesting program. That percentage is less now with higher costs for building.

Andrew indicated that in days past, they could not use funds to plant forests unless there was proof that they could have a return on the investment. With a paradigm shift, they now focus on forest management to help forest become more fire and insect/disease resistant.

Andrew and Mary-Ellen addressed the Landowner Assistance program whereby a landowner can get up to 50% cost sharing by DNR. Information is available on their website (<https://www.dnr.wa.gov/cost-share>). They indicated that pruning up to 8' to 10' from the ground is part of the assistance the program can provide. As a related side note, Andrew indicated that the Boulder Fire was as large as it was due to the diseased trees that are not removed.

DNR pointed out that there will be fires after the harvesting to burn piles of debris. It would typically occur in October or November with the moister climate. New trees are planted after the burn. They typically plant Ponderosa Pine and Larch (Tamarack) because they are fire and disease resistant. DNR plans for a 500' fire hazard abatement zone around structures and 100' around county roads such as Sacheen Southshore Road. Additionally, they leave a 50' no-harvest buffer around non-fish streams. DNR provided several links to detailed information on forest protection requirements and practices:

- https://www.dnr.wa.gov/publications/rp_burn_forest_fire_protection_book.pdf
- <https://apps.leg.wa.gov/WAC/default.aspx?cite=332-24-650>
- https://www.dnr.wa.gov/publications/fp_fpi_complete.pdf

When asked about the roads required for logging, they indicated that the plan for making roads is still underway. They noted that the type of equipment used for foresting is somewhat dependent on the contractor selected. Typically, they don't do chainsaw cutting anymore; they use heavy tree feller buncher equipment (cutting & falling by one device).

While we were standing on a knoll, Andrew pointed out that when they plant, the trees may be planted closer together than what is desired as the trees get bigger. At about the 9-year growth timeframe, they then thin the trees leaving all the cut trees on the ground. In fact, that process for the "9 Year Old Reprod" areas on the map was delayed a week for the field day. They have since come in and performed that cutting. The snowpack tamps the trees down and they eventually become food for the forest.

A gentleman by the name of Kent mentioned a large fire in the area in 1910. He indicated there is a book called "The Big Burn" that describes what happened. The book is available on Amazon. (Ref: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Fire_of_1910)

3. Walking Tour

During the walk, Andrew pointed out a variety of tree management practices. One issue he illustrated was an area where a group of fir trees appeared to be affected by root rot. Root rot spreads from the source trees to others through the intertwined root systems and as a result, typically once one tree goes bad, the others nearby will be affected by the same rot and eventually die as well. DNR provided the following link for information on root rot:

- <https://foreststewardshipnotes.wordpress.com/2022/06/01/root-rot-slow-burn-snag-creation/>

Andrew noted that Lodgepole Pine last about 80 years. These are not planted by DNR because the young trees are susceptible to beetles in addition to the fact that they do not live very long.

DNR pointed out a tree with the blue paint band, indicating that tree stays. He also pointed out an older, blue-banded tree showing how the paint eventually fades.

Mistletoe is a parasite to trees. It can shoot out seeds for spreading. For nourishment, it steals the sugars the tree needs for growth. It is hard to see from the ground but will look like a dark patch high up in the tree branches. White Pine trees have been heavily affected by White Pine Blister Rust. DNR provided a link for an informational pamphlet on diseases and DNR studies:

- https://www.dnr.wa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/rp_fh_white_pine_blister_rust.pdf

Grand Fir is not fire resistant nor does it have a good root system; they are taken out during harvesting. The Larch, or Tamarack, make good firewood and therefore they are taken out near roads because they will likely be illegally harvested otherwise.

Andrew told the story of the mouse tails in the Douglas-fir cones. I found two versions of the story on the Internet (Ref: <https://www.stcnature.org/douglas-fir-the-mouse-tail-cones/>).

“One version tells of a horrendously long, cold winter. A mouse took shelter underneath a Douglas fir, where he was protected from the wind and cold, yet he had nothing to eat. The big and apparently talkative tree took pity on the mouse and told him to climb to the top of its branches and feast on the seeds inside its cones. The little mouse thrived on these gifts from the fir tree and it wasn’t long before the other mice in the forest noticed. They followed him to his food source and started eating, but this angered the tree and it slammed its cones shut, trapping the mice inside. To this day, the legend goes, you can still see their tails sticking out.

The other narrative tells of a great fire sweeping through the forest. Other animals were able to outrun the flames, but the mice, with their tiny legs, realized they were doomed. They asked a Douglas fir if they could take refuge among its branches, and the tree graciously offered them the spaces between the scales of its cones. Once again we learn that the tails of those mice are still visible to this day.”

Andrew noted that sometimes the land is sold as part of the management of the forest because the land is too expensive to manage. We also talked about illegal harvesting off Sacheen Southshore and DNR has been alerted to the situation. Andrew commented that sometimes these people can be dangerous, so the best course of action is to call the county Sheriff's Office. If you can discretely photograph a vehicle and license plate, that is also helpful. He told of a personal interact he had with three gentlemen (lightly use word in this case) that he confronted who had threatened him during the interchange. He did note that harvesting also detracts from the illegal harvesting or other land abuses (e.g., making DNR lands one’s home).

Cedar trees were noted to be slow growing. Andrew mentioned that studies have also shown that cedar trees are beginning to migrate due to climate changes; they are moving north, west

in Washington, and higher in elevation to ensure they have the moisture they need. One issue of thinning forests and leaving larger trees such as cedars is that the remaining trees may have no support from their neighboring tree anymore and could fall. Cedars can also get a sunburn if they are not in a thicket of trees. For these reasons, if cedars are taken out, they tend to be taken out as a whole (e.g., a grove is removed) and they are no longer planted. He also noted that Larch and pine are holding their needles longer than they used to.

One point that was made about undergrowth is that ninebark brush tends to choke out trees. The brush becomes thick enough after a cut that new trees do not receive sufficient sunlight and never establish a young forest. As a result of this brush and others, DNR will typically spray to kill undergrowth so newly planted trees can establish themselves and grow taller than the undergrowth before it chokes out the new trees. Other brush pointed out are the Ocean Spray (bright white blooms drooping like grapes), Oregon Grape (looks like Holly, but with small blue berries), and Mountain Ash which have fern-like leaves and red berries. The goal of new growth is to have 125 trees per acre after 5 years of growth. Sometimes they will leave organic growth of around 20 acres because animals feed on the undergrowth. For example, moose like Vine Maple that have a high sugar content in spring. Deer like the moss hanging from the trees. He indicated that deer may actually follow a harvester and feed the moss after the trees have been delimbed.

Pine trees have deep roots. DNR tries not to thin pine from February through July because they are especially susceptible to beetle infestations. A cut tree will attract beetles. Beetles send out a pheromone when they feed, which attracts other beetles which can infect the good trees.

At the end of the walk, the group chatted about tree thinning, etc., on their own property based on dead or dying trees. Andrew suggested getting an arborist involved because they have more knowledge about what may be happening and what the best solution may be. For example, one may need to take out more trees if the issue is root rot. He said they are well worth the money.

4. Conclusion

At the end of the tour, Grant Miller chatted with the DNR representatives. Andrew asked if more people would have come if the event were held on a Saturday. Grant replied that there are lake residents who work, so it was likely. Andrew furthered that they could hold another field day in spring of 2023 or possibly fall 2023 after fire season. He also stated they are willing to be present at our June 2023 SLA Annual Meeting to answer questions.