

INTRODUCTION

The City of Sandpoint is a significant landowner in the Little Sand Creek Watershed with an ownership encompassing about 53 percent of the area. This watershed is critical to the well-being of Sandpoint since it is the community's primary drinking water source as well as the provider of many other important benefits. Consequently, it is critical that the City practice sound, long-term forest stewardship principles that are focused on water quality and forest health. The preparation of this updated plan is a key step in the process.

This report represents the third formal watershed planning effort following plans prepared in 1977 (by Cliff Wylie) and 1992 (by Inland Forest Management, Inc.). As with the last planning effort, a complete forest inventory has been conducted to provide information regarding the current forest condition in the watershed. This information has then been analyzed and combined with written descriptions of the unique forest types within the watershed, with the end result being recommendations for future forest management activities. This plan is intended to be dynamic and will require periodic updating to stay current.

WATERSHED MANAGEMENT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

This management plan reflects the future plans, objectives and goals of the City of Sandpoint for its municipal watershed.

The most important function of the Little Sand Creek Watershed is to serve as the primary municipal water supply for the City of Sandpoint. Consequently, the management plan has been developed with the focus on protecting this use. All other goals, while compatible, remain secondary to this overriding objective. This objective and other plan considerations are outlined below.

Primary Objective: To protect or enhance the quality of water generated by the Little Sand Creek Watershed and to insure an adequate and continuous supply of water, in perpetuity, for the City of Sandpoint. This objective will be achieved by:

1. Acquiring additional property in the Little Sand Creek drainage whenever the opportunity arises, with the long-term goal being ownership of as much of the Little Sand Creek watershed as possible;
2. Practicing sound long-term forest management principles;
3. Reducing the hazard of catastrophic wildfires and increasing fire protection, particularly along vehicle access, ridge and escape corridors;
4. Protecting forest soils from erosion, contamination, or other damage;
5. Minimizing the impacts to the forest from insects, diseases and wildfire; and
6. Maximizing forest productivity, consistent with the water quality objective.

Secondary Objective: To realize ongoing financial benefits to the City through periodic timber harvests and subsequent improvements in forest health and productivity. This objective will be achieved by:

1. Maximizing forest productivity and financial return through timber harvest in a manner that is consistent and compatible with the primary water quality objective; and
2. Reducing forest insects, diseases, and wildfire hazards.

Tertiary Objective: To protect and enhance wildlife, fisheries, and aesthetic values wherever possible, in conjunction with the other objectives.

HISTORY

The City of Sandpoint acquired the watershed property through numerous transactions beginning in 1918. The original land base was purchased in that year from Sandpoint Water & Light Company. Additional property was purchased after that date from many sources, including the Druid Investment Company and Palmer Brothers.

In the early 1980's, a concerted effort was made by Mayor Sally Cupan to acquire Bureau of Land Management (BLM) property in the watershed from the federal government. This effort was abandoned after many letters and other contacts with agency and congressional officials proved fruitless.

In 1988, a major land exchange was arranged between the City and Pack River Management Company. This exchange involved a trade of approximately 840 acres of City-owned land in the Schweitzer Creek drainage (portions of Sections 28 and 22, T58N, R2W, B.M.) for approximately 1200 acres of Pack River Management Company in the Little Sand Creek drainage (Section 31, T58N, R2W, B.M. and portions of Sections 1 and 6, T57N, R2W, B.M.). Much of the Pack River land had been aggressively logged prior to City acquisition. Through this exchange, the City gained direct control over a sizable land base located in the heart of the watershed.

In 1991, the City of Sandpoint traded 37,000 cubic yards of gravel from its watershed gravel pit to Pack River Management Company for an additional 40 acres in the watershed (NWSW, Section 33, T58N, R2W, B.M.). This 40-acre parcel was heavily logged in the late 1980's. Also, in the early 1990's the City acquired an additional 100 acres in Section 33 from Pack River in exchange for right-of-ways involving a natural gas line and an expanded power transmission line.

Many natural catastrophes have impacted the watershed over the years. The two most significant events involved a large wildfire in the late 1950's and a "rain-on-snow" event that washed out significant portions of the Schweitzer Mountain Road in 1991. A report from the Idaho Department of Lands regarding this last event is included in the Appendix.

Forest management of the City watershed has passed through many phases since ownership began in the late 1920's and 1930's. It is believed that Palmer Brothers completed most of this early logging, which mainly targeted removing large western white pine trees. Horses and chutes were utilized for much of this (and earlier) logging to bring logs from stump to road.

It appears that only low levels of sporadic logging occurred from the 1930's to the 1960's. Logging activity increased in the 1960's with a large sale of City timber going to the Pack River Management Company. From this time up until the late 1970's, timber was harvested from the watershed as revenue was needed for the City.

The above-mentioned harvests required significant road building to access the timber. A majority of the current road system was developed during this time. Additionally, in the 1960's, a primary road was completed through the watershed to access the newly created Schweitzer Basin Ski Area.

In 1977, the City of Sandpoint contracted with Clifford Wylie of Green Gold Forests to serve as the City's professional forest manager and agent. Mr. Wylie prepared a management plan and proceeded to place the City's property under an active timber management program. He generally produced a timber sale each year, with an annual harvest target of 375 MBF (thousand board feet). Clifford Wylie passed away in 1987.

Beginning in 1988, Inland Forest Management, Inc. (IFM) assumed management of the City's forestland. As with Mr. Wylie, IFM has functioned as the City's agent and has also prepared timber sales and provided other forest management services. IFM reduced the harvest level to approximately 250 MBF per year prior to completing an updated analysis to determine acceptable harvest levels.

A new management plan was developed by IFM in 1992. This plan recommended implementing an integrated resource management approach focused primarily on maintaining high water quality and enhancing forest productivity. Specific steps were outlined to achieve this goal including converting stagnant hemlock stands into vigorous forest, thinning overstocked stands, protecting vegetation in stream protection zones, and minimizing cumulative effects and impacts to water quality and other resources.

Through the late 1980's and early 1990's, an effort was made to develop a *Little Sand Creek Municipal Watershed Plan Agreement* that would be accepted by all significant landowners within the watershed. Unfortunately, Pack River Management Company, which owned over 1,000 acres in the drainage at the time, elected not to sign the agreement. Consequently, the agreement was never executed.

Over the last 20 years, numerous harvest operations, road improvements and reforestation efforts have been undertaken to improve the City's forestland. Refer to the Appendix for maps of past harvest and planting areas.