



Washington
State Department of
Agriculture

Environmental Justice Assessment
of
Establishing a Firewood
Quarantine in Washington State
(WAC 16-476)

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Environmental Justice Reporting Overview



An Environmental Justice Assessment (EJA) is an opportunity to assess the environmental justice impacts of an agency action. This template is designed to meet all the requirements established under [Washington's Environmental Justice Law](#)¹ (also known as the HEAL Act). While it was developed by the HEAL interagency Working Group, this document has been adopted by the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) to meet agency needs for fulfilling the requirements of completing an EJA.

EJA Table 1: Environmental Justice Assessment Overview

1. Primary agency responsible for this action	Washington State Department of Agriculture
2. Primary agency staff contact(s)	Sven Spichiger, Pest Program Manager
3. Secondary agency contact(s), if applicable	
4. Description of proposed significant agency action	The department is considering establishing a quarantine of untreated out-of-state firewood to prevent the introduction of plant pests and bee pests.
5. Date environmental justice assessment was initiated	December 2024
6. Date environmental justice assessment was completed	June 10, 2025
7. Type of significant agency action (check one)	<input type="checkbox"/> X The development and adoption of significant legislative rules as defined in RCW 34.05.328 ² <hr/>
8. Link(s) to initial notification with Office of Financial Management and/or other postings, such as publicly available results, materials, or reports related to the assessment.	

¹ [Washington's Environmental Justice Law \(HEAL Act\)](#)

² [RCW 34.05.328](#)

³ [RCW 70A.02.060](#)

Executive Summary of the Proposed Significant Agency Action

A firewood quarantine in Washington State, aimed at preventing the spread of invasive pests, has the potential to significantly benefit the environment by protecting forest health and reducing the risk of pest-induced tree mortality. However, the implementation of such a quarantine also carries the potential risk of unintended social impacts on overburdened communities and tribal populations.

Environmental Benefits: The firewood quarantine can deliver several key environmental benefits:

- **Forest protection:** By preventing the introduction of invasive species like the Emerald Ash Borer, the quarantine helps protect Washington's forests, preserving biodiversity, ecosystem services, and reducing wildfire risks.
- **Less use of chemical controls:** Reducing the flow of invasive insects into the state, can reduce downstream treatments that often include pesticides.
- **Public health and safety:** Healthier forests contribute to cleaner air and water, while the reduced risk of wildfires enhances public safety.
- **Sustainability of natural resources:** The quarantine ensures the long-term availability of forest resources by preventing ecological degradation caused by invasive pests, which is particularly beneficial for vulnerable populations and tribes.
- **Potential improved air quality in communities that rely on wood heat:** When used, dry firewood reduces smoke emissions (compared to wetter wood) and reduces home fire danger by reducing creosote buildup in smokestacks. Reduced smoke emissions result in cleaner wintertime air when smoke builds to unhealthy levels, as identified by the Department of Ecology's air quality program and local clean air agencies. And, reducing creosote home fires benefits community safety.

Environmental Harms: Despite its benefits, the quarantine has a very small chance of resulting in environmental harms:

- **Potential local resource depletion:** Increased demand for locally sourced firewood could contribute to unsustainable harvesting practices, resulting in habitat loss and reduced biodiversity.
- **Energy poverty:** The economic burden of more expensive heat-treated firewood coming from out of state may exacerbate energy poverty, particularly in overburdened communities, leading to inadequate heating and associated health risks.

⁴ **Environmental benefits** mean activities that: (a) Prevent or reduce existing environmental harms or associated risks that contribute significantly to cumulative environmental health impacts; (b) Prevent or mitigate impacts to overburdened communities or vulnerable populations from, or support community response to, the impacts of environmental harm; or (c) meet a community need formally identified to a covered agency by an overburdened community or vulnerable population that is consistent with the intent of chapter 70A.02 RCW.

⁵ **Environmental harm** means the individual or cumulative environmental health impacts and risks to communities caused by historic, current, or projected: (a) Exposure to pollution, conventional or toxic pollutants, environmental hazards, or other contamination in the air, water, and land; (b) Adverse environmental effects, including exposure to contamination, hazardous substances, or pollution that increase the risk of adverse environmental health outcomes or create vulnerabilities to the impacts of climate change; (c) Loss or impairment of ecosystem functions or traditional food resources or loss of access to gather cultural resources or harvest traditional foods; or (d) Health and economic impacts from climate change.

Impacts on Overburdened Communities: Overburdened communities, often characterized by limited resources and higher exposure to environmental hazards, may face several challenges:

- **Economic strain:** Increased out of state firewood costs could impose financial burdens, reducing access to affordable heating and potentially increasing exposure to cold-related health risks.

Impacts on Tribal Communities: Tribal communities, with deep cultural ties to the land, could experience both cultural and economic impacts:

- **Economic challenges:** Higher costs for heat-treated firewood from out of state might strain tribal economies, particularly for those dependent on out of state firewood for heating. Increasing demand for in state firewood could create opportunities for economic development in sustainable forestry.

Conclusion: While the firewood quarantine in Washington State offers significant environmental protection by preventing the spread of invasive species, we must give careful consideration to the potential negative impacts on overburdened and tribal communities. Mitigating the identified risks through public education and the promotion of sustainable forestry practices could help ensure equal distribution of the benefits of the quarantine so that vulnerable populations do not experience disproportionate effects. By doing so, Washington can protect its forests and ecosystems while supporting the health and well-being of all its residents.

Section 1: Analyze Environmental Benefits and Harms

1. Describe likely environmental benefits⁴ for overburdened communities, vulnerable populations, and tribes associated with this action.

A firewood quarantine preventing non-heat-treated, out of state, firewood from entering Washington State from surrounding areas could have several environmental impacts, mostly positive and some negative.

Positive Environmental Impacts: The rule change reduces a potential vector of invasive pests. As noted, invasive pests negatively impact Washington ecosystems and once invasive pests are established, very costly to remove or try to control.

Prevention of invasive species spread:

Non-heat-treated firewood from areas outside of Washington State can harbor invasive pests like the Emerald Ash Borer, Asian Longhorned Beetle, and others. Quarantining untreated firewood

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reduces the risk of introducing these pests to Washington's forests and environment. Invasive species can devastate local ecosystems by outcompeting native species, leading to a loss of biodiversity and altering habitat structures.

Protection of forest health:

By limiting the movement of potentially infested firewood, the quarantine helps maintain the health of Washington's forests. Healthy forests contribute to carbon sequestration, water regulation, our economy, and to providing habitat for a wide range of species. This protection can help sustain the ecological services that forests provide.

Reduction of tree mortality:

Keeping invasive species out of the state, we can help reduce tree mortality, help preserve forest ecosystems which can increase forest health and fire resiliency.

Support for local biodiversity:

The quarantine helps to maintain the existing balance of species in Washington by preventing the introduction of new, potentially harmful organisms. Preventing harmful invasives supports biodiversity, crucial for ecosystem stability and resilience.

Increased economic opportunities for local firewood providers:

If out of state firewood costs increase due to the quarantine, in state harvested firewood could have increased demand for in-state sourced firewood.

Negative Environmental Impacts:

Potential displacement of wood supply:

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Local demand for firewood might shift to other wood sources, such as increased logging in local forests to meet demand. This could lead to localized environmental degradation if not managed sustainably, including loss of habitat, soil erosion, and reduced carbon sequestration capacity.

Economic and social impacts:

If the quarantine disrupts local firewood markets, potential economic repercussions that could indirectly affect environmental practices may incentivize people to collect their own wood illegally, leading to unsustainable forestry practices like over harvesting or damage to sensitive ecosystems.

The firewood quarantine in Washington helps prevent the spread of invasive species and protects forest ecosystems and crops. With appropriate measures, the quarantine can play a key role in maintaining the health and biodiversity of Washington's forests.

Potential Impacts on Overburdened Communities:

Potential Increased out of state sourced firewood costs:

If WSDA quarantines untreated firewood from outside the state, the cost of compliant, treated firewood could rise due to the additional processing and labeling requirements. Overburdened communities, who may rely on firewood as an affordable heating source, could face higher expenses, further straining already limited financial resources.

Limited Access to Affordable Heating:

For households that depend on out of state firewood for heating, especially in rural or underserved areas, increased costs or reduced availability could lead to difficulties in maintaining adequate home heating during colder months. This may result in higher utility costs if households need to switch to more expensive energy sources, potentially exacerbating energy poverty.

In Washington state, approximately 5-10% of households rely on firewood or wood-based products as primary or secondary heating sources. According to data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS), the exact percentage can vary by region, with rural areas generally having a higher reliance on firewood for heating. To give a rough estimate:

- Washington state has about 2.9 million households
- If approximately 5-10% of households use firewood, this means 145,000-290,000 households use firewood to heat their homes either as a primary or supplementary heat source.

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2. Public Health Risks:

Exposure to Cold:

If community members could not source firewood from within the state or afford heat treated firewood from outside the state, this might lead some households to use less heating, increasing exposure to cold temperatures. This can have serious health implications, particularly for vulnerable populations such as the elderly, children, and those with pre-existing health conditions.

Environmental Justice Concerns:

Unequal Distribution of Impacts:

Overburdened communities often bear a disproportionate share of environmental hazards. If the firewood quarantine indirectly leads to illegal logging or unsustainable local wood harvesting in these areas, it could further degrade local environments already impacted by other stressors, such as industrial pollution or lack of green space.

Cumulative Environmental Stress:

These communities might experience cumulative environmental impacts, where the addition of new stressors—like increased illegal firewood harvesting—exacerbates existing environmental health disparities. This could contribute to a cycle of environmental degradation.

Social Impacts:

Access to Information:

Overburdened communities might have less access to information about the quarantine and its implications.

The firewood quarantine has the potential to protect Washington State's forests and ecosystems, but it may also impose additional burdens on already overburdened communities. By recognizing and addressing the unique challenges these communities face—through targeted outreach, and support for local industries—WSDA could help ensure equal distribution of potential quarantine benefits of the quarantine are equitably distributed and that the most vulnerable populations are not disproportionately impacted.

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Section 2: Identify Overburdened Communities and Vulnerable Populations

1. Identify the geographic area(s) where there may be environmental and health impacts because of the agency action.

The geographic areas in Washington State where environmental and health impacts from a firewood quarantine may be most significant include **rural, forested regions, areas with overburdened communities, and tribal lands**. These impacts could vary depending on economic reliance on firewood, local environmental conditions, and existing socio-economic vulnerabilities. Here's a breakdown of key regions:

1. Rural and Forested Areas:

Environmental and Health Impacts:

The rural parts of these regions have higher rates of firewood use for heating, especially in areas with limited access to natural gas or electricity. A firewood quarantine could increase costs, leading some households to burn cheaper, untreated, or unsafe materials, contributing to indoor and outdoor air pollution.

The demand for local firewood may rise, potentially leading to unsustainable harvesting practices, increasing the risk of deforestation, habitat loss, and environmental degradation.

2. Tribal Lands:

Colville Reservation (Northeast Washington)

Spokane (Eastern Washington)

Yakama Nation (South-Central Washington)

Quinault, Makah, Lummi, and other Coastal Tribes (Western Washington)

Environmental and Health Impacts:

Tribal lands may experience greater environmental stress if local wood resources are overharvested to meet the demand for local firewood.

3. Overburdened and Low-Income Communities:

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Regions:

South Central Washington (e.g., Klickitat, Benton, Franklin, Walla Walla counties)

Urban peripheries of major cities like **Spokane, Tacoma, and Olympia.**

Environmental and Health Impacts:

In these areas, lower-income households might rely on firewood as an affordable heat source. Increased costs due to the quarantine could push them further into energy poverty, reducing access to safe heating. This might increase health risks related to inadequate heating or exposure to pollutants from burning alternative materials.

- 2. Describe overburdened communities⁶ and vulnerable populations⁷ identified within the geographic area(s) where there may be environmental and health impacts because of the agency action.**

Overburdened communities and **vulnerable populations** in Washington State refer to groups that are disproportionately affected by environmental hazards, socio-economic challenges, and health disparities. These communities often have limited resources, greater exposure to environmental risks, and reduced access to services. Washington's **Healthy Environment for All (HEAL) Act** helps define these groups, focusing on communities facing cumulative environmental and health impacts.

Below is a description of the overburdened communities and vulnerable populations identified in the geographic areas where a firewood quarantine may cause environmental and health impacts:

1. Rural and Forested Areas:

Overburdened Communities:

Low-income households: Many rural residents rely on firewood for heating due to limited access to other energy sources. These areas often have higher poverty rates, and the increased cost of treated firewood from outside the state could place a financial burden on households that already struggle to meet basic needs.

Seniors and elderly populations: Older adults in rural areas, who are often on fixed incomes, are particularly vulnerable to increased firewood costs. They may depend on wood for

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heating during cold months due to geographic isolation and lack of access to affordable alternatives.

Vulnerable Populations:

People with limited financial resources: Low-income individuals and families who depend on firewood for heating may experience financial stress if the cost of treated firewood from outside the state increases due to the quarantine.

Children and the elderly: These populations are more vulnerable to the effects of cold and may experience hardship if energy costs rise, potentially leading to inadequate heating during winter months.

2. Tribal Lands:

Overburdened Communities:

Tribal nations: Tribes such as the Colville, Yakama, Quinault, Makah, and Lummi are highly dependent on firewood for both heating and cultural practices. A firewood quarantine that restricts untreated wood imported from out of state or reduces access to local firewood supplies due to increased demand, could limit access to culturally significant wood types, impacting tribal ceremonies and traditional practices, while also raising the cost of firewood for heating in these often economically vulnerable communities.

Vulnerable Populations:

Indigenous people: Indigenous populations face higher rates of poverty and often have limited access to infrastructure and services. The firewood quarantine could further strain these communities by increasing their financial burden and reducing access to wood resources they rely on for cultural and subsistence purposes.

Culturally significant practices: The quarantine may limit access to specific types of wood used in traditional ceremonies due to a heightened demand for locally sourced firewood, impacting the cultural heritage and social cohesion of tribal communities.

3. Overburdened and Low-Income Urban and Peri-Urban Communities:

Overburdened Communities:

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Low-income households on the outskirts of cities such as Spokane, Tacoma, and Olympia often use firewood as an affordable heat source. Rising costs for treated firewood from out of state or difficulty sourcing local firewood due to the quarantine, could increase financial strain on these families, especially those living in older or less energy-efficient homes.

Communities of color: Marginalized racial and ethnic groups, including Latino and Black communities in peri-urban areas, may be disproportionately affected by the increased cost of treated firewood from outside the state or difficulty sourcing local firewood, as they already face economic hardships and limited access to resources.

Vulnerable Populations:

Energy-insecure households: Families struggling with energy insecurity might face additional challenges if firewood sourced from outside the state becomes more expensive due to the need for it to be treated prior to entry into the state. This could potentially force them to reduce their use of heating during cold months, leading to inadequate warmth and increased hardship.

5. Cumulative Impact Areas Identified by the HEAL Act:

Puget Sound and Central Washington: These regions, identified under the HEAL Act for having cumulative environmental and health disparities, may experience financial stress from the firewood quarantine. Households already dealing with economic challenges could face increased energy costs due to restricted access to local firewood and rising prices for treated firewood from outside the state, exacerbating existing inequalities in resource access.

Section 3: Community Engagement Summary

1. Summarize engagement with people from overburdened communities and vulnerable populations to date.

WSDA issued a blog post on its public-facing webpage with information about the proposed rule and how to contact the department to provide feedback. WSDA reached out to home energy assistance non-profits in Klickitat, Benton, Franklin, Whatcom, Walla Walla, and Spokane counties who may source wood from out of state and let them know about the proposed rule change and how to comment and engage with WSDA.

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The home energy assistant non-profits were posed three questions:

1) Does your home heating assistance program rely on out of state, non-heat treated. firewood as a heating source?

2) How would this proposal of an out of state, non-treated firewood quarantine impact your program or your community?

3) Anyone else whom I should speak with, that may be impacted, or other comments?

2. Summarize information received from people from overburdened communities and vulnerable populations.

The Counties were covered by four energy assistance non-profits. WSDA called and emailed all four non-profits and heard back from three. The three non-profits all source firewood from within Washington State and reported that this rule will have no negative impacts on their programs or their ability to deliver home heating services.

Section 4: Tribal Engagement and Consultation

1. Summarize tribal engagements and invitations for tribal consultation to date.

WSDA used established email contacts for the Tribes, and sent information about the proposed rule change, as well as an invitation for engagement and feedback or dialog.

2. Describe likely impacts to tribal rights and resources associated with this action.

To our understanding, this rule further protects Tribal rights and resources, especially concerning the protection of forest resources and other ecosystem services and does not negatively impact Tribal rights or resources.

3. Summarize how information received from tribes and tribal organizations informed decision- making about this action.

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WSDA heard back from the Spokane Tribe and have included the email here: (name and contact information removed)

“Thank you for contacting the Spokane Tribe of Indians, we do concur with the recommendations of the WSDA rule change.

Regards,
THPO Officer “

4. Describe any plans for ongoing and/or future tribal consultation after the publication of the EJ Assessment.

WSDA does not have plans to further engage Tribes after publication.

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Section 5: Strategies to Address Environmental Harms and Equitably Distribute Environmental Benefits

1. Describe how the agency considered each of the following strategies to eliminate, reduce, or mitigate environmental harms and equitably distribute environmental benefits or provide a justification for not reducing, mitigating, or eliminating identified probable impacts:

To minimize the adverse effects of the untreated, out of state, firewood quarantine and promote equitable outcomes, WSDA could develop strategies tailored to specific areas of concern. Strategies for each key area, ensuring that the quarantine protects the environment while addressing the needs of overburdened communities and vulnerable populations.

(a) Eliminating the Disparate Impact of Environmental Harms on Overburdened Communities and Vulnerable Populations

Strategy:

- **Alternative Energy Solutions:** Encourage the State of Washington to continue to provide grants or low-interest loans to help transition overburdened communities to cleaner, more efficient heating sources (e.g., heat pumps, pellet stoves). These programs should prioritize the most affected communities to prevent environmental harms like resource depletion and deforestation.

(b) Reducing Cumulative Environmental Health Impacts on Overburdened Communities or Vulnerable Populations

Strategy:

- **Sustainable Forestry Initiatives:** Encourage sustainable local firewood harvesting and tree planting programs in rural and tribal areas to help keep ecosystems intact. This reduces deforestation risks and protects forest-dependent communities from additional environmental degradation.

(c) Preventing the Action from Adding to the Cumulative Environmental Health Impacts on Overburdened Communities or Vulnerable Populations

- **Wood Stove Replacement Programs:** Encourage state-funded programs that offer free or low-cost replacement of outdated wood stoves with modern, more efficient heating devices to reduce reliance on firewood, thereby reducing cumulative environmental health impacts, like poor air quality.

(d) Providing Equitable Participation and Meaningful Engagement of Vulnerable Populations and Overburdened Communities in the Development of Significant Agency Action

Strategy:

WSDA will reach out to four home heating assistant non-profits that supply wood to vulnerable households, that have a five-county reach or more. WSDA will ask if the rule increases costs for them to provide firewood. The non-profits provide services in areas that may have access to out-of-state firewood: Clark County; Community Development, Klickitat

CO; Washington Gorge Action Programs, Benton/ Franklin County; Benton Franklin Community Action Committee, and Spokane County; SNAP - Spokane Neighborhood Action Partners.

(e) Prioritizing Equitable Distribution of Resources and Benefits to Overburdened Communities

In this case, WSDA will require out of state firewood to meet heat treatment requirements and a label that reflects that the wood meets the requirements so that buyers will know the wood does not carry invasive pests.

(g) Meeting Community Needs Identified by the Affected Overburdened Community

Overburdened communities do suffer the ecological consequences from invasive pests due to ecosystem degradation and forest and crop damage. By reducing the flow of invasive pests transported on out of state firewood, hopefully communities will have less loss of forest, crop damage, and other harms created by invasive pests.

(h) Modifying Substantive Regulatory or Policy Requirements

Washington state allows the outdoor burning of forest slash and orchard tear out with an approved burn permit. If the Department of Natural Resources and Ecology air quality program required business to reduce tonnage by cutting out viable firewood, communities could reduce the smoke exposure and increase locally available firewood.

(i) Additional Mitigation Techniques from the Council, Office of Equity, or Representatives of Overburdened Communities and Vulnerable Populations

Strategy:

- **Office of Equity Recommendations:** Work with Washington's **Office of Equity** to encourage them to support statewide weatherization efforts and woodstove replacement programs.
- **Council and Community Representative Input:** Incorporate feedback from **environmental justice councils** and **local community leaders** into the development of mitigation strategies. These councils can suggest additional policies, such as localized energy assistance programs or conservation programs tailored to the needs of specific communities.

Conclusion:

By implementing these mitigation strategies, Washington State can ensure that the firewood quarantine not only protects the environment but also addresses the needs and concerns of overburdened communities and vulnerable populations. These actions would help reduce disparities, provide equitable access to resources, and create positive economic outcomes, while also promoting the sustainable management of natural resources and fostering inclusive decision-making processes.

2. **If the agency determines that it does not have the ability or authority to eliminate, reduce, or mitigate environmental harms caused by a significant agency action, or does not have the ability or authority to address the equitable distribution of environmental benefits, provide a clear explanation of why it has made that determination.**

This rule has a very low risk of increasing the overall price of firewood. Firewood price increases come from: demand, gas and diesel prices, labor prices, and overall inflation.

The above-mentioned strategies will bolster current efforts

3. **Identify performance measures or indicators (recommended 3-5) that can be used to track the equitable distribution of environmental benefits and/or the elimination, reduction, or mitigation of environmental harms for overburdened communities, vulnerable populations, or tribes.**

1. **Compliance efforts with the largest importer of out of state firewood:**

- **Purpose:** Focus on the largest importers of out-of-state firewood first.
- **Data Sources:** From WSDA plant protection program: How many enforcement cases and how much firewood did the agency confiscate?

2. **Community Engagement and Decision-Making Participation**

- **Indicator:** How many people and Tribes commented on the new rule?
- **Purpose:** Based on the feedback WSDA receives, we could potentially modify the rule language to more equitably carry out the mission to protect people and the environment.
- **Data Sources:** Public comment submissions and community engagement reports from agencies.

3. **Distribution of Financial Assistance and Resources**

- **Indicator:** Amount and percentage of financial assistance, grants, or resources allocated to overburdened communities and tribal populations for firewood sourcing (either locally or treated from out of state), energy transition, or alternative heating sources.
- **Purpose:** Encourage wood stove change out programs and energy assistant programs to consider the most vulnerable populations and communities first and to add the effects of the firewood quarantine into their considerations of decisions. We hope this measure encourages equitably to those most affected by the firewood quarantine.
- **Data Sources:** Government grant allocation records, financial assistance program data, and reports from tribal and community organizations.

Conclusion:

By focusing compliance efforts on the largest importers of out-of-state firewood, giving consideration to Tribes and overburden communities, and thinking about and changing the way energy assistance programs distribute funding, communities will get their needs met in a more focused way. Overall, there is a low chance of overburdened communities experiencing negative impacts as a result of this rule and a high chance that this rule will help prevent invasive pests from becoming established in Washington state.