

Final Biological Assessment of the Proposed Road Improvement Projects within the Doty Hill Marbled Murrelet Management Area (MMMA)

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Introduction

Purpose

In preparation for harvest of the proposed Juno Bay timber sale (FY2007), Tillamook District's Central Unit plans to improve Mapes Creek Road through the Doty Hill marbled murrelet management area (MMMA). This biological assessment (BA) will discuss the potential impacts of this proposed project on this MMMA.

Some of the proposed work (such as road brushing) may occur through a special firewood sale in 2005, and some of the work may be project work within the Juno Bay timber sale contract. Although the entire road improvement project may not be completed for a few years, the biological situation is unlikely to change. Therefore, I will discuss all proposed road improvement projects within the MMMA in a single Final BA.

This BA only discusses proposed activities within the currently established Doty Hill MMMA. Road construction and timber harvest (Juno Bay, FY2007) is planned south of this MMMA. Additional marbled murrelet surveys associated with this planned timber sale are being conducted to the south of the Doty Hill MMMA. If occupied behaviors are detected during these surveys, the Doty Hill MMMA will need to be expanded, or another MMMA will need to be established. If this occurs, another BA may be needed to discuss potential impacts of the proposed activities on the new site.

Policy Direction

ODF's Marbled Murrelet Operational Policies (effective 1 January 2005) require the involvement of an Area Biologist "in developing appropriate prescriptions for management proposed in a MMMA...consistent with procedure 1.1.P5.1" and considering the guidance within 1.1.G1.5. This guidance recognizes that "every MMMA is unique and there is no standard prescription for management activities in MMMA's. In general, management activities in MMMA's need to be consistent with the overall policy objectives of maintaining habitat suitable for successful nesting and minimizing the disruption of reproductive activities in marbled murrelet occupied sites." This guidance also gives many factors to consider when developing prescriptions, which I will not repeat in this BA. I have discussed the proposed road improvement with Gary Baker and Bob Teran. I discussed potential concerns related to impacting suitable murrelet habitat, and we designed the project to avoid these concerns.

Background

Survey History

The Doty Hill MMMA was established based upon murrelet detections made during murrelet surveys conducted during 1992, 1993, and 1994. Murrelet presence was detected at several stations within and near the MMMA. Subcanopy detections were observed at the top of Doty Ridge, in the northwest corner of the MMMA. This MMMA has not been surveyed since 1994. Survey stations and detections are shown in Figure 1.

Suitable habitat to the south and southeast of this MMMA will be surveyed in 2005 and 2006 in association with the proposed Juno Bay timber sale.

Site Information

The Doty Hill MMMA is predominately forested by mixed conifer stands that range from almost 80 to over 100 years old (Figure 1). Patches of high quality marbled murrelet nesting habitat is scattered throughout these stands in the form of large western hemlock and Sitka spruce with large, moss-covered limbs. Dwarf mistletoe is present in some of the western hemlock, which enhances development of nesting platforms.

There also is an inclusion of a 29 year-old plantation within the northwestern portion of this MMMA.

Sale Area Information

There are two proposed sales associated with the proposed road improvement project:

- An alder firewood sale will remove red alder along the road right-of-way.
- The road is being improved to provide access to a portion of the proposed Juno Bay timber sale, located south and southeast of the MMMA. There are patches of suitable murrelet habitat within and adjacent to the Juno Bay sale area, which will be surveyed in 2005 and 2006. Most of these trees are planned to be reserved timber to provide for future marbled murrelet habitat.

Management Prescription

The proposed road improvement project is described in the April 7, 2005 memo from Gary Baker to Clint Smith (Attachment 1). No suitable marbled murrelet habitat will be removed by this road improvement. The only tree removal will consist of red alder and sub-merchantable conifer within 8 feet from the existing road edge.

In addition to the proposed roadside brushing, culvert replacement and road surfacing (gravel) are proposed. Very little excavating or road widening will be needed.

Seasonal operational restrictions are not mentioned in Gary's memo, but Bob Teran has agreed to impose seasonal restrictions on these operations:

- The firewood harvest will not be allowed April 1 - September 15.
- Additional road improvement within the MMMA and within 100 meters of the MMMA boundary will not be allowed April 1 - September 15.
- No road construction will be allowed within 100 meters of the MMMA boundary April 1 - September 15.
- No blasting will be allowed within 1 mile of the MMMA boundary April 1 - September 15.

Assumptions

Defining Suitable Habitat

Research conducted on ODF ownership concluded that marbled murrelets selected large conifer trees with numerous platforms for nesting. Nests were located on larger diameter platforms with more moss, more horizontal cover, and closer vertical cover than non-nest platform trees available in nesting sites (Nelson and Wilson 2001). The researchers also found that murrelets frequently nested within patches (or micro-sites) of high quality habitat surrounded by lower quality (or non-habitat) within the MMMA's where the research took place. Based upon the results of this research, it is possible to make on-the-ground identification of patches of high quality murrelet habitat and patches of developing habitat.

Impact Assessment and Discussion

Effects of the Management Prescription

The proposed road improvement within the MMMA will not remove any suitable habitat, nor will it remove trees that provide protection to suitable nest trees. The road already was in place when the murrelet activity was discovered; this proposed project should not increase detrimental impacts.

Seasonal operating restrictions will be required to avoid disturbance of nesting marbled murrelets, so disturbance should not be a significant concern with this operation.

Discussion

This is a relatively straightforward activity, and the impacts are relatively easy to assess. No additional discussion is needed.

Risk Assessment

Biological Risk

In my opinion, the proposed road improvement within the Doty Ridge MMMA described in this BA poses a Low risk to marbled murrelets that may be nesting within the MMMA.

Compliance with Policy

The Area Wildlife Biologist (myself) has been involved in the design of this project, as required by policy. In my opinion, this project is designed to meet the overall policy objective of maintaining habitat suitable for successful nesting and minimizing the disruption of reproductive activities in marbled murrelet occupied sites; so I believe that the operation complies with ODF's murrelet protection policy.

Consultation with ODFW

Herman Biederbeck, ODFW District Wildlife Biologist, has reviewed the Final Draft of this Biological Assessment. Herman's comments are included as Attachment 2.

Literature Cited

Nelson, S.K. and A.K. Wilson. 2001 Marbled murrelet habitat characteristics on state lands in western Oregon. Final Rep., OR Coop. Fish and Wildlife Research Unit, Oregon State Univ., Dept. Fisheries and Wildlife, Corvallis. 159 pp.

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