

MEETING SUMMARY

WESTERN OREGON STATE FORESTS HCP SCOPING TEAM

Tuesday, December 1, 2020, 10:00 am – 2:00 pm

By Webinar/Video Conference

ATTENDEES

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

Technical Consultant and Guests: Troy Rahmig (ICF), Aaron Gabbe (ICF), Melissa Klungle (ICF)

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

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Deb Nudelman, Kearns & West, welcomed Scoping Team (ST) members. Meeting participants introduced themselves. They welcomed Jeff Young who is joining from NOAA Fisheries and will be participating in the Scoping Team moving forward as Jim Muck transitions away.

Deb reviewed the agenda, which included: 1) Agency Updates, 2) Update on Fire Recovery Efforts, 3) Update on NEPA Process, 4) Discuss Remaining Aquatic Topics, 5) Discuss Terrestrial Effects Analysis, 6) Update on HCA Management, 7) Updated on Terrestrial Monitoring, 8) Topics to elevate to the Steering Committee, 9) Confirm topics for Steering Committee (SC) update, and 10) Approach Going Forward, Next Steps, and Summary.

AGENCY UPDATES

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

- **NOAA Fisheries:** A number of NOAA Fisheries staff are retiring and there will be changes.

Deb noted that a meeting with stakeholders is set for this Thursday, December 3.

UPDATE ON NEPA PROCESS

Tere O'Rourke, NOAA Fisheries, provided an update on NEPA. The team has a working meeting tomorrow and will discuss the Purpose and Need and description of proposed action. NOAA Fisheries would like to send a draft Purpose and Need to USFWS for consideration soon.

UPDATE ON FIRE RECOVERY EFFORTS

Brian Pew, ODF, provided an update. ODF has conducted an overall analysis of the landscape, looking at habitat, timber stands, roads, streams and other elements. The analysis has initially found that roads have not been severely impacted, but some plastic culverts have been impacted. ODF is focusing on reforestation of the thousands of acres that need attention. ODF is also putting together salvage harvest plans as quickly as it can.

The ODF Annual Operating Plan (AOP) was put on hold. Instead, the agency will focus on salvage harvesting. The agency needs to revise its 10-year implementation plan to recognize this shift to focus on salvage harvest, and this is out for public comment now. ST feedback is welcome on this. There will be salvage harvest expected in HCA areas. It is expected that salvage will occur on roughly one-third of the impacted area.

ODF has ordered many seedlings. It is expected that reforestation will take many years.

You can find the draft Implementation Plan and other information on the Santiam State Forest restoration by visiting <https://www.oregon.gov/odf/recreation/Pages/santiam-state-forest.aspx>

ODF will host a virtual public forum via Zoom at 1:30-3:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Dec. 8 to provide an overview of damage to the forest post-fire, ODF's initial plans for forest restoration, and take public input. The link to view or participate in the meeting will be posted at <https://www.oregon.gov/odf/recreation/Pages/santiam-state-forest.aspx>.

Discussion

The ST discussed and provided the following comments and questions:

- What kind of comments would be helpful on the implementation plan (IP) revision?
 - ODF clarified that the following comments on the implementation plan on the landscape level would be helpful: how to ensure that no additional damage is done to resources, or how to enhance benefits to the species. ODF would appreciate comments on monitoring and adaptive management within the IP. As the agency learns more information about salvage harvest activities and reforestation in HCAs, it will provide that information.
- A member expressed they hope that this group can do an evaluation of the fire effects and see if there's anything we learned regarding forest management, silvicultural perspectives, and effects of the fires. Any information regarding how lands that were managed differently were impacted by the fire would be useful.

- Brian noted that several state and federal agencies are working together to consider a study like this, and ODF can provide that information.

DISCUSS REMAINING AQUATIC TOPICS

Troy Rahmig, ICF, framed the topics for discussion today which include: qualitative climate analysis, strategic aquatic conservation action, and torrent salamander effects analysis. Troy and Melissa Klungle, ICF, provided updates and information for consideration:

- We will update the HCP to ensure that it properly includes each of the ESUs.
- **Climate analysis:** At the last ST meeting, we concluded that having a qualitative approach to climate analysis makes more sense rather than a quantitative analysis because of the uncertainty of climate change impacts. The ODF and ICF team is reviewing literature suggested by some ST members, and updating Chapter 5 to include qualitative information related to climate change.
- **Strategic aquatic conservation action:** The strategic aquatic conservation action includes things that are not covered under the conservation strategy specifically, but which have the potential to benefit to the species. The team has begun to develop this action and will send text to the ST for review. It includes actions that involve beaver management, prioritizing management that will also have benefits to lamprey, and projects outside the permit area that will directly benefit covered species, and conservation action effectiveness research.
 - Lamprey: Where possible stream enhancement activities geared to improve habitat for covered species will be prioritized in areas that will also benefit lamprey.
 - Projects outside permit area: The HCP will explain under what instances a project outside of the permit area could be selected for funding.
 - Conservation action effectiveness research: The HCP will acknowledge that funds could be used to address research questions to make the conservation strategy more effective.
 - Beavers: The team has worked with some ST members on the proposed approach for beavers and would like more discussion with the full ST today. Beaver management will be included in a few areas in the HCP, including the covered activities section (to acknowledge how beavers need to be managed due to their potential impact on roads). The intention is to use beaver management as a tool to improve habitat for covered aquatic species, consistent with the biological objectives.

- **Torrent salamander effects analysis:** The team is currently developing maps to show torrent salamander distribution and comparing to information on harvest and roads. This would then be used to conduct an effects analysis.

Discussion:

The ST discussed and provided the following questions and comments:

Climate Analysis

- Members expressed alignment with the approach to using a qualitative approach to the climate analysis. Modeling will be challenging and will not produce greater certainty, and so a qualitative approach makes more sense.
 - The ICF/ODF team will provide language around the climate analysis to ST members by email for review in the next week or so.

Beaver Management

- It will be important to quantify the level of impact that beavers could have, because it is quite limited. If we can identify the likely areas where beavers may be an issue, this would help focus time and attention in writing about beavers. Suggest having a smaller sub-set of ST members to work on this and do some analysis on where the current or potential beaver habitat would be.
 - ICF suggested that the sub-set group can have conversation on what the covered activity looks like, and where the impact is. Note that the covered activity is what ODF is doing on the landscape that has the potential to effect fish habitat because beaver dams are removed. The HCP would then outline what would be done to offset those effects, and we can develop that at a small group meeting.
 - We can identify which roads have consistent beaver concerns and we may need to consider what to do with those roads to reduce beaver problems. If we identify the culverts of concern and put on restoration list to upsize the culvert or transition them to a bridge, that would reduce the beaver problem. This is a topic we'd like to discuss at the meeting.
 - It is important to understand how beaver control affects the streams and fish, rather than just focusing on how beaver control affects beaver.
 - It will be important to look at how beaver management can benefit aquatic species. We have been talking internally about what that could look like.
 - Melissa will work to schedule a meeting to discuss these issues, and then we can bring this back to the ST at our next meeting. All ST members should be invited, and Julie Firman, ODFW, Rich Szlemp, USFWS, and Jim Muck, NOAA Fisheries, expressed interest.

- Which model are you using to develop the beaver habitat map? There are some models that have been calibrated on the coast that may be useful. Julie noted that she can provide more information on this model offline. ICF noted that the intent was to do a high-level look, but if there is modeling that could be used to refine this that would be helpful.

Torrent salamander effects analysis

- A member suggested that the HCP clarify how decisions would be made on harvesting or management in potential salamander habitat, and this relates to what the model says. It is important that people understand how decisions will be made, and that the model is a tool to project potential effects but there will be other things that factor into the decision-making. The modeling will be verified with what is happening on the ground and professional judgment. There is a decision-making process that ODF goes through which sets limits and provides flexibility. Suggest describing the boots on the ground analysis in the HCP, so that the public understands it and so that people in the future know what the decision-making process is and what the boundaries are
- A member asked for more certainty, and a bound on the upper and lower limits so that there is more certainty.
- Members expressed alignment on the general approach to the torrent salamander effects analysis.
- ICF added that the topic of torrent salamander effects analysis might also warrant a small group discussion and suggested inviting the full ST and allowing people to opt out.

TERRESTRIAL EFFECTS ANALYSIS

Troy provided information and updates on where the team is with the Terrestrial Effects Analysis.

- The effects analysis chapter includes an accounting of species habitat that would be lost from covered activities over time, and number of species acres that would be harvested and grown over time. "Habitat" is defined using a Habitat Suitability Index (HSI).
- Since the October Board meeting, there have been small group meetings to refine the definition of habitat using the HSI and made some changes. The biological goals and objectives acreages have also been updated accordingly for each of the terrestrial species.
- Changes in terminology have been developed: Northern spotted owl (NSO) habitat is now broken down into nesting/roosting habitat, foraging habitat, dispersal habitat, and not currently habitat. For other terrestrial species, the original highly suitable, suitable, and not currently habitat terms remain.

- Troy reviewed the HSI for each of these habitat classifications for each of the terrestrial species.
- Troy reviewed the acreage of cumulative habitat gains and losses over the permit duration for NSO. Nesting/roosting habitat increases over time, and dispersal and foraging habitat shrinks somewhat because it turns into nesting/roosting habitat. The growth in nesting/roosting habitat primarily occurs within HCAs, and by the end of the permit term the vast majority of lands inside HCAs are higher quality habitat for NSO. Outside of HCAs, most of the area becomes not habitat.
- Troy reviewed how this is translated into biological goals and objectives (BGOs). All of the originally estimated acreages have increased so we anticipate more habitat growth over time. The acreage estimates are shown by habitat type.
- Troy reviewed the acreage of cumulative habitat gains and losses over the permit duration for marbled murrelet. Suitable and highly suitable acreage increases over time. The growth in suitable and highly suitable habitat primarily occurs within HCAs, and by the end of the permit term the vast majority of lands inside HCAs are suitable and highly suitable habitat for marbled murrelet. There is a slight increase in habitat outside of HCAs by the end of the permit term.
- Red tree vole habitat growth over time has a very similar patterns as NSO and marbled murrelet.

Troy reviewed next steps: After this meeting, ICF will send revised BGOs and updated versions of the documents for ST review and comment. Troy would appreciate any further comments or questions. The revised documents will then go into the draft HCP. The intent is to address any red flags before the information goes into the draft HCP. We want to make sure ST is comfortable with this information going into the HCP and need to hear at this point if there are any questions and concerns.

Discussion

The ST discussed and provided the following comments and questions:

Discussion on acreage of cumulative habitat gains and losses over the permit duration for NSO:

- This information is very helpful. For the NSO cumulative habitat gain and loss information, it would also be helpful to identify the acres harvested inside and outside of HCAs.
- Question about whether there will be less than 40% dispersal habitat present on the landscape by the end of the permit term. There was a commitment of 40% of dispersal habitat outside of HCAs.
 - ODF provided clarifications on habitat growth and noted that HSI is not a good measure of dispersal habitat and so the information may show less dispersal

habitat over time than what would actually be grown. There are likely lands that should be classified as dispersal, but the model does not capture them as such.

- ODF noted that the commitment to 40% of dispersal habitat outside of HCAs remains unchanged, and it will be described in the HCP. That will then be further defined in harvest scheduling through the 10-year Implementation Plans.
- A member reminded the group that this 40% is a minimum, not a target.
- ICF noted that nesting/roosting and foraging habitat is also dispersal habitat.
- Suggest splitting out swiss needle cast, hardwoods, and other thinning that the model did, rather than showing all harvest as the same.
- Suggest raising the minimum harvest age by some amount in the model to understand what the effect might be.

UPDATE ON HCA MANAGEMENT

Troy framed the discussion on HCA management. A small group of ST members has been discussing management in HCAs over the past several weeks. He provided information and noted:

- Management in HCAs includes three kinds of activities: healthy conifer stands, swiss needle cast stands, and conifer restoration in hardwood-dominated stands. All management in HCAs is intended to be for the benefit of the covered species.
- The small group of ST members has been thinking through the pace and scale of activities. They also worked to develop definitions around how frequently management activities could occur (i.e., never, rare, infrequent, and common activities). Management will be more frequent in stands with lower suitability, and less frequent in stands with higher suitability.
- Management will not occur if it could result in lowering the quality of habitat for species.
- Any management activities in HCAs would be disclosed in IPs and AOPs, so the public and interested agencies will all know what is happening in advance.
- Reviewed information on the type and frequency of management in various habitat types. Different types of silvicultural activities would be permissible in various habitat types, always with an expected outcome related to improving habitat for the species. There are more options for silvicultural activities in lower quality habitats; in some types of very high-quality habitat (for example, in or near NSO core areas), no management is permissible.

Discussion

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

- How do the acreages of habitat where management can occur compare to the growth and harvest model figures? If ODF finds that it doesn't need to treat an area, will ODF be looking for other acreages to treat in order to make up the difference?
 - ODF responded that treatment thresholds for swiss needle cast (SNC) stands and alder stands seem realistic, and ODF is fairly confident that it can treat those outlined amounts. For healthy conifer stands, the model is less precise. The model was seeking to increase the number of high-quality habitat stands inside of HCAs. The focus will be on managing younger stands and trying to turn those into higher quality habitat. The pace and scale in the narrative are sideboards for what would be managed.
- A member noted that this seems to be going in the right direction.
- Suggest defining SNC stands and clarifying what is meant by “moderately to severely infected SNC stands.” Suggest clarifying what type of alder stands are included as well. There is a lot of value to older alder stands and should consider older alder within HCAs.
 - ODF agreed that it can better describe “moderately to severely infected SNC stands” which comes out of a GIS layer, and better describe the types of alder stands. The intent is to not treat a good amount of alder stands (there will be a significant amount of unmanaged alder stands).
- Appreciate the addition of “never” and “rare” to the frequencies. Consider “never” managing in the higher quality nesting/roosting habitat of 0.7 to 1.0 HSI. Also consider not having 0.7 HSI NSO habitat in two rows.
- Question about how salvage efforts in HCAs be disclosed in IPs and AOPs. If there is salvage in HCAs, it would be important to disclose that.
 - ODF noted that the type of disclosure depends on the timing of the disturbance in relation to the AOP cycle. In some circumstances there will likely be salvage in HCAs.
 - ICF suggested discussing the topic on disclosure in IPs and AOPs in a small group meeting.
- Suggest more clarity on what the percentages mean in the frequency definitions (what is the unit).

- Question about the exemptions in the RCAs. ST members would like to see that information.

UPDATE ON TERRESTRIAL MONITORING

Troy framed discussion on monitoring for terrestrial species. He noted that a small group has met to discuss monitoring of terrestrial species. He provided a summary on where we are heading for each terrestrial species and the intentions for the monitoring program. He reviewed the goals and types of monitoring for the various species.

Troy will send out the information for ST review after today's meeting.

Discussion:

The ST discussed terrestrial monitoring and provided the following questions and comments:

- Is there separate information for adaptive management? Would hope that the terrestrial monitoring or adaptive management section has a connection to better understand the habitat use, and that the information can be used to better manage habitat in the future. One of the purposes of understanding habitat use should be to use that information and apply it for the benefit of species in the future.
 - Troy noted that adaptive management is described in chapter 6, and the ODF/ICF team will make sure that the intent of monitoring and link to adaptive management is clearly described.

CONFIRM TOPICS FOR STEERING COMMITTEE UPDATE

The next SC meeting is December 9 from 1-4 pm. Troy noted that the intent is to update the SC on the changes in the habitat thresholds, where we are in HCA management, and update on monitoring. They will be briefed on all of these topics, and the hope is that ST members are keeping SC members informed between meetings.

If there are any items that the ST feels it has not been able to resolve, the SC can potentially help with those.

Discussion

The ST discussed and provided the following comments and questions:

- A member noted that it will be important to understand how much of a priority the HCP is for the SC. Would like to see a commitment by the SC to make this a priority over the next several months and through to completion. There are many priorities including other HCPs on other agencies' plates, and it would be important to understand the priority level of this HCP for the SC.

- Suggest discussing the topic of trees older than 120 years with the SC.

APPROACH GOING FORWARD, NEXT STEPS, AND SUMMARY

Deb thanked members for their participation and reviewed upcoming meetings. The next ST meeting is scheduled for December 1 from 10 am – 1 pm.

Discussion

The ST discussed and provided the following comments and questions:

- Question about whether there will be appendices in the HCP. ICF noted that there will be several appendices for ST review.
- Suggestion to bring back the table of outstanding issues that was developed in September. As we move forward, would be helpful to revisit that table to see where we are with those outstanding issues. ICF noted it would bring back that table.

ACTION ITEMS

The following action items were identified throughout the meeting:

- ICF/ODF: Provide language around the climate analysis to ST members by email for review.
- ODFW: Provide more information on the beaver habitat map model.
- ICF: Schedule a meeting to discuss beaver management issues, and then we can bring this back to the ST at our next meeting.
- ICF: Bring back the table of outstanding issues developed in September to the next ST meeting.
- ICF: Send out the information on terrestrial monitoring for ST review after today's meeting.
- ICF: Send revised BGOs and updated versions of the documents for ST review and comment.
- KW: Schedule a small group discussion for the topic of Torrent salamander effects analysis. Invite the full ST and allow people to opt out.
- KW: Schedule a small group meeting to discuss the topic on disclosure in IPs and AOPs in a small group meeting.