MEETING SUMMARY

WESTERN OREGON STATE FORESTS HCP STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING

Tuesday, March 31, 2020, 1:00 pm – 4:00 pm

By Webinar and Teleconference Only

ATTENDEES

Steering Committee: Liz Dent (ODF), Kim Kratz (NOAA Fisheries/NMFS), Paul Henson (USFWs), Leah Feldon (DEQ), Bill Ryan (DSL), Doug Cottam (ODFW), Dan Edge (OSU)

Technical Consultant: David Zippin (ICF), Troy Rahmig (ICF), Melissa Klungle (ICF)

Facilitation Team: Cindy Kolomechuk (ODF), Brett Brownscombe (Oregon Consensus), Debra Nudelman and Sylvia Ciborowski (Kearns & West)

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Sylvia Ciborowski, Kearns & West, reviewed webinar instructions and protocols.

Deb Nudelman, Kearns & West, welcomed members and thanked them for their participation. She reviewed the agenda and meeting materials. The key agenda topics included: 1) Agency updates, 2) Update on stakeholder engagement, 3) Report out on Scoping Team progress, 4) NEPA update, 4) Update on the terrestrial strategy approach and development, 5) Review draft aquatic conservation strategy, 6) Update on policy-level timber harvest modeling process, 7) Steering Committee (SC) direction to Scoping Team (ST), and 8) Approach going forward and next steps.

Liz Dent, Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF), welcomed SC members. She noted that the Western Oregon HCP meeting open to the public was held remotely on March 30. Approximately eighty members of the public participated, which was a much higher turnout than previous meetings open to the public.

She then provided context on how ODF is moving forward in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. ODF is supporting several agencies as they build an emergency response team at the state level. The April Board of Forestry (BOF) meeting has been modified and will be held as a half-day virtual meeting. The Forest Management Plan (FMP) topic that was anticipated to be discussed will no longer be presented at the April meeting; it is now on the consent agenda and will be discussed at a future BOF meeting. Additionally, the HCP update is no longer on the April agenda and is now expected to occur in July.

AGENCY UPDATES

SC members provided the following updates relevant to the Western Oregon HCP process:

- **United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)**: The agency presented an update on two lawsuits including the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Resource Management Plan (RMP) Revisions and the Spotted Owl Critical Habitat Decision of 2012.
- **NOAA Fisheries**: NOAA Fisheries has backfilled Ken Phippen's position. Tere O'Rourke from the U.S. Forest Service has taken the position.
- **Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW):** 1) State employees are considered essential at this point. If this changes, then that will impact ODFW ST members' ability to attend ST meetings. 2) The agency provided an update on the status review for marbled murrelets.
- **Department of State Lands (DSL)**: The agency is moving forward with transitioning the Elliott State Forest into a research forest. The agency will still need to develop a plan for ODF lands that are adjacent to the Elliott State Forest.
- **Oregon State University (OSU)**: Planned work around marbeled murrelets has been likely put on hold due to the COVID-19 response.

REPORT OUT ON STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Deb noted that the meeting open to the public was held on March 30. After the formal meeting and presentation on the HCP updates, an informal discussion period was offered. Many members of the public remained on the webinar for the discussion period and provided additional questions and comments.

She also noted there is a modeling meeting on April 8 that was scheduled in response to a request from industry and conservation stakeholders. The meeting will provide an opportunity to review and discuss timber harvest and habitat species modeling.

UPDATE ON NEPA PROCESS

Kim Kratz, NOAA Fisheries, and David Zippin, ICF, provided an update on the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process and noted that NOAA Fisheries is coordinating with ODF and ICF to execute a process that would allow the ICF contractor to work on both the current HCP development process, as well as manage the NEPA process.

Deb asked for any questions or comments regarding ICF as the NEPA contractor. There were no questions or concerns, and members expressed comfort with ICF as the NEPA contractor.

REPORT OUT ON SCOPING TEAM PROGRESS

Troy Rahmig, ICF, reported out on the ST progress. The ST has been meeting frequently to discuss the aquatic and terrestrial strategies. On the aquatic strategy, the ST has focused on key aspects including road system management, restoration and fish passage, riparian buffering strategy, and management in Riparian Conservation Areas (RCAs). On the terrestrial strategy, the ST has primarily been discussing data use, species habitat models, Habitat Conservation Area (HCA) designation, and management activities in the HCAs.

The level of engagement at the ST has been tremendous, and the ST is working very well together and brings forward relevant information, data, perspectives, and opinions for productive collaborative discussion and problem solving.

APPROACH TO TERRESTRIAL STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

Troy provided an overview of the progress made in developing the terrestrial strategy. Key points of the presentation included:

- **Biological Goals and Objectives (BGOs)**: Reminder that the BGOs guide development of the conservation strategy. The biological goals are essentially to support the persistence of each species in the Permit Area. The objectives speak to conserving, maintaining, and enhancing occupied and suitable habitat; as well as increasing the quality and quantity of habitat during the Permit Term.
- **Sequencing of Species:** The team is sequencing the five terrestrial covered species to develop the conservation strategy. HCP development is led by looking first at northern spotted owl and marbled murrelet because more is known about those species, and then will look at whether additional conservation actions are needed to treat red tree vole, Oregon slender salamander, and coastal marten.
- **Species Data**: Reviewed how the HCP team is using species data. There is some variation in data availability, so there are slightly different approaches for data use for each species.
    - For northern spotted owl, good long-term survey data is available. The HCP focuses on locations that have been active recently, as well as additional areas that meet certain criteria (i.e. areas that are near currently active sites, are in locations identified as important for the species, have higher ODF ownership of surrounding habitat, or are representative of species range within the Plan Area). The HCP prioritizes sites with the highest potential value for northern spotted owl.
    - For marbled murrelet, survey and observation data are the guides for drawing conservation areas. HCP development focuses on locations that have significant observations, visual and auditory observations, and areas of highest likelihood of occurrence based on the habitat suitability model. The HCP team will fill in gaps in survey data by looking at the habitat suitability model. Marbled murrelet management areas (MMMAs) are also being used as a guide, but not an end point, for drawing HCAs. The ST is also discussing the most appropriate patch

size for marbled murrelets and how that influences the creation of HCAs; the strategy may include some smaller patches to protect marbled murrelet in some instances.

    - For other covered species, some survey data is available but is limited. Because of the limited data, we cannot use survey data in the same way as for owls and marbled murrelets. We will use the available survey data but will more heavily supplement it with modelling information.

- **Habitat Modeling**: The team is completing habitat suitability models for four terrestrial species (northern spotted owl, marbled murrelet, red tree vole, and Oregon slender salamander) but not for coastal marten. There is not currently a good published model for coastal marten within the Permit Area, and most of the literature on habitat use of the species is difficult to draw assumptions from.

    - Published models are available for northern spotted owl, marbled murrelet, and red tree vole. We are looking at those models to understand how they characterize habitat and at the literature to see if anything new has been done since the models have been published. We are looking to forestry inventory data to figure out how we can replicate or represent those habitat conditions that are useful to the species using forest inventory data. We then determine the parameters that are most important to the species (i.e. stand density, tree height, etc.). Stand level inventory data is used to represent that information for each of the species.

    - The HCP has designated gradations of habitat quality (e.g., low, moderate, high quality) at the stand level.

    - Using stand level inventory data allows us to link the habitat model to the timber harvest model, and ultimately allows us to explain how the habitat quality will change over time.

    - Each of the HCP models has undergone peer review, and experts have reviewed the technical work. The team is now comparing how the HCP models perform against those other published models.

    - Reviewed the benefits of the modeling approach. The modeling approach allows for an analysis of how habitat quality and quantity will change over time, allows for a better understanding of how management actions will influence habitat quality over time, provides for a better understanding of what habitat conditions could actually be at the end of the Permit Term, and can determine the relative investment needed to actually improve habitat quality during the Permit Term.

- **HCAs:** The ST is using the concept of HCAs in the terrestrial strategy. The idea is to use survey data and models to understand where the best habitat currently is and where it would likely be in the future. The assumption is that some level of management would be allowed in the HCAs, and the ST is beginning to discuss what those management activities could look like.

    - The ST has been walking through portions of the permit area and discussing how best to draw HCAs in each portion of the forest. It is possible to draw larger

HCAs in parts of the forest with large swaths of ODF-managed lands; but it is not possible to draw large HCAs in the southern portion of the permit area as there are more scattered tracts.

- ODF representatives clarified that any management that would be permitted in HCAs would be for habitat improvement purposes only. The ST is continuing conversation on appropriate management in HCAs. The ultimate size of the HCAs may depend on what kinds of activities are permitted within those HCAs. At this point the HCAs are quite large, and it is only possible to draw large HCAs if a range of management strategies are permitted within those HCAs.

Discussion:

SC members discussed the terrestrial strategy development and provided the following questions and comments:

- When will the HCP team know that it has drawn the right balance between timber harvest and conservation, and reconciled the conservation strategies with requirements under Greatest Permanent Value (GPV) and needed commercial timber harvest?
  - Troy responded that the process is iterative. The team is currently calibrating the timber harvest model. Once the HCAs are drawn as a first draft, then the team will be able to see timber harvest and conservation strategies together and make iterations as needed. Some minor iterations may even occur through the NEPA process.
  - ODF added that the aquatic and terrestrial strategies will be combined to see how the two strategies come together.
- During modeling, it is important to remember that every acre in the Permit Area is not the same in terms of its ability to generate revenue. For example, the outskirts of the Tillamook forest were less impacted by burns in the 1930s-50s. It will also be important to consider how best to treat lands outside of HCAs.
- The acronym “HCA” has a historical meaning in the northern spotted owl context.

DRAFT AQUATIC CONSERVATION STRATEGY

Troy provided context and an overview of the draft aquatic conservation strategy. Key points of the presentation included:

- **BGOs**: There is one biological goal for all covered fish species and four objectives. The goal is to support the persistence of covered fish by maintaining and enhancing habitat in steams. The objectives focus on promotion of long-term wood recruitment, enhancement of overall channel complexity, maintaining and enhancing water quality and quantity, and improving fish passage. The aquatic strategy is anchored in the BGOs.
- **Components of the Aquatic Strategy**: Key components of the aquatic strategy include road network management (which includes a combination of management direction and best practices), stream enhancement and restoration projects, and riparian buffers. The

ST has been discussing these three components, with a primary focus on riparian buffers and road network management, before diving into discussion on stream enhancement projects.

- **RCAs:** The ST discussed terminology and settled on using the term "riparian conservation areas (RCAs)" to describe riparian buffers. The ST has been discussing the size of RCAs and where they should be applied. The RCA strategy is tied to stream functions identified in the BGOs (i.e. temperature, sediment, and wood recruitment).
    - There is some variation in RCA widths that is based on several factors including size of stream, whether the stream is fish-bearing or non-fish bearing, location in the watershed, high-debris flow or landslide potential, efforts to minimize sediment and temperature increase, and ability to provide for adequate wood recruitment.
- **Modeling Approach**: ICF has been working with TerrainWorks on modeling and is beginning to receive model results. To date, the ODF statewide stream layer has been combined with the TerrainWorks stream layer. The proposed buffer strategy is linked to this stream layer in Geographic Information System (GIS) to understand what this means on the landscape. Wood recruitment modeling and other modeling will be used to fact check the buffer strategy.
- **RCA Strategy**:
    - The ST has been discussing how to define the aquatic zone, particularly in those areas that have channel migration, seeps and springs adjacent to streams, or other landscape features.
    - The strategy will likely include differences in buffer widths based on various characteristics (i.e. fish bearing streams, main stem, upper end of fish use, perenniality, and potential debris flow tract/high energy stream).
        - The strategy proposes a temperature protection zone to minimize the effects of temperature on fish as water moves downstream between fish-bearing and non-fish bearing portions of the stream. ST members have compiled and reviewed existing studies and papers to understand the best way to construct a buffer in the temperature protection zone.
        - The strategy proposes an equipment restriction zone in seasonal non-fish bearing streams to minimize sediment that enters into the aquatic system.
    - ODF uses horizontal distance to measure buffers, which is different from slope distance, which is what some other agencies and industries use. The HCP will include a graphical explanation of the difference between the two.

Discussion:

Members discussed the aquatic strategy and provided the following questions and comments:

- Question about whether buffer widths and protection zones might vary depending on length of stream. Troy responded that the intent would be to apply the same strategy regardless of stream length. Individual timber sales would likely only occur at discrete

areas along the stream, and so the buffer width would only be applied at that place along the stream where the sale is occurring, and everything else would remain the same. Very short streams coming off of fish-bearing streams might inherently have a larger buffer around them because of the buffer on the fish-bearing stream they are connected to would engulf most of the small adjacent stream.

- Members discussed the temperature protection zone, and the appropriate level of buffering to reduce temperature impacts downstream. Some noted that it may be appropriate to consider strategic buffering in key locations that need higher levels of protection; and that the temperature protection zone buffering strategy might be supplemented by other mitigations or protections elsewhere. ODF staff noted that the ST has not yet discussed mitigation in depth and will need to do so at future meetings.

Deb asked members for final comments, questions, and concerns and to indicate if they feel the ST is on the right track with the aquatic strategy. Members provided the following responses:

- Overall members supported the tiered buffer strategy and noted that it seems easy to understand, is justifiable and scientifically reasonable, and conforms well with other processes.
- Members noted that it will be important to describe what the HCP is trying to accomplish in terms of avoiding, minimizing, or mitigating effects on the species. It may also be useful to describe the HCP as an overall package of strategies that collectively meet the conservation needs of species. If adverse impacts are expected, it will be important to describe where those impacts are anticipated, and what is proposed to offset those impacts.
- Members agreed that mitigation can come in many forms: expanding the buffer, restoration activities, contribution of funds to other regional recovery efforts inside of our outside of the Permit Area, among other activities.
- Discussion on use of slope distance, and whether buffer distance changes depending on what it is being buffered. For example, less buffer may be needed to maintain shade whereas a larger buffer might be appropriate to deal with sedimentation issues. Troy noted that the current approach does not propose distinct buffers in this way. Rather, the width of the buffer depends on the type of stream and what the HCP is trying to achieve in that stream. For example, the buffer may be wider in perennial streams in order to achieve shade and temperature benefits, while the buffer may be narrower in certain stream types areas where fish are not present, but sedimentation and wood recruitment are an issue.
- Appreciate that ODF will maintain the horizontal buffer approach they have used in the past for consistency.
- Note that there is a lot of variability on the landscape and this will be important to consider in designing the buffer strategy.
- Getting public understanding of the projected timber harvest will be important.
- It will be important to clearly explain the buffer strategy to the public, and the balance between meeting timber harvest needs and conservation of species.

POLICY-LEVEL TIMBER HARVEST MODELING PROCESS UPDATE

Troy provided an update on the policy-level timber harvest modeling. He reminded the group that the modeling is considered "policy-level" because it is meant to provide enough detail to help policy-makers make decisions, but it will not be modeling at a level that harvest scheduling could occur off of it.

The modeling is being conducted across the entire Permit Area and is not broken down by district or county. More detailed implementation modeling will occur in the future.

Various metrics will be modeled including annual timber volume and revenue, annual operating costs, annual net operating revenue, forest inventory, and covered species habitat quality. The BOF has asked for these metrics to be modeled to help them make their decision anticipated for October 2020.

Currently, the model is being calibrated. In the coming month, the HCP team will work to layer HCP conservation strategies , such as RCAs and HCAs, into the model.

STEERING COMMITTEE DIRECTION TO SCOPING TEAM

The HCP project team will provide a report out to the ST on what was discussed during today's meeting. SC members were encouraged to have ongoing conversations with ST members to stay informed and ensure alignment within the agencies.

NEXT STEPS AND SUMMARY

Liz thanked participants for their time and efforts and closed the meeting.

The next SC meeting will be held on April 30. Members should assume the meeting will be virtual.

The HCP project team will also be in touch to schedule small group check ins to see how things are going.

ACTION ITEMS

The following action items were identified throughout the meeting:

- KW – Schedule small group check-ins with ST/SC members.