



Board of Forestry Comments, 11/01/2017

At your October Board meeting, and at the recent FTLAC meeting, the Department of Forestry outlined their proposed process to help the Board move towards finalizing a new FMP for the NW State Forests, with an eye towards coupling that FMP with an HCP. The process that was shared in those meetings involved a parallel track between both FMP and HCP development. On the FMP track were a series of high level policy decisions that this board would step through one at a time, in a sense building the plan as you went. While at the same time the HCP process was advancing in somewhat similar fashion with a core negotiating team advising, and a stakeholder team being informed of progress. The HCP process also included several opportunities for “offramps”, should the negotiations reach an impasse, or the cost of further pursuit of the HCP be deemed too high.

As I pondered the process that was described, I thought of other forest planning processes I have seen or been involved with in one way or another. And I have to say that this one struck me as being very unique. In my experience, its more typical for a planning process to involve the development of alternatives, each with a different set of variables associated with it. Of course, one of the primary reasons for this is to allow stakeholders and decision makers an opportunity to consider tradeoffs. You are familiar with this type of process, as this was precisely the track that was taken for the recent riparian rules that you adopted earlier this year. If you recall back to the spring and summer of 2016, you were presented with a series of alternatives, all cataloged in a matrix. The department had spent time quantifying the benefits and costs of each of alternative. The ability to compare the impacts and the costs of relative levels of buffers along streams, allowed you as a board to find a solution that the majority of you could support. I fear that had you followed a linear planning process similar to the one being presented by staff in this case, you would have had much less understanding of the impacts and costs associated with the ultimate decision in the end.

Considering alternatives would not only provide you with a better understanding of the relative costs associated with your choices, but you would also be helping agency staff to better represent alternatives within the context of HCP negotiations. You would also be prepared to move forward more appropriately should the HCP offramp be taken.

As a first alternative, I would suggest a baseline be developed that catalogues only legal requirements, such as the FPA, to appropriately use as a benchmark for comparison. As staff layers other alternative choices on top of this benchmark you will be equipped to weigh the options and have informed discussions regarding tradeoffs and the future of these resources and the communities that depend on them.

Throughout the next several months and years we’re all going to collectively spend a great deal of our time invested in an important discussion about the future of Oregon’s state forests. The process for that discussion is paramount – I urge you to critically consider the process, and make sure we have a process that will (1) allow for a basic understanding of the tradeoffs, (2) allow for informed HCP conversations, and (3) leave us with alternatives that will be viable both with and/or without an HCP.

Sincerely,

Seth Barnes
Director of Forest Policy