

MEMORANDUM

TO: Art McCoy

FROM: Randy Smith

SUBJECT: Preliminary Biological Assessment for the **South Chicken** Timber Sale

DATE: February 3, 2006

Purpose

Western Lane District is proposing the South Chicken timber sale in their 2007 Annual Operations Plan. This sale area contains potentially suitable habitat for northern spotted owls. Portions of the sale are within the 1.5 mile circle for the McVey Creek northern spotted owl activity center. This memo presents the relevant biological information needed to assess the potential effects of the South Chicken timber sale on northern spotted owls.

Marbled Murrelets

The sale area is approximately 23 miles from the ocean. There is no suitable marbled murrelet habitat within or adjacent to the sale area. The nearest known occupied marbled murrelet site on ODF land is approximately 0.7 miles southwest of the sale area.

Northern Spotted Owls

Policy Direction

In the Western Lane District, the standard for protection of northern spotted owls, according to ODF policy (Holloway 2002), is to apply the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service rescinded Incidental Take Guidelines (ITG) as outlined in "Procedures leading to Endangered Species Act compliance for the northern spotted owl" (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 1990). According to the ITG, the best available habitat is identified for a 70 acre core area; at least 500 acres of suitable habitat should be maintained within a 0.7 miles radius, and within the home range circle (in this case 1.5 miles), either 40% suitable habitat (1,808 acres) or 1,906 acres of suitable habitat should be maintained. Additional factors to be considered and documented in this biological assessment include proximity of the operation to a site, the prescription proposed, the size of the operation, the history of activity near the site, and other relevant factors.

Survey Information

The South Chicken timber sale was surveyed to protocol for northern spotted owls in 2004, 2005 and will be surveyed again in 2006 consistent with the survey protocol (Anonymous 1991). As a result of these and previous surveys in the area, one northern spotted owl activity center has been located within 1.5 miles of the sale area. The McVey Creek site is located on BLM land and is approximately 1.0 miles from the South Chicken timber sale area. The Chicken Creek site was within the area of the sale but was declared historic in 2004. The Chicken Creek site was located on ODF land approximately 0.1 miles from the South Chicken timber sale area.

Site History

McVey Creek

In 2001, the pair nested but failed to fledge young. The historic pair nested in 2002 and fledged two young. The pair did not nest in 2003. In 2004, the historic pair nested in a new tree within the core and fledged one young. In 2005, the historic female nested with a new male and fledged one young.

Chicken Creek

A pair nested and fledged two young in 2001. In 2002, barred owls were located in the core and no spotted owls were detected. There were no responses from 2003-2005. The site status was changed to historic in 2004. Barred owls were again detected in 2004.

Habitat Information

The South Chicken sale consists of 124 acres of approximately 70-year-old second growth Douglas-fir and scattered big-leaf maple that originated after fires in the early 1930's. Both sale areas are dominated by Douglas-fir stands and have an average DBH of 18 inches with 160-180 TPA. Stand Level Inventory information for a portion of Area 2 shows 8 snags per acre over 12" DBH with 3 snags per acre over 24" DBH. This area also has 2,600 cubic feet per acre of existing down wood which 550 cubic feet per acre is in Class 1 and 2. The entire sale is considered suitable habitat for northern spotted owls.

Defining the Home Range

According to "Procedures leading to Endangered Species Act compliance for the northern spotted owl" (USFWS 1990), the median home range size (based on 95% minimum convex polygon) for spotted owl pairs in the Oregon Coast Range is 4,766 acres, or the approximate equivalent of the area encompassed by a circle with a radius of 1.5 miles. Although spotted owls generally do not have circular home ranges, in the absence of more specific information about the home ranges of this site, I will assume that a 1.5 mile radius circle around the nest or activity center approximates the home range of this site.

Defining Suitable Habitat

Although spotted owl habitat has generally been described as old growth, spotted owls are known to use a variety of forest types in this part of the Oregon Coast Range. Spotted owls are known to nest in stands as young as 60-80-years-old on state forest lands in the Western Lane District that have suitable nesting structures (38% of known nests on ODF lands in the District are located in stands in this age class) and to forage in even younger stands (Glenn and Anthony, 2000).

For the purposes of this discussion, suitable spotted owl habitat is considered to be stands at least 55 years old, younger stands that have known owl use, or stands that appear to be suitable habitat from an assessment of aerial photographs (taken in 2004) and/or ground verification in 2005.

Landscape condition

The following discussion assesses the habitat situation within 1.5 miles of the McVey Creek spotted owl activity center, as recommended by the ITG (Table 1, Figure 1).

The South Chicken timber sale will clear cut 100 acres within the 1.5 mile circle for the McVey Creek spotted owl site. A habitat analysis of the McVey Creek spotted owl site indicates that there are currently 2,433 acres of suitable habitat within 1.5 miles of the activity center. A previously approved ODF sale, Almaise, will partial cut and clear cut a total of 161 acres within the McVey Creek 1.5 mile circle. If the sale area, state acres in notification and habitat lost due to road construction are excluded from the suitable habitat, 2,171 acres (48%) of suitable habitat are available within 1.5 miles of the activity center. Based on this preliminary habitat analysis, this site will maintain enough unmodified suitable habitat within the 1.5 mile circle after harvest to be consistent with the ITG.

Sale Prescription

The South Chicken timber sale is a 124 acre modified clear cut sale in two areas. Both areas are stands that resulted from natural seeding that followed a series of fires between 1910 and 1930.

Green trees will be left as buffers around draws and seeps and larger trees will be left scattered across the upland areas. At least 5 TPA will be left and at least 2 snags per acre will be left or created. For all areas, green trees, snags, and down wood will be left in the sale area consistent or exceeding the guidance in the Northwest Forest Management Plan. A mixture of Douglas-fir, hemlock and cedar will be planted after harvest. There will be approximately 1 acre of suitable habitat removed associated with this sale due to road construction within the McVey Creek 1.5 mile circle.

Assessment

The McVey Creek spotted owl site is approximately 1.0 miles from the proposed South Chicken timber sale. Approximately 100 acres of the sale are within 1.5 miles of the activity center. The McVey Creek owl activity center is on BLM land and is not located in a LSR. Federally managed land makes up 33% of the area within 1.5 miles of the spotted owl activity center, 47% is managed by ODF and 20% is managed by other landowners. The preliminary habitat analysis of this site indicates that the ITG will be met within 1.5 miles of the activity center after harvest of the sale area.

Risk Assessment

The South Chicken timber sale includes 124 acres of modified clear cut of second growth Douglas-fir and big-leaf maple stands. This activity will take place within 1.5 miles of the McVey Creek activity center.

I believe the South Chicken sale as currently planned will have a low risk of negatively affecting the occupancy and productivity of the McVey Creek spotted owl site. This assessment is based on the following factors:

McVey Creek:

- ◆ The sale is located 1.0 miles from the McVey Creek activity center;
- ◆ Approximately 48% of the 1.5 mile circle will remain as unmodified suitable habitat after harvest of the sale, exceeding the ITG.

Literature Cited

Anonymous. 1991. Protocol for surveying proposed management activities that may impact northern spotted owls. Revised – March 17, 1992. 15 pp.

Glenn, E., and R. G. Anthony. 2000. Home Range and Habitat Use of Northern Spotted Owls on State Forest Lands in the Oregon Coast Range. Unpublished Final Report, Oregon Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit, Corvallis, OR. 114 pp.

Holloway, R. "State Forests Program Spotted Owl Strategies." ODF Internal Memorandum to Area Directors, District Foresters, Assistant District Foresters. September, 2002.

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. 1990. Procedures leading to endangered species compliance for the northern spotted owl. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 1, July 1990. 15 pp.

Cc: Rick Rogers
Tom Mickel
Marcia Humes
Rob Nall

Table 1. Acres of suitable habitat on State and Federal lands within the 1.5 mile circle of the McVey Creek northern spotted owl activity center. Suitable habitat determined through 2004 air-photo analysis and a 2005 field assessment.

	Acres	McVey Creek
		1.5 miles
Suitable habitat		
ODF		1434
Federal		999
TOTAL		2433
Sale Area	124	100
Suitable habitat removed for new road construction		1
State acres in notification (Almaise)		161
Suitable acres minus sale acres, road construction and State acres in notification		2171
% suitable post-harvest		48%