



Lake Whatcom Watershed Forest Management Plan

Whatcom County Council Meeting - 12.9.25



**NORTHWEST
NATURAL
RESOURCE
GROUP**



Outline

- Management Planning Overview
- Community Engagement
- Ecological Forest Management
- Management Objectives
- Management Recommendations

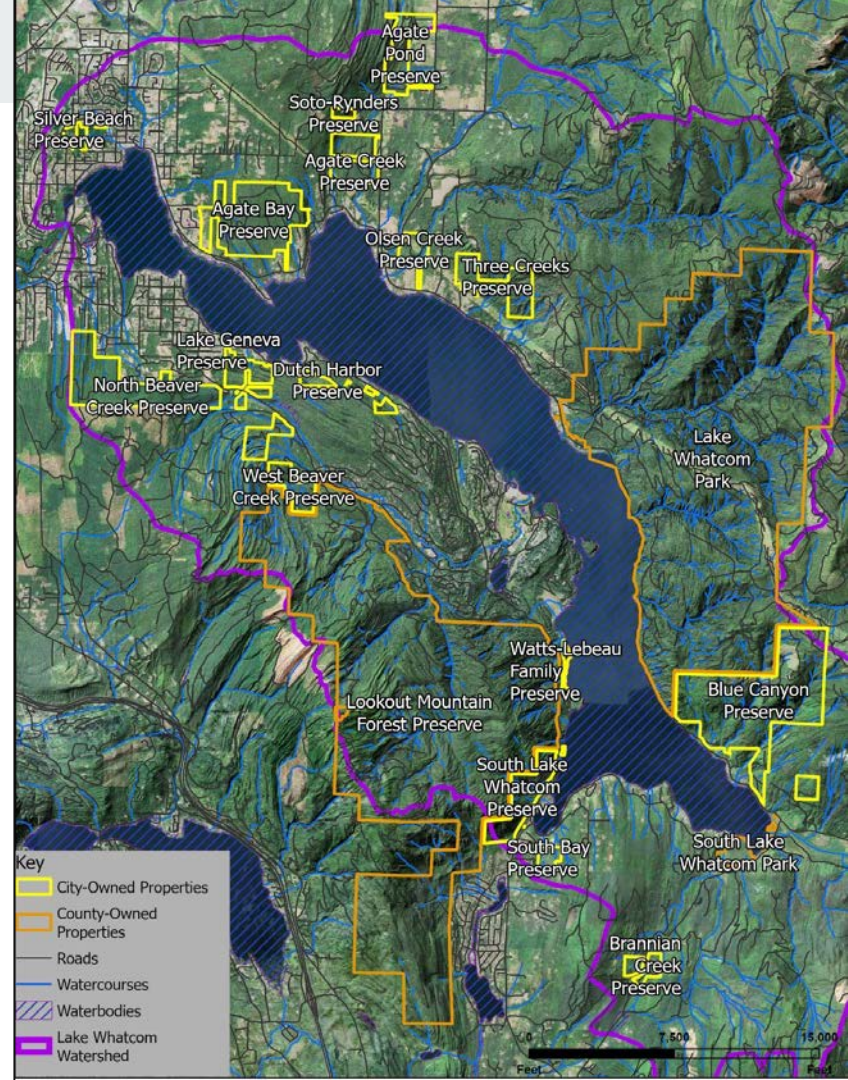
Management Plan Background

- Whatcom County and Bellingham manage over one third of watershed
- Forest Management Planning is goal of Lake Whatcom Management Program's 2025-2029 Work Plan
- NNRG contracted to develop 30-year management plan for 12,200 acres across 19 City and County properties



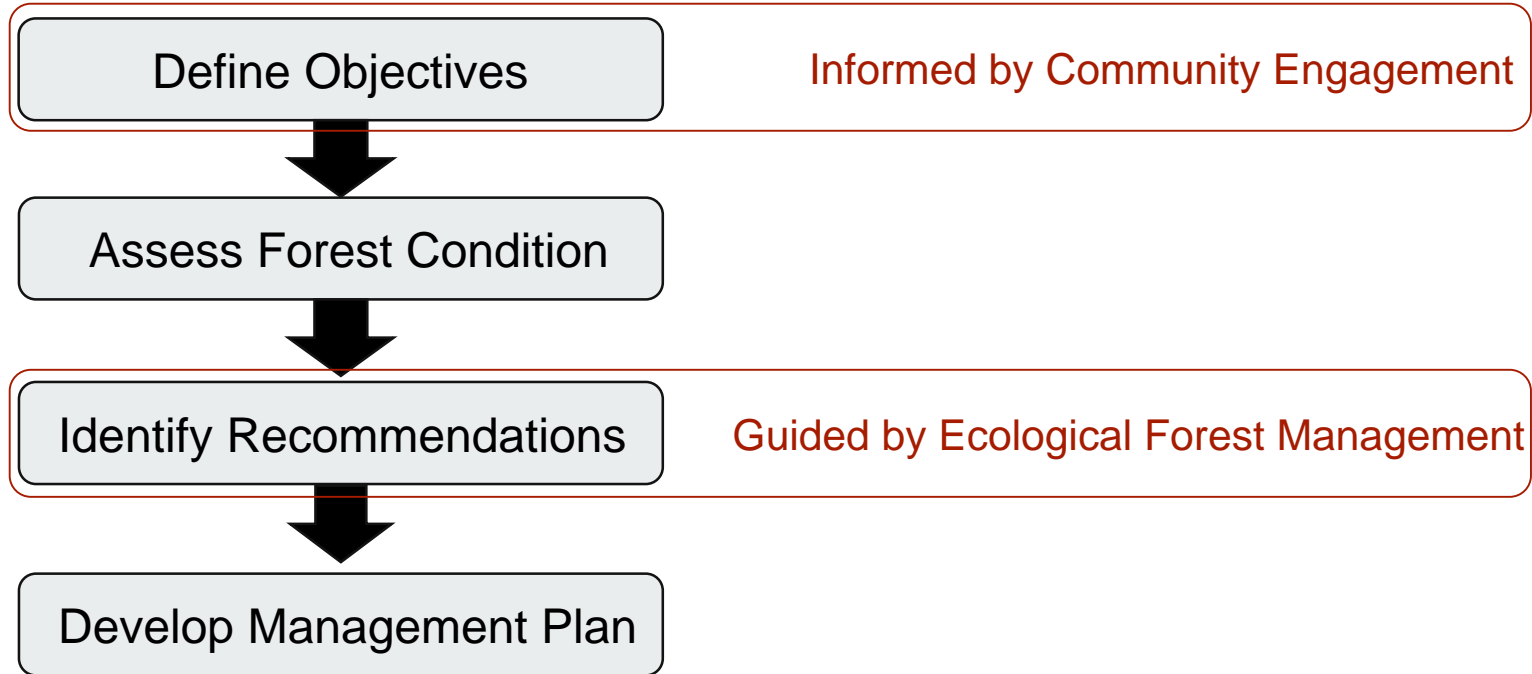
Management Plan Scope

- Developed in Partnership with City of Bellingham
- County Properties - 9,290 Acres
 - Lookout Mountain Forest Preserve (4,554 acres)
 - Lake Whatcom Park (4,660 acres)
 - South Lake Whatcom Park (76 acres)
- City Properties
 - 2,915 Acres Across 16 Sites





Management Plan Approach

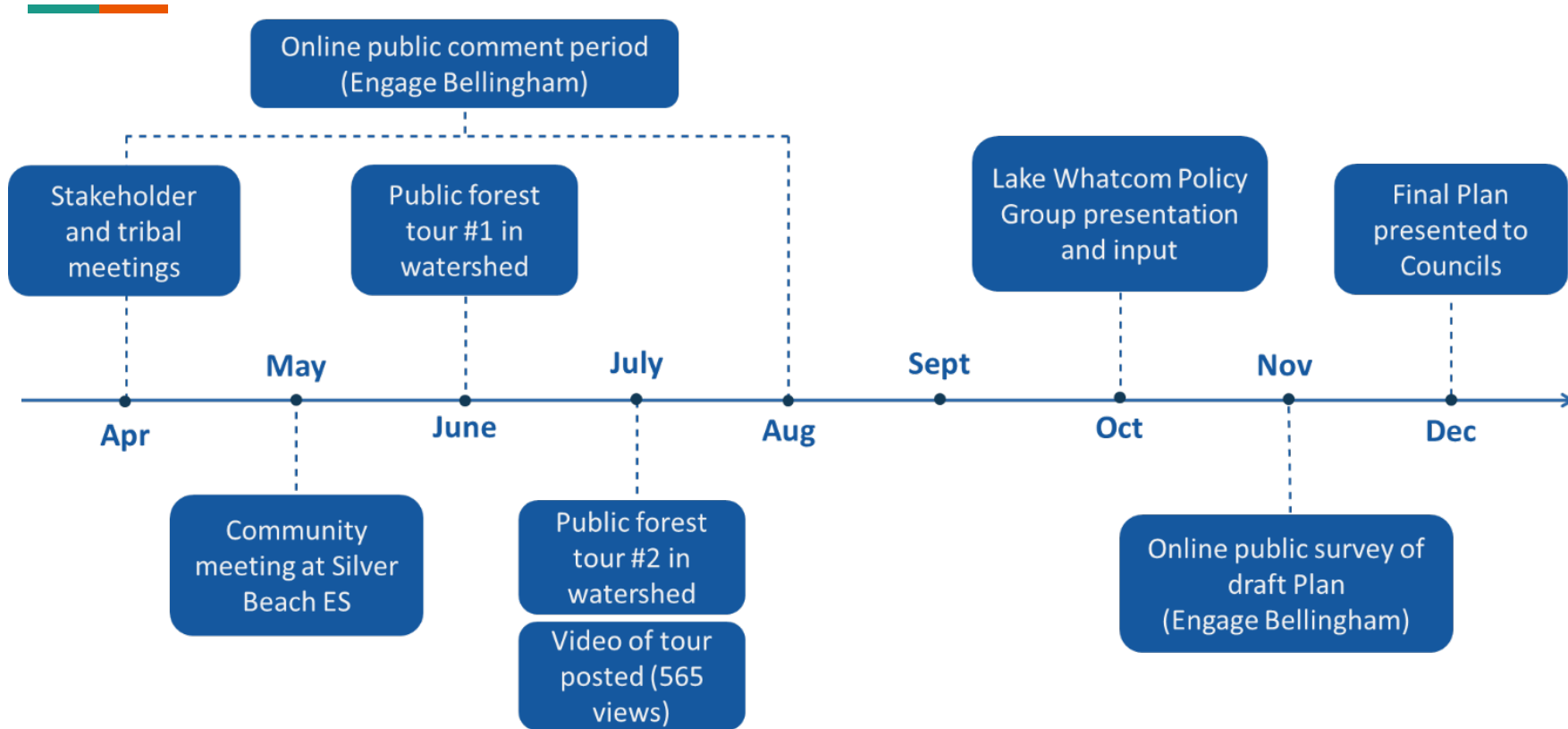


Management Plan Objectives



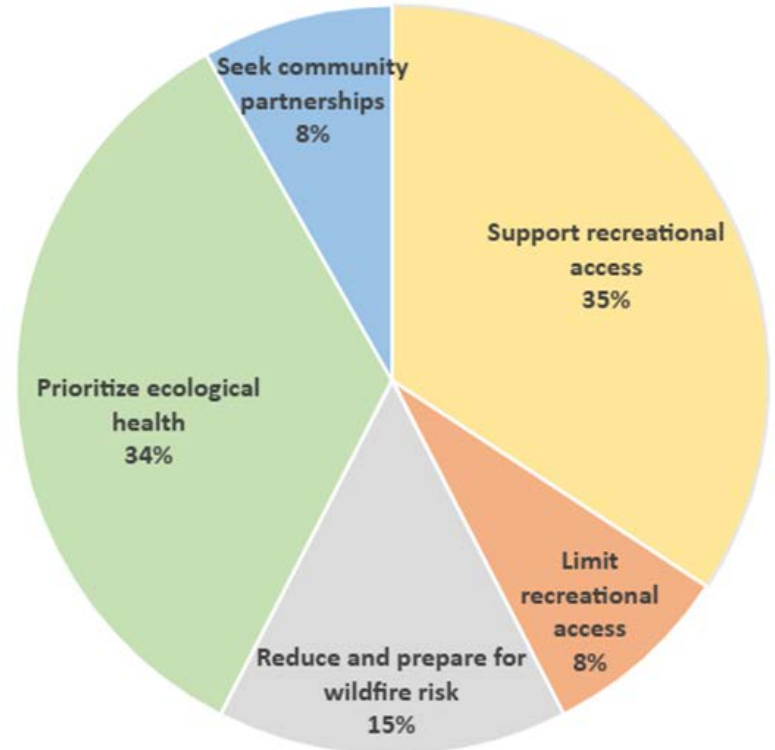
- **Water Quality** - maintain and improve water quality in Lake Whatcom and the surrounding watershed with attention on reducing sediment delivery to the lake.
- **Forest Health and Resiliency** - promote healthy and resilient forests that are adaptable to changing climate and ensure longterm forest cover in the watershed.
- **Resistance to Wildfires** - improve forest resistance to and recovery from wildfires.
- **Wildlife Habitat** - provide quality wildlife habitat throughout the watershed while preserving and protecting critical and unique habitats.
- **Recreational Access** - ensure management recommendations align with and support recreation goals and access that are appropriate for the County and City respectively.

Community Engagement Timeline



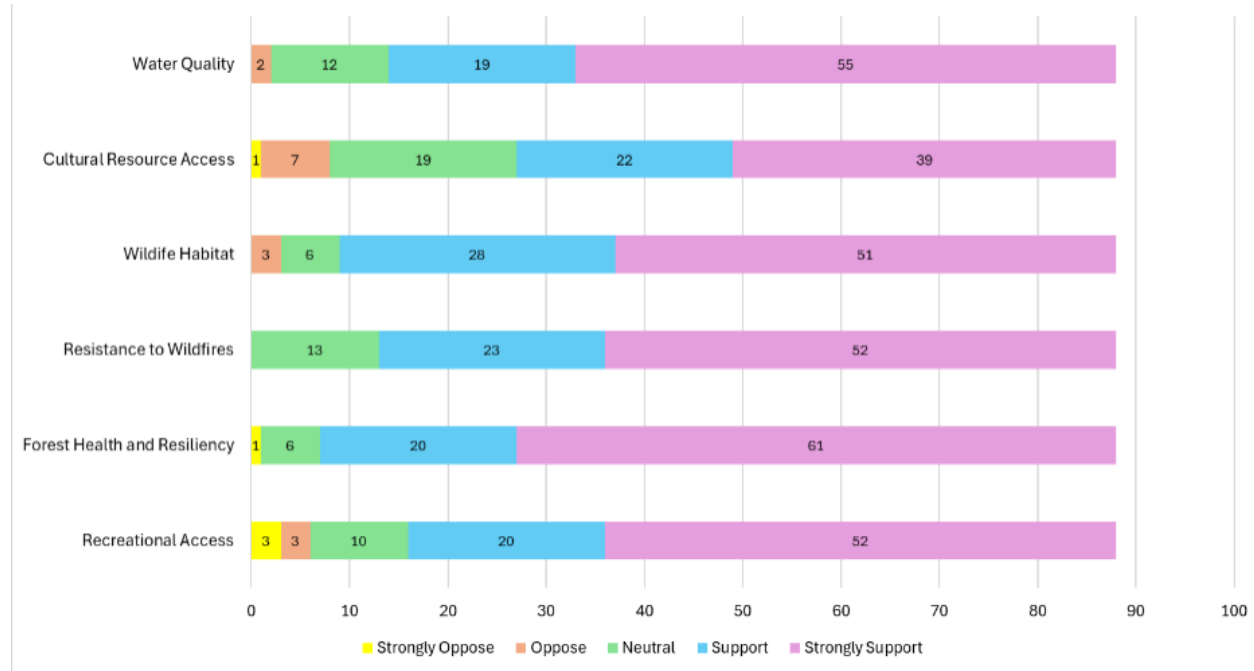
Community Engagement Phase 1 (April - July 2025)

- Collected 56 Public Comments
- Key Themes:
 - Prioritize ecological health
 - Support and opposition for increased recreational access
 - Reducing wildfire risk
 - Seeking community partnerships
- Results inform plan objectives



Community Engagement Phase 2 (Nov 2025)

- Collected 88 Public Comments
- Strong Support for Plan Objectives and Direction
- Comments Inform Plan Revisions



Desired Future Condition

Objectives are Best Met By:

- Resilient, diverse, and ecologically functional forest landscape
- Emulates the structure, composition, and function of native ecosystems in later stages of development.

Management Actions Can Guide Forest Development
To Meet Objectives





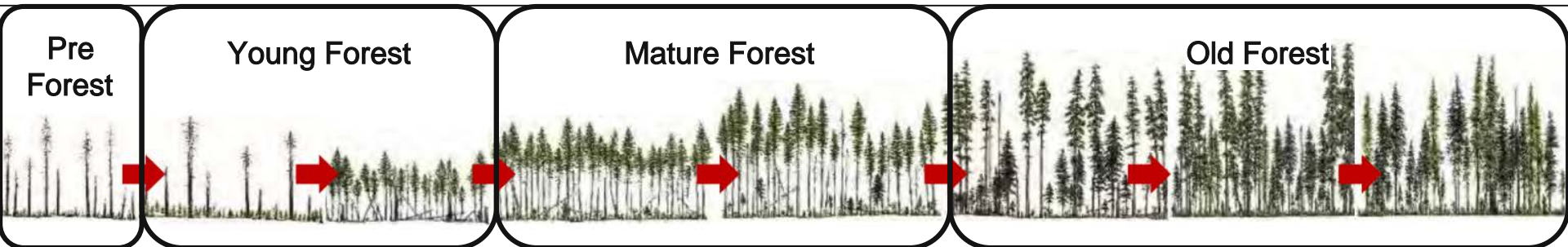
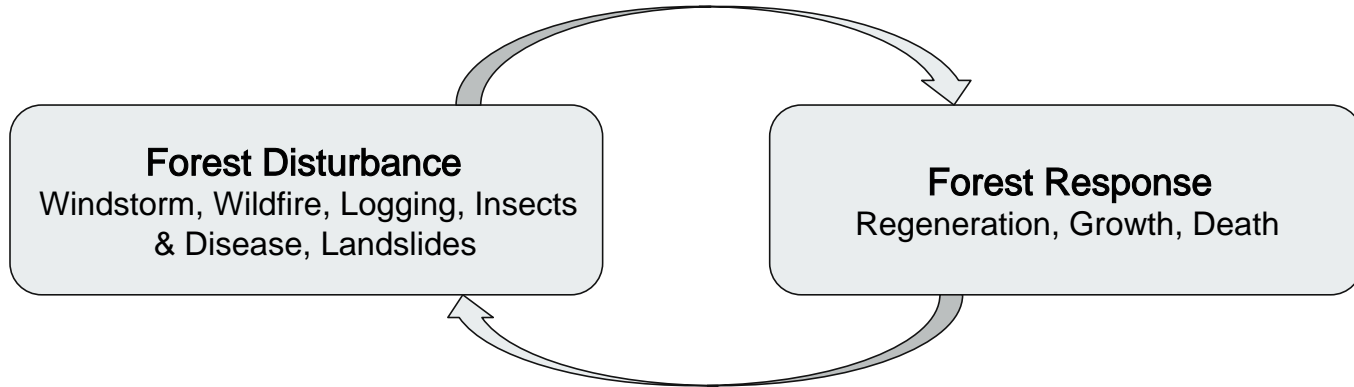
Ecological Forest Management

- Managing for Multiple Objectives
- Guided and Constrained by Forest Ecology
- Management Actions
 - Maintain Ecosystem Integrity & Continuity
 - Mimic Natural Processes
 - Increase Structural Complexity





Forest Development



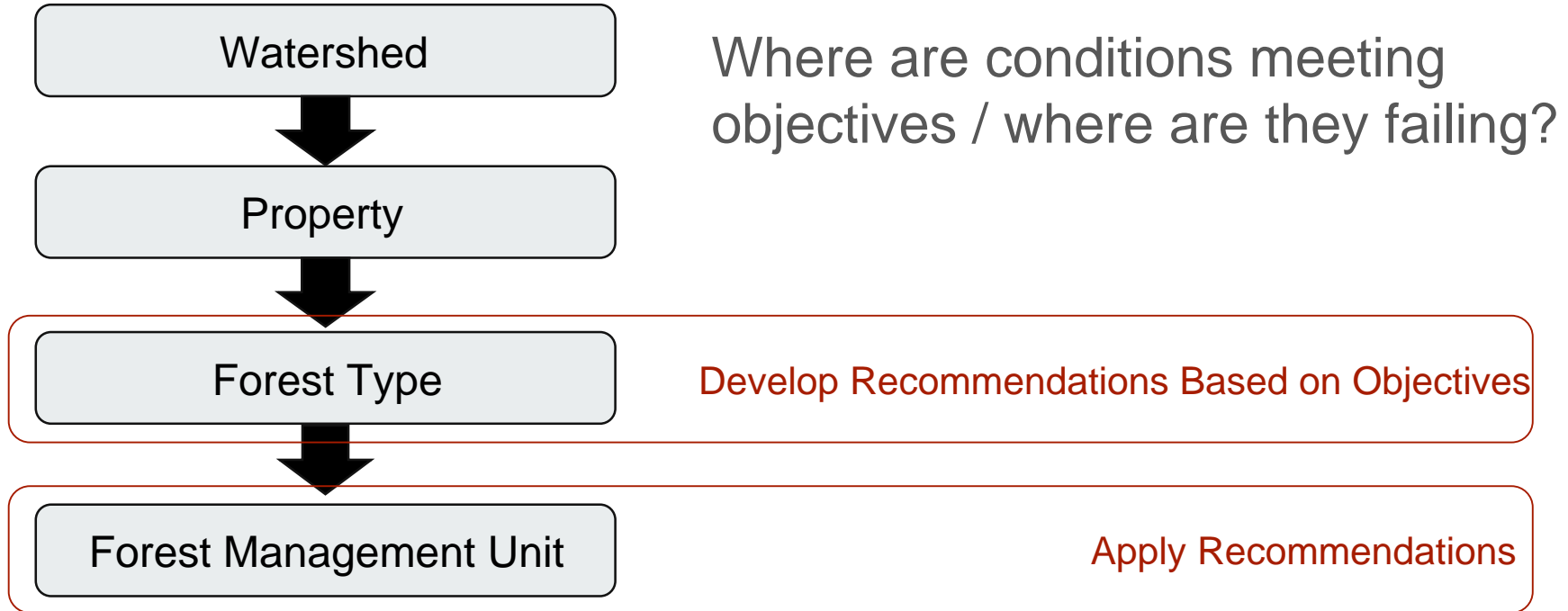


Forest Management History

- Original Stewardship
- Primary Forest Harvested
 - 1850s to 1950s → Logging, Agriculture, and Development
- Forest Regrow From Disturbance
 - Naturally Regenerated Forests → Conifer, Hardwoods, Or Both!
- Secondary Forest Harvests Begin
 - Late 1980s - 2010s → Douglas-fir Plantations Established



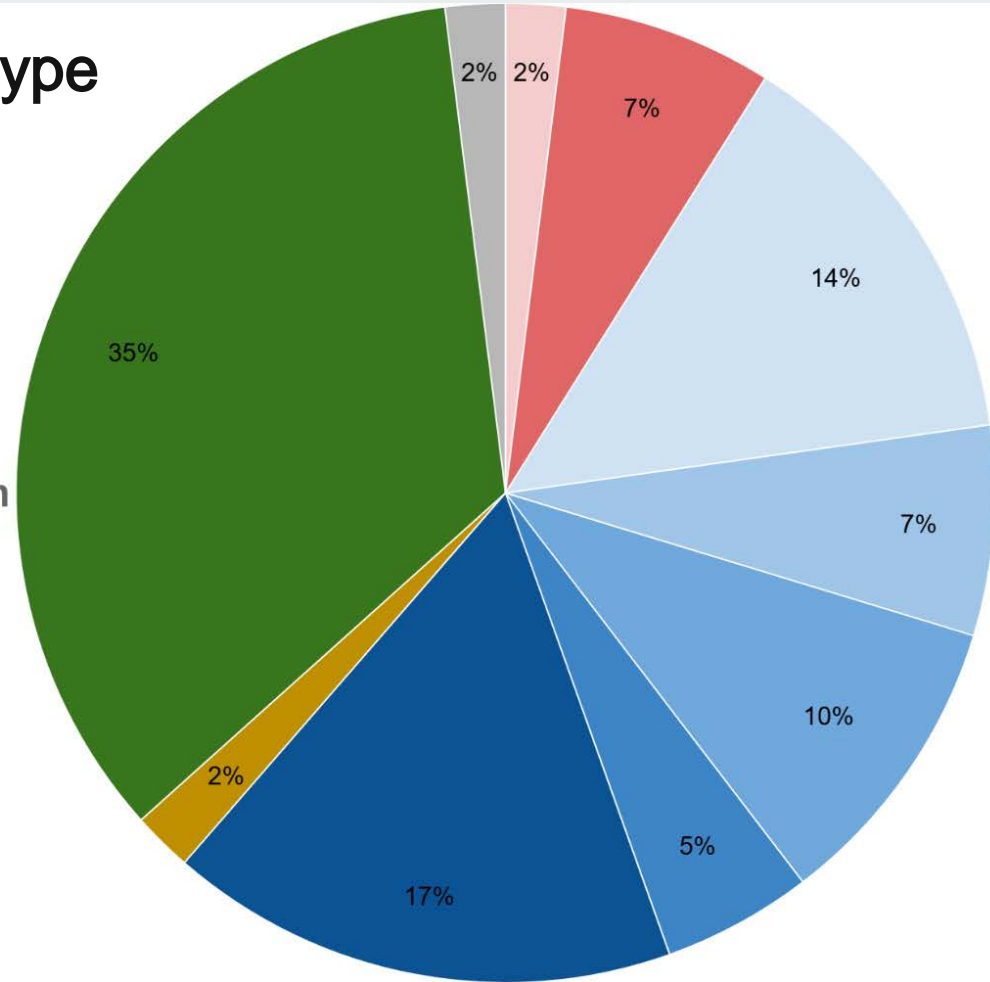
Forest Assessment



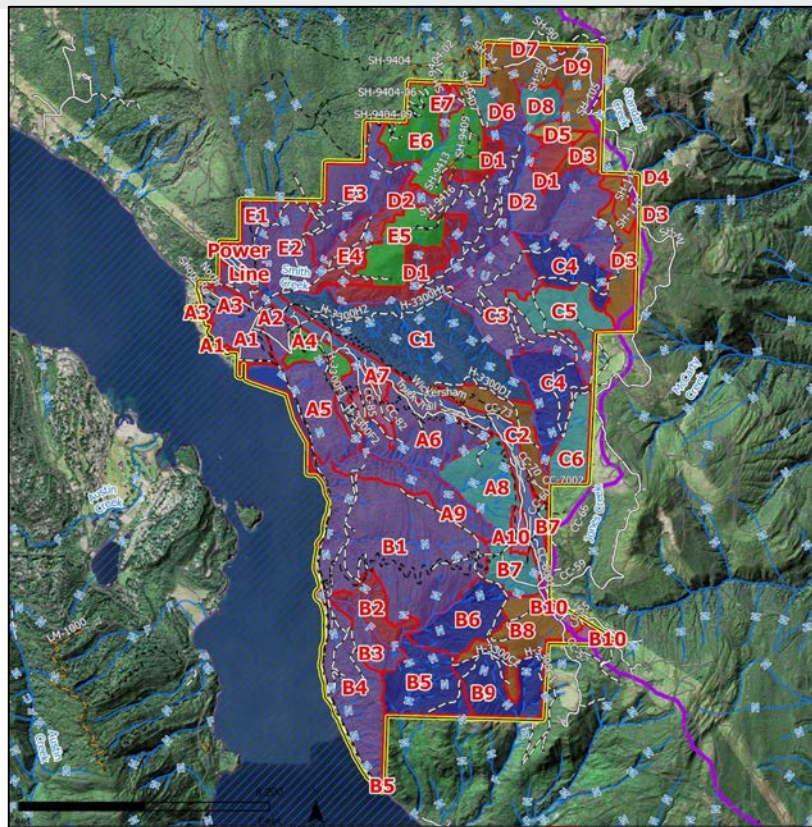
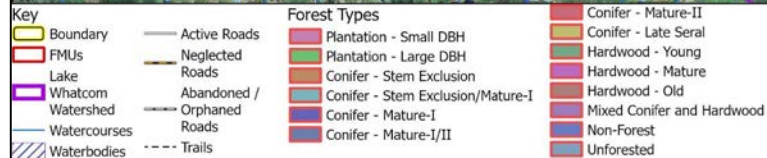
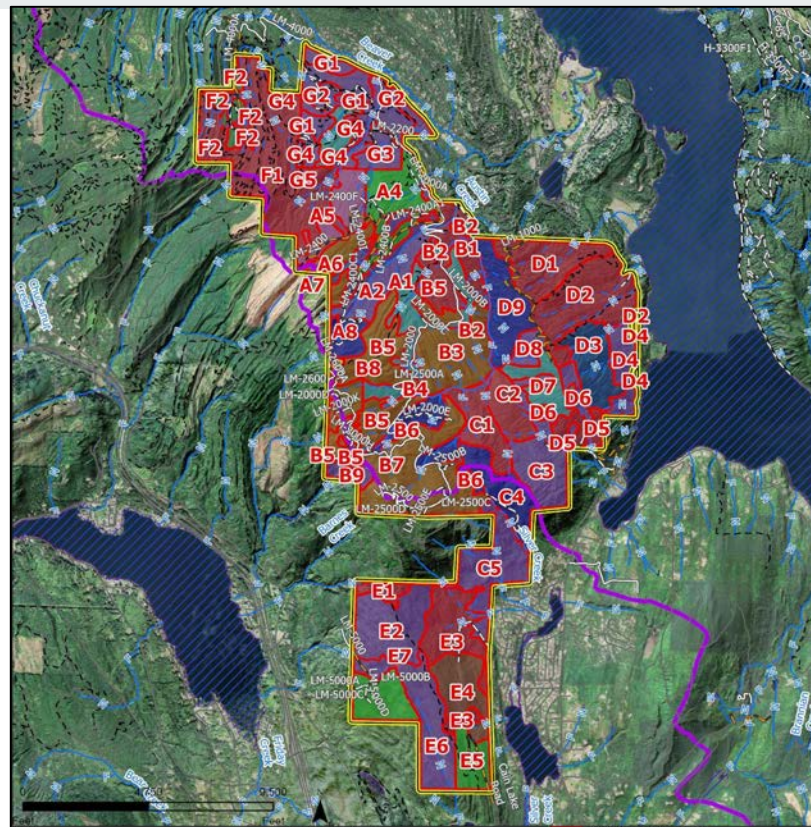
Recommendations - Forest Type



- Plantation - Small DBH
- Plantation - Large DBH
- Conifer - Stem Exclusion
- Conifer - Stem Exclusion/Mature-I
- Conifer - Mature-I
- Conifer - Mature-I/II
- Conifer - Mature-II
- Hardwood - Old
- Mixed Conifer and Hardwood
- Non-Forest



Recommendations - Forest Management Unit



Recommendation: Thinning

- Thinning
 - Mimics Natural Processes
 - Reduces Competition Stress
 - Grows Larger Trees
 - Improves Resilience
 - Accelerates Stand Development
 - Reduces Fire Risk
- Variable Density Thinning
 - Increases Spatial Heterogeneity
- Commercial vs Non-Commercial



Recommendation: Planting

- Under Canopy Planting
 - Augment Natural Regeneration
 - Increase Species Diversity
 - Ensure LongTerm Forest Canopy Cover
- Open Area Planting
 - Reforestation of Developed Areas
 - Increase Stocking



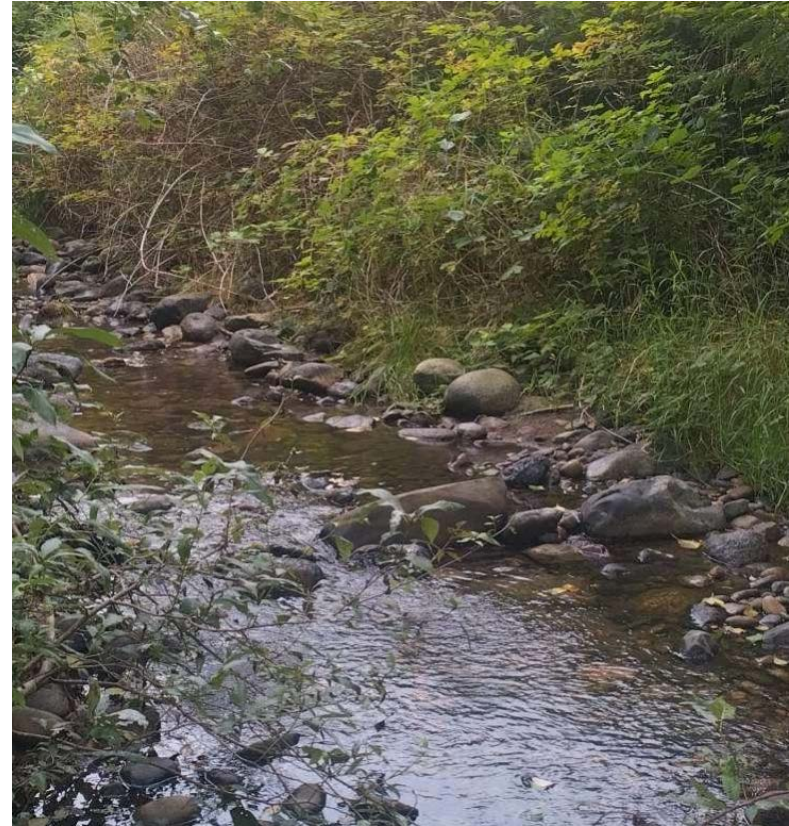
Protecting Water Quality

Background

- Forest Sediment Sources
 - Mass Wasting Events
 - Road Usage & Drainage Issues
 - Ground Disturbing Activities
 - Exacerbated by High Rainfall Events
- Forestry Regulations Limit Sediment Delivery

Recommendations

- Avoiding / Screening for Unstable Slopes
- Buffering Riparian Areas
- Improving Road Maintenance



Road Maintenance and Design

Background:

- RMAP Process Assessed and Upgraded
Most Roads under DNR Ownership
- Maintenance Deferred on Active Road
Segments Since Reconveyance

Recommendations:

- Address Maintenance Backlog to Restore
or Decommission Road Segments in
Compliance with Forest Practices Rules
- Implement Maintenance BMPs





Next Steps & Implementation

Next Steps

- Non-Project SEPA Checklist
- Adoption By County Council

Implementation

- 30-Year Timeline with Adaptive Management
- Create Operational Work Plans
- Operations Require Forest Practice Act Applications



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