

Western Oregon State Forests Habitat Conservation Plan Virtual Meeting Open to the Public Wednesday, September 16, 2020

Meeting Summary

Introduction and Overview

The Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) is considering a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) for forest lands in western Oregon. As part of the stakeholder engagement process for the effort, ODF held a virtual meeting open to the public on September 16, 2020. The meeting was also recorded and posted to the [ODF YouTube channel](#).

Purpose of Meeting

- Hear updates on the development of the draft HCP
- Hear and discuss updates on the HCP Conservation Strategy
- Learn about the information that will be presented to the Board of Forestry in October to help the Board make a decision whether to move forward with an HCP

Attendees

Over 140 members of the public attended the meeting. Those in attendance represented conservation groups, industry representatives, government agencies, tribal representatives, and county representatives, as well as members of the Scoping Team (a technical level HCP working group) and Steering Committee (a policy level HCP working group).

Notification Methods

ODF invited agencies, tribes, counties, interested parties, stakeholders, members of the Steering Committee, members of the Scoping Team, and the general public to the meeting.

Notification methods included:

- Email distributions to interested parties
- Posts on ODF social media including Facebook and Twitter
- Meeting notice via FlashAlert to media in areas that would be potentially covered in the HCP (including Portland media)
- Post on the ODF news site
- Post on the Western Oregon HCP project webpage
- Letter from ODF to specifically invite county commissioners
- Targeted outreach to watershed councils

Format

The meeting open to the public was a two and a half-hour webinar meeting that included presentations and discussion and question and answer opportunities. The meeting was followed by an informal, one-hour virtual discussion period for participants to ask questions and discuss topics of most interest. Participants were also able to submit questions or comments via email to Jason Cox, ODF, at Jason.r.cox@oregon.gov to be addressed during the meeting.

Participants were encouraged to write and confirm their name as they joined the webinar to track attendees. Participants also received the opportunity to provide their affiliation through a webinar poll.

Meeting Summary

Welcome, Introductions, and Agenda Overview

Deb Nudelman, Kearns & West, introduced herself as part of the facilitation team and welcomed participants. She mentioned that this is the sixth meeting open to the public. The intent of the meeting was to share more information about the HCP process and to provide updates on HCP development. She reviewed ground rules for the meeting as well as webinar instructions and protocols. She then launched a webinar poll to gauge members affiliation.

Lena Tucker, Deputy State Forester with the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF), welcomed meeting attendees. She thanked participants and state forest staff for attending today's meeting and for their interest and dedication to the HCP process, especially with the current wildfires. She noted the wildfires have burned approximately one million acres and is ODF's current priority. The HCP is important, even with the wildfires, because it helps create certainty over time. Lena acknowledged the agencies, organizations, and consultants that are working together on the HCP and their contributions.

Brian Pew, ODF, welcomed participants and noted the project team has been working to develop the HCP since 2018. He explained the purpose of the meeting is to share updates on the development of the HCP before the Board of Forestry (BOF) meeting on October 6. In October, the BOF will make a decision on whether or not to finish the HCP, including moving it into the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. The final approval of the HCP would occur in the summer of 2022, after the NEPA process. ODF is interested in hearing participants interests, questions, and concerns during today's meeting.

Deb briefly introduced the project team. The project team has a variety of expertise and is working alongside ODF to develop the HCP. The project team includes ODF, ICF, Oregon Consensus, and Kearns & West. Cindy Kolomechuk is ODF's lead on this project. ICF is providing technical support to write and develop the HCP. Kearns & West is leading the public engagement and facilitation process and helping to build alignment around the process. Oregon Consensus is providing a neutral forum for parties to reach agreement on contentious public issues.

Deb reviewed the meeting agenda which included the following topics: 1) Updates on the Western Oregon State Forests HCP process, 2) Updates on the conservation strategies, 3) Overview of the comparative analysis of the three forest management planning scenarios, and 4) Summary and next steps. Meeting materials will be posted on the ODF website after the webinar.

Deb explained that ODF has a strong interest in hearing stakeholders' questions, interests, and concerns. After the webinar meeting, there is an hour-long session for informal discussion to ask questions and discuss topics of most interest to participants. She explained participants are also welcome submit written questions and comments via email to Jason Cox, ODF at Jason.r.cox@oregon.gov.

Updates on the Western Oregon State Forests HCP

Troy Rahmig, ICF, provided an update on the HCP and shared a draft timeline of the development of the HCP. He explained that the effects analysis, monitoring and adaptive management, cost and funding, and several other chapters of the draft HCP has been completed. Additionally, the comparative analysis and the pre-NEPA planning have also been moving forward.

October 6 is a pivotal point for the HCP as the BOF will decide whether to continue with the development of the HCP. If the BOF decides to move forward with the HCP, the HCP would continue to be refined.

Troy outlined the materials that will be presented to the BOF in October. This includes drafts of nine out of the ten chapters of the HCP. These chapters have been reviewed by the Scoping Team and will continue to be refined following the BOF meeting. However, the refinements are not expected to substantially change the conservation, economic, or social outcomes, which are important to the BOF. Information that is still under discussion or development is identified in the draft chapters. Additionally, the comparative analysis of the two other forest management planning scenarios will be presented to the BOF and will be the centerpiece of the meeting. The draft chapters and the information that will be presented to the BOF will be posted to the ODF website on Monday, September 21.

Update on Conservation Strategy Refinements

Troy provided an update on the conservation strategy including refinements to the Riparian Conservation Areas (RCAs) and updates to the Habitat Conservation Areas (HCAs). Key topics of the presentation included:

- RCA Refinements:
 - RCA buffer distances are in feet.
 - Seasonal fish bearing streams have been updated to include a 120' buffer, rather than a 50' buffer.
 - The RCA stand age charts show passive management in the areas over time.
 - Biological goals and objectives are set over the 70-year permit term.
- Updates to the HCAs:

- The HCAs are areas where management activities aim to produce higher quality terrestrial habitat to benefit covered species over the course of the permit term.
- Reviewed the final draft HCA size and distribution for the three subgeographical areas: The North Coast, Willamette Valley, and Southern Oregon.
- The sizes of the draft HCAs vary across the permit term and are largely driven by species occurrence data and suitable habitat.
- There is a total of 239,000 acres in the HCAs, most of which are intended to have active management.
- Presented a series of maps that show the landscape for the HCAs by district.
- Management in RCAs and HCAs:
 - There will be no management or harvest in RCAs but may include aquatic restoration and wood enhancement projects during the permit term.
 - HCAs will include active management to improve the quality and quantity of habitat overtime. Management activities will be aligned with the biological goals and objectives.
 - HCAs may include silvicultural treatments such as density management, selective harvests, and regeneration of stands.
 - The pace and scale of management activities are being determined.

Overview of the Comparative Analysis of the Three Forest Management Planning Scenarios

Mark Buckley, ECONorthwest, presented the comparative analysis of the three forest management planning scenarios. This research effort was initiated almost a year ago and is a more expansive version of the business case analysis.

Key topics of the presentation included:

- The purpose of the comparative analysis is to evaluate and compare the outcomes of the three forest management planning scenarios, which include the current FMP (cFMP), the draft FMP (dFMP), and the HCP.
- Parameters and key model assumptions of the comparative analysis include a 75-year timeframe, timber prices, and harvest costs.
- Provided an overview of the analysis of the three forest management planning scenarios.
 - High-level outcomes of the HCP analysis included:
 - More resilient habitat with largest patch sizes and better species protection with lowest edge ratios.
 - Strongest potential outcomes for aquatic strategies.
 - Largest number of old stands within protected areas.
 - Largest average annual harvest volume and most distributed revenue compared to cFMP.
 - Lowest Endangered Species Act (ESA) related costs.
 - Most favorable net operating income.
 - Provides greater predictability and certainty.
 - High-level outcomes of the dFMP analysis included:
 - Protects the largest share of habitat.
 - Offers the lowest cost for harvest.

- High-level outcomes of the cFMP analysis included:
 - Highest increase in carbon stock.
 - Strongest in conservation.

The presentation on the comparative analysis, the executive summary, and the full report will be posted to the ODF website on Monday, September 21.

Public Input and Q&A Summary

A question and answer and discussion period followed the presentations. The main topics that were brought up during the discussion period included:

Conservation Strategies:

- Q: How do we take into account the habitat that may be moving northward because of the fires? What assurances are available to track the factors impacting human, animal, and plant species?
 - A: We are striving for larger, more contiguous HCAs that are more robust and can withstand events like fires over time. We are seeing larger fires than we have seen in the past, and the team is relying on the current available information. In the future, the HCP may need to be altered as new information is learned and there is flexibility built into the HCP to do that. The current strategy is to make the forest more resilient. Natural events are expected to occur and the goal is to assist the species and the environment as much as possible.
- Q: Were the HCAs drawn to also protect water supplied to communities? Was this one of the considerations?
 - A: The HCAs were based on species occupancy and suitable habitat. Some HCAs likely provide ancillary benefits. This has not been analyzed in the HCP but may be analyzed in the NEPA process. The RCAs and buffers provide enough protections to offset changes with water quantity, sedimentation, etc. The water quality discussed in the HCP has to do with the covered fish species.
- Q: Will the draft HCP have more information about silvicultural treatments in the HCAs?
 - A: Yes, the draft HCP will include details about the silvicultural treatments. The forest prescriptions for the larger forest will be included in the FMP. Draft chapters of the HCP will be posted on Monday.
- Comment: A participant expressed concern that the specific details about the management inside and outside HCAs have been shared late in the process. This makes it difficult to provide input and feedback.
 - Response: A wide range of prescriptive options has been provided for management outside of HCAs to allow for flexibility. Chapter 4 of the HCP includes habitat objectives and prescriptive details that provides additional information on management inside of HCAs.

- Comment: Oregon's coastal forests have more potential for sequestering carbon than any other forest on earth and can become part of the solution to climate change. However, these coastal forest trees are being cut down. There is concern that the Oregon coast range is being harvested as it is important for the sequestering of carbon and the fight against climate change.
- Q: Are there limits on the treatments that are beneficial to the covered species?
 - A: The decision process around treatments is still under development. If a stand is extremely unhealthy, we may apply a severe prescription such as replanting with a better species mix that is more appropriate. The sideboards on the amount of management is also considered. Management in HCAs are directed by outcomes that benefit the species. The prescriptions take into consideration the structure of the stands and where they currently are located. Some commercial timber could be a byproduct of HCA activities.
- Q: Will there be information that describes the quality of habitat in the HCAs?
 - A: Yes, the narratives and charts in the draft HCP show how the habitat will likely change over time.
- Q: Are there provisions for habitat restoration in RCAs?
 - A: The HCP includes restoration projects, including wood enhancement projects, barrier removal, and fish passage improvement projects. The work will likely be coordinated through watershed groups and others. ODF will continue to work with partners to use the HCP to prioritize work and think about steps moving forward.
- Questions and discussion on restriction of management activities inside of the RCAs.
- Clarifying questions on acres that are constrained outside of HCAs, and management prescriptions outside of HCAs.
- Q: Does the harvest volume estimate include the volume inside HCAs?
 - A: Harvest volume estimates include volume inside and outside of the HCAs; this is the total volume. The majority of volume comes from outside HCAs and minimal amount comes as a byproduct from management inside the HCAs. The harvest volume estimates are high level policy modeling and the model runs are a conservative estimate.
- Q: Due to the wildfires across the state, will ODF take a step back and assess the damage to the forests? Will there be additional opportunities for stakeholder input?
 - A: Approximately 23,000 acres of HCAs have been affected by the fires. The forest fires had different levels of intensity and initial reports found that the forest is not completely lost. At this time, ODF does not expect a lot of changes to the HCAs. There will opportunities for public input if the BOF votes to move forward with the HCP.

- Q: What areas are identified as old growth and how many are incorporated in the proposal?
 - A: Old growth is determined at the stand level and is defined as a stand that is 175 years old or older. Currently, 138 acres are recognized as old growth patches. Old growth will be protected and will not be logged or thinned. Inoperable areas make up 180,000 acres; 60 percent are included in HCAs.

- Q: What are the thresholds in the adaptive management strategy that would serve as triggers for the biological goals and objectives, especially in terms of harvest rates?
 - A: ODF is proposing five-year and ten-year check-ins centered around compliance.

- Q: Will the maps and data sets for the HCAs be shared?
 - A: Yes, and the team is currently creating a package of the data, information, and work products completed to date that will be posted on the ODF website.

- Q: What is the level of take for endangered species?
 - A: Take is defined in the HCP in terms of habitat loss. Chapter 4 and 5 explains what this will look like over time.

- Q: Will ODF provide opportunities for public engagement to discuss management and HCAs?
 - A: Once the HCP is in implementation, ODF expects to have stakeholders involved in the process as well as discussions on monitoring.

Comparative Analysis:

- Q: The dFMP does not seem to include details on the aquatic strategy. Can you clarify the management prescriptions under the dFMP related to structure targets, departure schedule, steep slope, etc.?
 - A: There is a chart that explains the management prescriptions and assumptions for the dFMP and will be presented to the BOF. The steep slope and riparian areas are modeled similarly to how they are implemented currently. The landscape design strategy includes 36 percent of the forest.

- Q: Will the HCP help ODF become financially viable?
 - A: The HCP provides a lot of certainty and stability but does not solve all of ODF's financial concerns. This HCP is not a cure all but can help benefit species, ensure compliance, and provide stability. The BOF will be evaluating the HCP in terms of greatest permanent value.

- Q: Federal lands also contain suitable habitat. Does the comparative analysis acknowledge or consider species not covered under the HCP?
 - A: No, the comparative analysis mostly evaluates the effects on covered species. The goal is to benefit all species, but the HCP focuses on the covered species to be compliant with the ESA.

Summary and Next Steps

Brett Brownscombe, Oregon Consensus, provided a brief overview of where we are now in the HCP stakeholder engagement process. This meeting is the latest in a series of meetings open to the public. Upcoming meetings include:

- BOF meeting on October 6.
- State Forest Advisory Committee (SFAC) meeting on September 17.
- Joint stakeholder meeting on September 24.

The stakeholder engagement process will continue after the October 6 if the BOF decides to move forward with the HCP. If the BOF does not move forward with the HCP, ODF will engage stakeholders to discuss the path forward for forest management.

Jason Cox, ODF, noted that meetings will continue to be virtual. He reminded participants of the opportunities to provide verbal and written testimony to the BOF. The deadline for written testimony is October 2, and the verbal testimony sign up will open on October 1.

Cindy Kolomechuck, ODF, noted the HCP materials and information will be sent to the BOF and will be posted to the ODF website on Monday.

Brian thanked members for attending the meeting and confirmed the team is working to get information out to the public as quickly as possible.

Lena closed the meeting and thanked everyone for participating and remaining dedicated to the HCP process.