

MEETING SUMMARY

WESTERN OREGON STATE FORESTS HCP SCOPING TEAM

Tuesday, May 26, 2020, 10:00 am – 2:00 pm

By Webinar/Video Conference

ATTENDEES

Participants: Nick Palazzotto (ODF), Rich Szlemp (USFWS), Rod Krahmer (ODFW), Jim Muck (NOAA Fisheries), Tere O'Rourke (NOAA Fisheries), Ryan Singleton (DSL), Brian Pew (ODF), Mile Wilson (ODF), Julie Firman (ODFW)

Technical Consultant and Guests: Troy Rahmig (ICF), Aaron Gabbe (ICF), Randy Smith (ODF), Corey Grinnell (ODF)

Facilitation Team: Cindy Kolomechuk (ODF), Sylvia Ciborowski (Kearns & West), Deb Nudelman (Kearns & West)

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Deb Nudelman, Kearns & West welcomed members. Meeting participants introduced themselves.

Deb reviewed the agenda, which included: 1) Agency updates, 2) Report out on stakeholder engagement, 3) Review administrative draft HCP table, 4) Habitat Conservation Area (HCA) review and revision, 5) Initial harvest model outputs, 6) Effects analysis approach, 7) Initial monitoring discussion, 8) Confirm topics for Steering Committee (SC) update, and 9) Approach going forward, next steps, and summary.

AGENCY UPDATES

Members provided the following updates relevant to the Western Oregon State Forests HCP process:

Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF): 1) The agency provided an update on the ODF budget reductions and noted that it will not impact the State Forests Division. 2) The Governor nominated three new members to the Board of Forestry, who will begin in June.

NOAA Fisheries: A Ninth Circuit decision was made in favor of NOAA Fisheries against Pacific Rivers Council regarding the agency's compliance with the Aquatic Conservation Strategy (ACS) objectives and the Northwest Forest Plan for the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Regional Management Plan (RMP). BLM is currently implementing the agency's RMP.

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW): 1) The fishery on the Columbia River and Chinook River has been closed due to low returns. Both the commercial and recreational fishing groups agreed that the closure should happen. 2) Chinook returns to the Coquille River have been declining.

United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS): The fisher listing was released a couple of weeks ago. There is now a new District Population Segments (DPS), and the Oregon portion of that DPS will not be listed. The Sierra Nevada newly devised DPS was put forward to be listed.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT UPDATE

Deb reported out on recent stakeholder engagement efforts. A meeting with industry stakeholders was held on May 8. Peter Daugherty, ODF, organized the meeting to discuss modelling as a follow-up to the March meeting open to the public. Stakeholders were interested in understanding the conservation strategies and the ODF team communicated that a lot of work is still being done and that the strategies would likely be available in July, along with early modeling results.

There was a recognition of the work the Scoping Team (ST) is doing and the need to have time available in the process to do the work to develop the HCP. ODF made it clear that we want to be very transparent in our work; there were a lot of questions around habitat modeling and its relationship to wood recruitment and some of the covered species. ODF will be doing some follow-up to review species habitat models with some of the stakeholders.

It was mentioned that a meeting with conservation stakeholders is also being planned and a meeting open to the public is scheduled for July 13 from 1-4pm.

REVIEW ADMINISTRATIVE DRAFT HCP TABLE

Troy Rahmig, ICF, presented a summary of where we are in the process of developing key elements of the Administrative Draft of the HCP. He outlined which elements the ST has and have not yet been reviewed, as well as the timing proposed for reviewing outstanding elements. He also noted that some of the elements will be needed for the comparative analysis that the Board of Forestry will review at the October Board meeting. The Administrative Draft HCP table will be sent to the ST after the meeting for review.

The ST will likely review an early and not fully complete version of Chapter 4 (Conservation Strategy) in June. The ST has had a lot of discussion on some elements of the Conservation Strategy, however, there are some elements that the ST has not touched on much or at all. Those conversations will occur at ST meetings in the coming months.

Over the coming months, the ST is expected to review chapters on: The Effects Analysis, Monitoring and Adaptive Management, Assurances, Implementation, Cost and Funding, and Alternatives to Take. Some of these chapters will be reviewed after September because they

are not needed for the comparative analysis that the Board of Forestry will review at the October Board meeting.

The project team will also be sharing the Administrative Draft HCP table and summary with the SC at the May 28 meeting to help the SC understand the overall structure and timeline of the development of the HCP.

Brian Pew, ODF, added that the intent is to meet with the Board of Forestry in October. The table shows that the Administrative Draft will be in more of a draft form than originally expected, but this is the appropriate level of detail to present to the Board to seek their decision on whether to move the HCP into the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Phase.

Discussion

ST members discussed the summary and overall progress in the development of the Administrative Draft of the HCP and provided the following questions and comments:

- Suggestion to include road haul in the conservation action related to minimizing effects from road construction.
- Will any of the conservation strategies have to be modified based on the harvest modeling results?
 - Yes, the conservation strategies may have to be modified somewhat but it is unclear to which degree at this time.
- ST members were reminded that in order to be consistent with the process, the project team will not take any elements of the HCP to the public or to the Board of Forestry that have not been reviewed by the ST.

HCA REVIEW AND REVISIONS

Troy explained that the HCAs have been put into the first run of the timber harvest model. ICF and ODF have had small group meetings with some ST members to talk about HCAs and will review the outcomes of those meetings today. Troy explained that today's meeting will also include a review of the summary statistics for covered species to demonstrate what we are accomplishing now with the HCAs. The management activities in the HCAs will also be discussed.

Troy provided an overview of the HCAs. Key topics of the presentation include:

- Draft HCAs were used to inform the first timber harvest model run. The HCAs may be modified prior to the next model run based on how the HCAs and activities within the HCAs are behaving in the model and based on feedback from the ST.
- During small group meetings with ST members, the project team heard some questions from the ST around why some boundaries were drawn in specific ways, why some older

stands fall outside of HCAs, and why some lower quality habitat was included in HCAs. Troy provided reasoning as to why these decisions in drawing the HCAs were made.

- Rich Szlemp, USFWS, Rod Krahmer, ODFW, and Ryan Singleton, Department of State Lands (DSL), were invited to provide any comments and feedback on the HCAs and results of the small group meeting. Key comments and questions provided include:
 - ODF did an admirable job of looking at the forest and developing the HCAs. Through the lens of the Common School Fund (CSF) lands, there were some comments related to scattered tracts in the south and west. It is difficult to satisfy habitat requirements for multiple species; however, the HCAs do a sufficient job.
 - The team did a great first take at drafting the HCAs. As we look forward, would still like to consider how we can address older forest that may fall outside of the HCAs. Suggestion to look at how we can build habitat around that older forest, either within an HCA designation or otherwise.
 - Connectivity from both east to west and north to south is important, and it is important to draw the HCA lines to build that connectivity. We may want to designate some younger age stands within HCAs to bulk up those areas to provide for future connectivity.
 - Will there be discussion on identifying and mapping out inoperable areas?
 - Inoperable areas are likely to be better defined during the second iteration of the HCAs. ODF is very clear on which lands are completely inoperable. The Districts looked at promising ground versus not promising ground to help draw the HCAs as well.

Troy then reviewed a summary of the HCAs relative to the covered terrestrial species. Key topics of the presentation include:

- Northern Spotted Owl: Almost all of the northern spotted owl highly suitable land and a majority of the suitable habitat within the Permit Area are captured within HCA boundaries. Additionally, nearly all northern spotted owl activity centers fall within the HCAs.
- Marbled Murrelet: Almost all of the marbled murrelet highly suitable habitat and most of the suitable habitat within the Permit Area are captured within HCA boundaries. Additionally, nearly all Marbled Murrelet Management Areas (MMMA) and marbled murrelet observations fall within HCAs.
- Oregon Slender Salamander: Because this species is ubiquitous, all of the modeled habitat is not included in HCAs like for the other species. Overall, more than half of the various types of suitable habitat are included within the HCAs. All Oregon slender salamander occurrences are captured within the HCAs.

Discussion

ST members discussed the HCAs and provided the following questions and comments:

- Is there an assumption that all covered lands have some suitable habitat for Oregon slender salamander?
 - Surveys have shown Oregon slender salamander as being ubiquitous on the landscape, and the model has confirmed this.

Summary of HCAs

Nick Palazzotto, ODF, then provided a summary of the HCAs and the age classes, broken out by District, stand type, and production ground. Key topics of his presentation include:

- In the data, it is possible to explore individual HCAs and to look at the age class structure of each individual HCA.
- Reviewed the age classes within HCAs, broken down by District:
 - The vast majority of acreage older than 90 years is included within the HCAs.
 - The southern area has forest older than 120 years and has more old forest as compared to the northern coastal forest. A lot of management is likely to occur in this area.
- Stand type data: Data is also broken out across stand type to distinguish between conifer (swiss needle cast and non-swiss needle cast) and hardwood (mostly alder). 25% of the HCAs are not in healthy conifer stands that are moving toward owl habitat and may be prime for conversion to support the species.
- Production ground: There is a layer that breaks out lands as high, average, marginal, and low production ground. Low production ground is nearly synonymous with inoperable lands. A lot of the areas within the HCAs are on high or average production grounds, meaning there is a management opportunity on these grounds.
- Age class, stand type, and production ground: When information on age class, stand type, and production ground is combined, we can see the breakdown of conifer versus hardwood within each age class and the number of acres within each type of ground. This is very helpful for thinking about pace and scale as it helps provide an acreage estimate of how much can be harvested and how fast we would want to harvest it.
- Characterizations of lands outside of HCAs will be available later.

Discussion

ST members discussed the HCAs and age classes and provided the following questions and comments:

- Can you pull out how many of the younger swiss needle cast stand acres are within specific HCAs? This might help provide more detailed information about pace and scale within specific HCAs.
 - Yes, this information is available within each HCA. For example, there is information on how many acres within each HCA are swiss needle cast stands under 60 years old. To the extent we need to, we can focus on individual HCAs to better see the data to consider pace and scale.
- When managing structure during the life of the HCP and into the future, it is important to consider how you will assess whether management is achieving the habitat goals over time (i.e., composition and structure of the forest). Recommendation that the HCP incorporates a process for performing this assessment.
 - ODF is looking at how management changes the quality and quantity of habitat using the models and will be asking whether the management actions help meet the intended outcomes regarding habitat.
- A member provided two questions: 1) How do we know what our desired outcome is and how is the desired outcome measured as we go forward with the modeling? How do we adequately evaluate whether we are achieving desired habitat outcomes? 2) How can we best articulate the purpose of alder conversion as a means to promote habitat values?
 - The model helps inform what the intent is of converting alder and what the conversion gets us. There has been a lot of talk about alder conversion, and the kinds of prescriptions that make the most sense.
 - Suggestion to have more of a conversation around how to manage alder. Eliminating swiss needle cast is not the goal. Instead, putting stands on a better trajectory to support the species should be the goal. Monitoring will be important to help understand how we are meeting habitat outcomes. The model contains the habitat metrics, and while it is a timber-centric model, it can help us understand habitat outcomes. There are a few ways to think about the model outcomes, and one way to look at them is to consider that at the end of the permit terms, we will see a higher quantity of suitable and highly suitable habitat for the species. The real question is where will we be at the end of the permit term? The modeling is looking at 100 years, which is helpful to consider the future in the long term.
 - There is a need for more discussion on alder management and to look at the harvest model closely. As we move forward, we look more closely at individual HCAs, which is where pace and scale really matters. The question at this point is: do we need to identify the HCAs where alder conversion is being considered or is it something to be identified in the future?

Troy summarized the conversation and noted within the context of the HCP the focus is on the covered species. Within the HCP, we would need to explain how and why hardwood or alder conversion would benefit the species over time, as well as why a specific pace and scale is beneficial to the species. It is also important to track success over time through monitoring. Monitoring will be a combination of on-the-ground work and modeling. Modeling is a tool to help project the future, and the projection helps justify the timber management program and the quality of habitat it will yield over time. The monitoring will then be used to help validate that assumption.

TIMBER HARVEST MODELING

Mike Wilson (ODF) Provided a high-level overview of the timber harvest modeling results:

- This first model run was an opportunity to calibrate and understand the model, to see if it is working properly. The results show that some fine tuning will need to be made in order to have the model work properly.
- Overall, harvest volumes are low in the modeling, and that is because regeneration harvest is not occurring in HCAs in this harvest run. For the second model run, it may be important to include areas in need of swiss needle cast treatment or large swaths of upland alder. There may also be a need to do look at tradeoffs and incorporate some HCA sizing adjustments.
- Thinning is occurring inside and outside of the HCAs, in very young age stands.
- Northern Spotted Owl (NSO): Currently all NSO sites meet the 40% rule. In small group meetings with some ST members, it was noted that it may make sense to remove harvest restrictions on some sites outside of HCAs.
- Marbled murrelet: Some MMMA's are experiencing some thinning in the modeling, so the suggestion for the second model run is to modify the focus on habitat quality rather than looking at MMMA boundaries alone.

Discussion

ST members discussed the timber harvest modeling and provided the following questions and comments:

- It will also be important to see the timber yields together with the habitat suitability models.
- Question about whether any harvesting occurs in high quality owl habitat. ODF responded that the timber model honors the rules within the conservation strategy, which includes a mitigation measure to avoid NSO nests both within and outside of HCAs. There is no harvesting within 70-acre core areas. Within HCAs, the model is trying to improve habitat over time.

- Question about whether any harvesting occurs around the nest sites outside of HCAs.
- ODF clarified that the model does need some changes because it is not performing correctly. Tweaks will be made for the next model run.

EFFECTS ANALYSIS

Troy then presented on the effects analysis. Key topics of the presentation include:

- The timber modeling will help inform the effects analysis and will allow us to better understand the effects on covered species.
- Reviewed proposed terminology including the definition of take, which includes an element of harm that results in the inability of the species to breed, feed, or shelter.
 - It was noted that not all effects result in take. For example, there can be a loss of habitat of a covered species that might be an effect on the species but would not result in take.
 - The effects analysis can include a more specific analysis for species with more data. However, for species with little or no data, the analysis is based on more assumptions and modeling and is less specific and more conservative.
- Effects analysis describes both direct and indirect effects. Examples of both effects were provided.
- Reviewed a proposal for threshold and criteria for determining potentially adverse effects for each of the four covered species. For each species, the ODF and ICF team has outlined certain harvest activities that may have the potential to effect covered species, certain harvest activities that would not result in an effect on covered species, and proposed avoidance and minimization measures.

Discussion

ST members discussed the effects analysis and provided the following questions and comments:

- Will the definition of take also include harass and other harmful activities?
 - The definition does not specifically include the term “harass,” but most of the activities that would typically be considered harassment would likely fall under the definition of “harm.”
- All covered lands are Oregon slender salamander habitat, so there is no “unsuitable” habitat for the species. Therefore, harvest activity of any type has the potential to affect the species. Consider changing the table to reflect this.
 - The project team will consider how to update the table. We may want to consider how to minimize take, and how the HCAs themselves mitigate against take.

Troy noted that the effects analysis will be sent to the ST for review. The ST is encouraged to provide feedback by June 1. A call can be scheduled to discuss the effects analysis further if needed.

CONFIRM TOPICS FOR STEERING COMMITTEE UPDATE

The next SC meeting is scheduled for May 28. The project team will present the current work and the progress made in developing the HCP as well as where we are at in the development of the conservation strategies. It was noted that the project team will provide the SC with more information on the technical details. The information will be provided as an update, not as a point of seeking agreement.

APPROACH GOING FORWARD, NEXT STEPS, AND SUMMARY

Deb thanked ST members for their participation. The next ST meetings are scheduled for June 2 and June 23.

A member suggested discussing the following topics at a future ST meeting:

- Management activities within HCAs.
- How to protect the outliers for owl sites and marbled murrelet sites that are outside of HCAs.
- Conservation objectives for alder.

ACTION ITEMS

The following action items were identified throughout the meeting:

- ICF: Send the Administrative Draft HCP table to the ST for review.
- ICF: Send the effects analysis to the ST for review.
- ST: Review the effects analysis and provide feedback by June 1.